

PEOPLE- AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF SERVICE MARKETING.

People constitute an important dimension in the management of services in their role both as performers of services and as customers. People as performers of services are important because, "A customer sees a company through its employees. The employees represent the first line of contact with the customer. They must, therefore, be well informed and provide the kind of service that wins customer approval. The firm must recognise that each employee is a salesman for the company's service". The importance of customers in services stems from the fact that most services imply active and involved customer organisation interface.

- a) **Service Personnel:** Service personnel are important in all organisations but more so in an organisation involved in providing services. The behaviour and attitude of the personnel providing the service is an important influence on the customer's overall perception of the service and he can rarely distinguish between the actual service rendered and the human element involved in it. How often have you had the experience of holding onto a telephone receiver after dialling for Assistance or Trunk Booking and receiving no response? What do you think has been the role contribution of the telephone operators towards giving our telephone system the image which it has today?

The case of telephone operators is still controllable because the telephone system presents a low contact organisation. High or low contact is defined on the basis of percentage of total time the customer has to spend in the system compared with the relative time it takes to service him. By this definition, restaurants, hospitals, schools represent a high contact organisation. The other important distinction of service personnel is between those that are visible to the customer and those that are not. In a restaurant, the waiters are visible while the cook in the kitchen is not. As a marketing manager you have to devote more time training the visible personnel, since they have greater responsibility in maintaining relations with the customer. The rice dish which is not cooked properly is the cook's fault but it is the waiter who will have to bear the brunt of the customers' anger. The manner in which the waiter behaves with the customer will be an important determinant in the restaurant losing that customer forever or retaining him as a regular client.

As a marketing manager your primary concern is the visible service personnel and especially so if yours is a high contact organisation. You have to be concerned with ways in which you can improve the quality and performance of your service personnel. This can be done through:

- a) careful selection and training of personnel;
- b) laying down norms, rules and procedures to ensure consistent behaviour;
- c) ensuring consistent appearance; and
- d) reducing the importance of personal contact by introducing automation and computerisation wherever possible.

b) Customers: Customers are important because they are a source of influencing other customers. In the case of doctors, lawyers, consultants one satisfied customer will lead to a chain reaction, bringing in his wake a number of other customers. Thus as a marketing manager, your first task should be to ensure complete satisfaction of the existing customers. The kind of customers

that you attract exerts an important influence on prospective customers. The prospective customer may feel attracted towards the organisation (it may be a restaurant, club, school, college) because it has his 'type' of customer or the customer may turn away if he perceives the existing customers to be of a kind with whom he would not like to associate. You have to decide about the class of customers you would like to have and work towards providing your service organisation an image which will fetch you your future customers.