



Case Study 1 A Salutation That Won Hearts

Vijayalaxmi Moovala*

Bahrain Institute of Banking & Finance

Abstract: This real life case highlights the extraordinary customer service rendered by a car park security guard, Gulzar Ahmed, in one of the major shopping malls (Bahrain City Centre), in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Gulzar became famous for the gesticulation and body language he adopted as a greeting, which is a salute with a sweeping wave of his hand, while bowing with a smile. This salutation was offered to every single visitor/ customer who passed his path as a car park guard. Gulzar created history in the services sector of Bahrain and the 'WOW' effect in the minds of the mall visitors. Within a short span of time, Gulzar became famous in Bahrain and had a large fan following. Major newspapers and magazines had write-ups about his customer orientation and interviews with him. A young Bahraini student, overwhelmed by Gulzar's salutation and courtesy, created a Facebook page titled 'We love the legend of City Centre' on the social networking site Facebook which soon attracted a membership of about 13,000 members. Gulzar received several awards and was given out-of-turn salary increments by his employer as a token of appreciation. Gulzar's case lays emphasis on the fact that a brand image can capture market share, but a genuine smile can capture mind share. What is important for the customer is not just the transaction, but also the treatment. Gulzar is a success story of an intrinsically motivated employee who delighted the customers.

SECURITY SERVICES OFFERED BY BATSCO

This leading security company in the Kingdom of Bahrain¹ was established in 2005 offering a range of security services. The Company's major services are:

- Trained uniformed guards.
- Security equipment such as CCTV, access control systems etc.
- Fire and safety related equipment.

¹ Kingdom of Bahrain is an island in the Gulf region with a population of 742,600 [2006 statistics] http://www.cio.gov.bh/CIO_ENG/English/Publications/Bahrain%20in%20Figure/BIF2006.pdf

* Center for Leadership & Management, P.O. Box: 20525, Juffair, Kingdom of Bahrain
Email: vijaya@bibf.com ; mvijaya@hotmail.com

- Vaulting for storage of valuables.
- Security consultancy and risk assessment reports.
- Analysis and intelligence reports on national critical assets.

Batsco's vision is to provide trained uniformed guards and other security services which are uniquely customised to the clients' requirements. Some of their major clients include Ministries and Government departments, banks and financial institutions, corporate customers, hospitals, telecommunication companies, educational institutions, super stores, hotels, buildings, VIP houses, automobile dealerships, airlines offices, business centres, exhibition centres, industrial units, restaurants, currency exchange companies, jewelers, power stations, warehouses, transport companies etc.²

Batsco is owned by Mr. Mohammed Taqawi, a dynamic business leader. The operations of the company are managed by the General Manager, Mr. Muhammed Shaukat Hayat Khan, an ex-Colonel from the Pakistan Army. Within a short span of three years, there was a rapid growth in the market share of Batsco. It provided security guards to approximately 95% of the malls in Bahrain. Batsco was awarded the contract as a security provider for Bahrain City Centre, a mega-shopping complex which began operations in September 2008. Effective leadership, continuous employee development, and teamwork contributed to the success of the company.

GULZARAHMED

Gulzar Ahmed, a 46-year old, security guard working in Batsco, hailed from Mirpur in Pakistan. After twenty years of dedicated service, he retired from the Military Police of Pakistan Army in 2004. He subsequently worked with Muslim Commercial Bank for four years before being offered a job in Batsco, Bahrain. Gulzar, a father of three, took up the job at Batsco to ensure his children have a good life and a sound education. He was personally recruited by Colonel Khan and started work with Batsco in August 2008, as a security guard, i.e. about 1 ½ years ago. Gulzar's assignment in Bahrain started with Bahrain City Centre. Batsco assigned 150 security guards to City Centre one of whom was Gulzar.

Recruitment and Selection

Colonel Khan handpicked Gulzar for the job of a security guard in Batsco. The key qualities that encouraged Colonel Khan to recruit Gulzar were the following characteristics:

- Disciplined and conscientious
- Sincere
- Physically fit and full of energy

² www.batsco.net

- Committed to the job
- Charismatic

Gulzar had a proven track record of outstanding performance and experience in handling exceptional assignments. He previously worked as a security guard for the Chief of Army of Pakistan, a prestigious and high security job assigned to the very best in the field. In addition, Colonel Khan, saw in Gulzar, a concern for the well-being of his family, a keenness to provide and give his three children the opportunities that would help them become successful in life. This family values helped Gulzar secure the job at Batsco.

L earning and D evelopment

On joining Batsco, Gulzar, like all other security guards, received the mandatory one month intensive training at the Guards Training Center in Bahrain. After successfully completing the one month training, Gulzar had to go through the company's specific training programmes, designed by the top management of Batsco. This was a two-week customised in-house training programme which included induction components and training inputs on major competencies. The main areas of focus of this training programme were:

- Bahrain culture
- Batsco's vision and values
- Health and safety regulations
- Guarding responsibilities
- Personal grooming
- Customer service
- People orientation
- Positive attitude
- Commitment to the job/ company
- Professionalism / leadership

TOPMANAGEMENTINPUTANDCOMMITMENT

The customised training programme was immediately followed by a personal meeting with the General Manager, Colonel Khan. Colonel Khan in his executive talk to the guards reiterated the company's expectations and values. He reinforced the need for professionalism and commitment to dedicated work. Colonel Khan ended these sessions by assuring the guards of the top management's support, his personal commitment, and above all, his accessibility at all times.

On-site Training

The guards were then assigned to different locations and provided continuous on-site training. Gulzar was assigned to Bahrain City Centre. Bahrain City Centre being a major client and a new shopping mall in the country, Colonel Khan personally oriented the guards at their locations. During his initial on-site visits, he emphasised that the guards, positioned at the main car park entry and exit points were responsible for directing traffic, and need to ensure that the visitors/ customers feel welcome at the mall. His motto to them was '*always give something extra to the tired customer*'. He personally instructed Gulzar and his team to extend a warm smile and a friendly gesture to the customers. At this stage, Gulzar demonstrated to Colonel Khan, the gesticulation and body language that he would like to adopt as a greeting, that is, a salute, sweeping wave of his hand, while bowing with a smile.

Colonel Khan, whose military background prompted him to inform Gulzar, also from the same background, that Gulzar should have a mental picture of himself standing at the quarter-guard of a regiment in the Army (a place where a group of guards are alert and vigilant 24/7), also called the face of the regiment. Gulzar who played the role of a quarter guard, picked up this cue and through his mannerisms and people orientation became the face of Bahrain City Centre.

CLIMB TO FAME

Gulzar started doing his work diligently at the main exit point of the car park of Bahrain City Centre. His salutation was offered to every single visitor/ customer who passed in the path of his guard duty area in the car park. Gulzar's salutation did not waver and was offered to all, irrespective of age and immaterial of the harsh weather conditions. Customers to the mall were, at first, just amused to see something so rare. This kind of customer service was never experienced by them in Bahrain malls. It all started with the initiative of one visitor to the Bahrain City Centre, who wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, about this unique salutation from a car park guard. This was soon followed by other mall customers writing to the newspapers. Soon after, many local newspapers and several magazines had full reports about the exceptional mannerisms and service orientation of Gulzar. They carried detailed personal interviews with Gulzar and his managers.

Legend of Bahrain City Centre

Gulzar's special salutation touched one and all. A 20-year-old Bahraini, Hanan Ali Marhoon, a University student and shopper at Bahrain City Centre, was overwhelmed by Gulzar's courtesy and salutation. She and her friend noticed him the first time they went to the City Centre, and were enchanted by his warm smile and smooth wave. She soon found out that all her friends liked him too and, wanted to create a Facebook

³ Created in August/ September 2009

group so others could share their experiences and appreciation of Gulzar. Hanan felt that Gulzar deserved more and created a Facebook page titled 'We love the legend of City Centre'³ on the social networking site Facebook. Her expectation was that the open group would include about 60 members from her friends' list. To her surprise, the page started attracting hundreds of new 'members' every day and there was an exponential increase in the membership. Within a short period of time, about 12,600⁴ people joined in, and many posted appreciative comments about Gulzar on the profile page.

Sight to See

Gulzar was one of the sights in Bahrain that people flocked to see. The highlight of the shopping spree of customers/ shoppers to the City Center was Gulzar himself. Visitors brought along their family members and friends to see Gulzar and, experience what he had to offer. In fact, many of them drove slowly and lingered on as they passed by Gulzar, to hang on to the wonderful experience of watching Gulzar smile and salute to them.

Traffic-stopping Mannerisms

Visitors to the mall slowed down or stopped their cars when they exited the car park at Bahrain City Centre, where Gulzar was on duty. They wanted to have a word with Gulzar or just smile back at him, or hand him a tip/ gift. According to Gulzar⁵, people stopped their cars and told him it was a pleasure to see his happy face. Though shoppers were usually tired and irritable after hours of shopping, they were still eager to watch Gulzar in action.

Token of Appreciation

Fascinated by his courtesy, customer orientation and professionalism, visitors to Bahrain City Centre, were generous in vocalising and publicising their appreciation for Gulzar. They not only were generous with words, but also with gifts. While shopping at Bahrain City Center, especially during the holy month of Ramadan⁶ (2009), shoppers had another item added to their shopping list, 'food and drink for Gulzar'. They had him in their thoughts, and brought him food to break his fast. As a token of their appreciation for his hard work and high spirits, shoppers from Bahrain and other Gulf countries, who visited the City Centre, offered Gulzar their admiration and affection, along with their generous tips.

⁴ Figure in March 2010.

⁵ Gulf Daily News – 10th September 2009

⁶ Holy month of the Islamic calendar during which Muslims observe fasting from sunrise to sunset.

Slogans and Titles

Though Gulzar's official title was a security guard, he was bestowed with more popular titles like: 'Mr. Smooth', 'Legend of Bahrain', 'The world's friendliest car park attendant', 'Single best operator', and 'One in a million'. Some of the catchy slogans used in newspaper write-ups about him were: 'The regal Gulzar's bow', 'The power of a smile', 'Robotic precision', and 'Enigmatic smile'

CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND GROWTH

In recognition of his outstanding performance, Gulzar's employer, Batsco, raised his salary twice, that is, within a period of 1½ years. Plans were afoot to promote Gulzar to a supervisory position. The management tried to balance the business requirements and personal aspirations of Gulzar, who expressed his desire to remain as a car park guard, as that was the source of his recognition in Bahrain. Gulzar's fame and his association with Bahrain City Centre necessitated that he remained there. Customer demand for Gulzar's presence, interaction with him, and their affection for him, was the best best form of reward for him. An analogy can be drawn to the Coca Cola Classic⁷ (in 1950 which was brought back by Coca Cola due to heavy customer demand and loyalty. The situation was similar to the case of Gulzar. If Gulzar was not at his location for an extended period of time, the general managers of Bahrain City Centre and Batsco would receive phone calls from visitors, enquiring about his whereabouts.

Awards/ Rewards

The management of Batsco presented Gulzar with several awards. Colonel Khan went the extra mile, and invited the Ambassador of Pakistan [in Bahrain] to visit Batsco and honour Gulzar in person, with an appreciation letter. Colonel Khan also had a plan to contact the Ministry of Labour in Bahrain to honour Gulzar for his commitment and dedication to work. The best reward was Colonel Khan's personal commitment to provide gainful employment to Gulzar's son. As a compensatory measure, the management of Batsco promised to bear the expenses of a religious trip to Mecca⁸, for Gulzar and his family members. The management of Bahrain City Centre shopping complex continuously received positive feedback about Gulzar. Amazed by the magnitude of positive feedback from shoppers, and impressed with Gulzar's work ethics, the management of Bahrain City Center, gave Gulzar several cash awards, a gold medal, and certificates of appreciation.

⁷ http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/pdf/stories/Heritage_CokeStories_newcokestories.pdf

⁸ Mecca – A holy city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

External Influence and Pressure

Meanwhile many prestigious clients of Batsco approached Khan to relocate Gulzar to their sites. Several of them were willing to double Gulzar's salary and bear the financial commitment. Some employers even directly approached Gulzar with job offers. However, Gulzar, a dedicated and loyal employee was not influenced by such offers. He was happy and contented in his job as a car park guard at Bahrain City Centre. Gulzar never took undue advantage of his success. He never negotiated with management for better compensation, nor did he take up other job offers. He served the company with a great sense of dedication. Colonel Khan also never capitalised on Gulzar's fame by leveraging for higher fees from his clients.

Team Impact

Gulzar continued being a good team member. He was a role model that other team members tried to emulate. They were motivated by his professionalism, and were willing to learn from him. The management of Batsco started training other guards to adopt Gulzar's mannerisms and salutation, and have included his style as part of their training module.

Winning Characteristics

Apart from a strong sense of duty and commitment to work, Gulzar was an employee with a sense of integrity and high level of professionalism. His work ethics was undoubtedly, one of the best. When asked by local newspaper reporters about what makes him tick, Gulzar simply stated that: "No job is too small. One should do everything with a smile and look good while doing it⁹. When I wave at the mall visitors, I like to smile as well. Seeing me smile, makes them smile, parents and their children, and that pleases me."¹⁰

The winning characteristics of Gulzar were:

- Strong sense of belonging/ loyalty
- Commitment to work
- High level of work ethics/ integrity
- Perseverance/ discipline
- Humility

⁹ HalaBahrain, English Magazine-September 2009

¹⁰ *Gulf Daily News* – 10th September 2009

- Initiative
- Team work
- Positive energy
- Right attitude
- Selflessness
- Self-motivation

Gulzar is a real life example of an intrinsically motivated employee. Professionally, he played the role assigned to him to the best of his ability.

Trend-setting Customer Service

Gulzar's previous training and two decades of attending to VIPs instilled in him the sense of work ethics that made him a trendsetter in his line of work in Bahrain. He created history in Bahrain, and became the success story of Batsco. The extraordinary customer service that he demonstrated was a good example of Gulzar reaching the 'unconscious competence' learning stage, 'where he does what he does, without his knowing he is doing it'. The trend-setting, unique salutation of Gulzar, which came naturally to him, created warm waves of loyalty among the mall visitors/ customers. His heartwarming customer service is a true example of how, one person's initiative can create customer delight that may surpass years of university education and grand marketing strategies. The word-of-mouth advertising that Gulzar commanded can be compared to what some of the best brands found in the market offer.

CONCLUSION

Gulzar's case lays emphasis on the fact that customers are always in need of something innovative, be it a tangible product or an intangible service such as that offered by Gulzar. Customer loyalty can be gained not only through brand image, but also from heartwarming customer service. There are a few key lessons which can be learnt from Gulzar's success story: there is no job small or big; all that is needed is that it is done with honesty, pride, devotion and dedication. It can bring respect, fame, success and good name. One honest gesture is more valuable and will have far reaching impact than huge amounts spent on advertisements. **A brand image can capture market share, but a genuine smile can capture mind share.** What is important for the customer is not just the transaction, but also the treatment. Gulzar made every single mall visitor who crossed his path feel that he/she is the most important person. **These are the lessons, one can learn from him.**

Discussion Questions

- Q1. Comment on Gulzar's work ethics and service orientation.
- Q2. Assess Colonel Khan's role and contribution in Gulzar's success.
- Q3. Critically evaluate if Gulzar's success was a stumbling block or, a stepping stone to his career advancement.
- Q4. Analyse the impact, both positive and negative, that Gulzar's success could have had on other team members.
- Q5. Differentiate between customer satisfaction and customer delight as perceived by the visitors to the Mall where Gulzar was on duty.