

## ***Insults into opportunities***

I started my electrical contracting business in the year 1984. In the year 1985 the banks started getting computerized and the computers were then called as “advanced ledger posting machines” in the banking parlance. Our company did the electrical works for most of the branches of most of the banks in Tamil Nadu doing wiring and earthing, installation of panel boards for ALPM’s, air conditioners and lighting. The computers were very expensive then and so a lot of care and safety measures were taken to operate and protect the computers. The experience we got by installing computers for several manufacturers including hundreds of PC’s besides main frames got us orders for doing work in other establishments like insurance companies and many corporates.

In 1986 we were doing the electrical works for a corporate consulting company who were then installing around 45 computers. They had a centrally air conditioned system which needed overhauling and change of cooling tower. My previous years of experience got me the fabrication and erection of the cooling tower. They were enjoying the coolness inside the office after the overhauling of the ac plant while Madras was sweltering at 40 degrees Celsius. I happened to meet the Managing Director of the company who had come from Calcutta then. He complimented me on our work and requested me to find an interior decorator who could make a conference table to seat 17. He further requested me to handle this particular assignment on behalf of him since he was operating out of Calcutta. I set out to ask a few of my contacts on this and one of them recommended me to a person who was quite knowledgeable in the Interior decoration field.

I approached the interior decorator and after exchanging pleasantries set out about my task of taking him to my client’s office to take the measurements of the conference room. The clients were pleased to note that I had brought the best person in the field since he was very knowledgeable. The discussions wound up and the interior decorator was to give a detailed drawing, specification and quote in 3 days time. After 3 days when I called upon the interior decorator he said that he would take another 2 days to finish and I reported this to my client. At the end of 2 days the interior decorator and I went to the client’s office with the detailed drawing, specification and quote.

The clients were happy to see the overall presentation presented by the interior decorator, forwarded the set of papers to their MD by fax. The MD approved the proposal almost immediately and the client awarded the work to the interior decorator. The work order along with the advance was given and the time stipulated for making the 17 seat conference table was 20 days.

I was going about my work when after 10 days I was asked by my client about the progress of the conference table. So, i set out to the interior decorator’s office to see the progress of work. The interior decorator was not in the office and so I left word asking him to call me when he got back. Those were days when there were no mobiles and most of the entrepreneurs had only one telephone. He did not have a telephone in his house. The following day I went to his office and met him after a long wait in the reception. When I asked him about the status of work with respect to the conference table he was casually telling me that he would initiate the work soon. He added saying that here and there, there would be delays and we have to just move on with the flow !! I did not like his answer since I could

hardly see any flow, but I reported the status of work to my clients who were amused by the reply the interior decorator had given me.

After a gap of 5 days I went to see the interior decorator to see if he had commenced the work and to see the progress. Alas ! he hadn't started work. He was, as usual in a meeting with his staff, possibly talking about global warming, the green house effect and the economic crisis !! He had totally forgotten his responsibility to my client's company to deliver the conference table not only in time, but the commitment to fabricate the table itself. I was aghast !! Since I had taken up the responsibility I did not know how to answer my client. I was very angry at the nonchalant attitude of the interior decorator. I told him to return the money which he had received as advance from my client since I thought that he would never make it. Seeing my anger he coolly said that he should not have taken up such a small order as small as making just one conference table. Infuriating me further he said that he had decided to do electrical works from then on, apart from doing interior decoration and furniture business. He went on to say something authentically insulting. He said that if Ramkumar can do electrical works, I can also do electrical works, saying that he smiled. After a long pause when I was apparently seething with rage inside, about the ultimate insult in front of his staff I told him distinctly, " You have insulted me in front of your staff; You did not have the basic commitment to fulfill even the smallest order. I am cutting a sorry figure in front of my highly valuable client." I now proclaim in front of the same staff that I will be one day, a great interior decorator of repute, and you would soon see me as an electrical engineer turned into an interior decorator !! When you, without commitment could think of doing electrical work which is not your forte, I with enormous commitment could well do interior work seeking proper help and guidance.

I went and told my client about what happened with the interior decorator, they cancelled the order with him, got back the advance and together with them found an other interior decorator who made and delivered the conference table to the client in a fortnight.

Once after being insulted it is normal for anyone to feel hurt or get embarrassed. I was hurt, since it was not in the proper perspective on the interior decorator's part to insult without any rhyme or reason and that too in front of his staff. Direct words of insult can be sharper than a surgeon's knife. Adding to this, it is from a person who was unworthy of any consideration since he had no commitment to work whatsoever and to me it had always been "work is worship." I used the negative energy of the insult and deflected it to my advantage to start my own interior decoration company. I named my company and made a visiting card and the description of the work we do in the visiting card read as "Turnkey interiors" from "conception to completion."

A few days later after I printed the visiting card i met my school friend in one of the bank's local head office. He was a sales executive in a UPS manufacturing company. When I told him that I had started an interior decoration company he told me that one of his corporate clients were looking out to having 2 cabins done in their office apart from installing computers and air conditioners. One hour later I was in the corporate office suggested by my friend. They said that they wanted to have 2 cabins, computer tables, chairs, false ceiling besides the electrical works, I told them confidently that we would be able to do all the works to their satisfaction. I left saying that I would come back with my supervisor and take

measurements and give a quote on the following day. Little did they know that they were talking to a novice who did not know the difference between wood and plywood, foot and square foot, nails and screws !!

I rushed home confronted the painter who was painting our house and requested him to introduce me to a carpenter. I also went to see a friend who did false ceiling. I met another contact who did vinyl flooring. Asking a lot of questions to the carpenter I was fairly clear later about the basics of carpentry – difference between wood and plywood, nails and screws, foot and square foot was now revealed to me, by my carpenter and I am an engineer !! Armed with the latest knowledge after meeting the carpenter, the false ceiling person and the vinyl flooring person I went with the painter who was painting the house and the carpenter he had introduced the previous day to meet the prospective client.

We took measurements and then I made a comprehensive estimate including carpentry, false ceiling, painting, electrical, vinyl flooring and air conditioners and submitted it to them. After a week I got the order and then I became a full fledged interior decorator and executed the work – from conception to completion. This was just the start. Two and a half decades later our company would have done up the interior spaces of many of the corporate companies, airlines offices, showrooms and multiplexes. We had an ISO certification. Several architects worked for us and we had engineers who supervised the works. An electrical engineer + an interior decorator became a unique selling proposition.

A few years later I met the interior decorator who was instrumental in my starting interior decoration business. He had closed his company and was now working as an executive in a showroom. I told him about the progress I have made in my professional life and extended my business card to him. He took the card, intently looked at it and said that the font in the name of the company looked like jalebi sweets. To him it looked like many Indian language fonts which are normally rounded and indeed it was !! Saying this he laughed loudly. I took it as a humour and not as an insult and I also laughed loudly. On the way home I stopped in the sweet shop to buy half a kilogram of my favorite jalebis !!

So, when someone insults you take that as an opportunity to use that energy and deflect it to your advantage. Instead of evasion or blocking as in martial arts the best way is to deflect and use the energy to your advantage.