

Accident with the passengers in bus

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Case Study: “ Same Accident but different Perception”

The Police report read that bus number 011-1234 while on its route from Ambattur to Madras on April 16, 1986, had an accident some 30 miles from Poonamallee-an apparent collision against a banyan tree. When the policeman on beat arrived at the scene around 1. 30 pm. He was unable to locate the driver. The passengers -some 35 on them were in state of panic.

All of them had got down from the bus and many were sitting under the shade of a nearby tree some distance from where the bus-stood with its damaged front parts. Children were crying and the women passengers were screaming as they saw the policeman walk towards them. The men were talking loudly, all at the same time. Nobody is able to state clearly what had happened or at what time exactly the accident had taken place. Estimate when the accident occurred varied from 35 minutes to 2 hour earlier.

Three day later, the general Manager of Pandyan transport was sitting at his desk looking at three different reports in front of him. One was the Police man's report which detailed the extent of damaged to the bus, and the fact that the driver had abandoned the bus without telling the passenger where he was going or what they should be doing. The Regional Transport Officer (RTO) who was summoned to the scene two hour later also fields a report of his assessment of the damage.

He stated that Thangavelu, the driver, whose record indicated that he had been a fairly safe driver for almost two decades, had been involved couple of minor accident in the past six months. The first was when he hit a cyclist who fortunately sustained only some minor bruises and had the cycle intact.

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The second when he drove in to a ditch on a rainy night. Fortunately, again, there were no serious injuries to anyone and no damage to the bus. The RTO said that he had suspicion that Thangavelu was perhaps driving under the influence of alcohol.

Actually, according to RTO Thangavelu was found one of the policeman inside hut near the place of the accident drinking at 5: 30 pm on April 16, and from there he was taken to the police station. The RTO felt that the Thangavelu' s behavior was totally irresponsible in as much as he left the spot of the accident (Something that the rules absolutely prohibited) and on top of that he was drinking just after the accident! The third report in front of the manager was the one filed by Thangavelu himself.

Thangavelu stated that in an effort to avoid a stray cow on the road, he swerved the bus and accidentally hit the tree on the side of the road on April 16. As soon as the accident happened, he wanted to report the incident to the police and to his head-office. He also wanted to seek assistance so that the passenger could be put in another bus and his bus towed away. But he did not want to alarm the passenger and hence got down from the bus, signaled to the passenger that he will be back, and walked in search of a nearby telephone to contact the police and his head office.

Unfortunately, even after walking four or five mile, there was no telephone inside, but he knew there definitely was one in the Tehsildar's home a few miles away. Hence he walked further but on reaching the place, he found the house locked. Knowing that the passengers would be in a state of frenzy, he started to walked back to the bus, but arriving at the spot he found neither

the bus nor the passenger. By this time, he was weary, and guessed that the police must have arrived at the spot transported passenger by another bus, and towed away the damaged bus.

Since he was dead tired after all the walking and since his hours of duty were already over, he thought he would soothe his nerves with some toddy. That was the time when the police into the hut and dragged him away.

Thangavelu said that he did not walk away from the scene of the accident but he had acted in the best interests of his passengers. He did not want them to panic and thought he would find a telephone within a mile or so.

He tried to be dutiful in the only way he knew how, and had no other option but to do what he did!

Questions

- What kind of perceptual processes were operating in the three different reports?
- What additional information would you, as the manager of Pandyan Transport, seek to clarify your own perception of the incident?
- Given the information provided in the case, how would you resolve the issue of whether or not to fire the driver?