S-lon attributes resilience through pandemic to customer-centricity

S-lon, Sri Lanka's pioneering water management solutions supplier and a subsidiary of the Capital Maharaja-owned S-Lon Lanka (Pvt) Ltd, escaped unscathed and even prospered from the pandemic that ravaged the country's economy. Apart from compassionate leadership and foresight, 'customer centricity' may be attributable to this success. Customer centricity is at the heart of S-lon's ethos, with the guiding premise "if it's not good enough for your family, it's not good enough for the customer!"

While contemporary marketing continues to preach the cliche that "the customer is king," S-lon ascribes to the belief that 'the customer is GOD.'

Commenting on S-lon's journey through the past two years, Group Director of The Capital Maharaja Group, Mr. S C Weerasekara opined: "S-lon treats and considers all stakeholders down the line – be it the merchant, the plumbing professional, or even our own staff – as customers. This mindset of according importance to every link of the supply chain has helped us stay resilient & ahead of the curve."

"S-lon has a simple philosophy: The brand believes in offering a quality product and an unparalleled service so the customers will do the 'marketing' by becoming 'Brand Evangelists'. S-lon relies on 'earned reputation' through passion, compassion & unwavering integrity over publicity that is bought through exuberant marketing campaigns," he added.

This enthusiasm and mentality based on 'customer centricity' has helped S-lon to emerge fairly triumphant from the pandemic's various waves. While the initial wave of the epidemic was handled rather effectively in terms of particular businesses and the country as a whole, later waves had numerous effects across industries and communities.

From the outset, Mr. Weerasekara led the team from the front working hands-on with every link of the supply chain. Perhaps it was the market intelligence coupled with 'people skills' he gained as a young Sales Representative at S-lon that fueled this unique yet high-yield approach.

"Navigating Covid 19 became a humanitarian mission when many of our sales representatives lost lodgings at the height of it due to landlords fearing executives out on the field might be getting exposed, and exposing others, to the deadly pandemic. Not only did we find these team members alternative accommodation, we also provided them food and medication to boost immunity. I was able to understand their plight better, and take swift action, given my own experience as a sales representative," Mr. Weerasekara noted.

When most manufacturing was halted due to the pandemic, the S-lon facility was kept operational since it was deemed necessary to be able to meet the 'accumulated demand' once the lockdown was lifted. All of this, however, was done in accordance with strict health & safety guidelines outlined by health authorities, which included a 20-item exhaustive checklist. To reduce the spread of infection, all staff were vaccinated and transported in private vehicles to & from work.

At the beginning of the pandemic, S-lon insisted on collecting dues from distributors which was met with criticism from the industry. Although this course of

Group Director of The Capital Maharaja Group Mr. S. C. Weerasekara attributed S-lon's success to customer-centricity and taking bold, strategic decisions – pertaining to the long-term – where necessary. He also said that S-lon has managed to emerge resilient in the aftermath of back-to-back lockdowns given the organization's preparedness in the face of adversity. Instead of halting production, S-Lon forged ahead in keeping with health & safety guidelines to ensure the accumulated demand would be catered to sans shortages, delays or unprecedented price fluctuations. S-lon did not compromise on its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives during the pandemic and did not have to down-scale, but, instead, generated more occupational opportunities for local youth. Mr. Weerasekara urged investors & industrialists to remain hopeful & asserted that recovery was possible if everyone worked towards the single-minded mission of accomplishing progress through minimizing wastage in all aspects, professional & personal. In terms of the way forward, S-lon intends to expand to newer markets in 2022 empowering Sri Lanka's aspirations of economic recovery & growth.

action was then perceived as being "greedy", many soon agreed that it was the right thing to do pertaining to the long-term sustainability of the company's operations. This measure enabled S-lon to supply continuously ensuring no shortages or unprecedented price hikes.

At the height of the pandemic, 1100 fully vaccinated staff members were working adhering to safety guidelines stipulated by the Government. This in turn enabled S-lon to pay full salaries as well as acquire new talent in the immediate aftermath instead of laying off staff - or downsizing - which was the common, expected scenario.

Mr. Weerasekara was optimistic that Sri Lanka could recover in the next year granted everybody commits conserve resources and endeavor to be more efficient in their job roles: "We can overcome this catastrophic period if we all commit to reducing wastage whether its in the production line or our own personal lives; sacrifices would be inevitable but I am confident Sri Lanka would regain momentum and stability over the next 2-3 years."

S-lon did not compromise on any aspect of the business during the pandemic including Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives such as "Gamai Pansalai" & "Thuru Kepakaru" – the former is a campaign to restore & renovate religious places around the country in an effort to empower communities through spiritual enrichment while the latter is a re-forestation initiative that focuses on long-term, consistent nurturing of our precious planet.