

Is Your Business Customer-Focused?

by Maureen McNamara

We all know the statistics: a customer who has had a bad experience will tell up to 20 people, while the average satisfied customer may tell five others—if you're lucky!

It costs five times more to attract a new customer than to keep one you already have. Only 4% of your customers will bring a complaint to your attention, so for every complaint you receive there may be dozens that you haven't heard about.

What are you to do?

If you are like many business owners and managers, you probably survey your customers, either formally or informally, to determine their level of satisfaction. Research studies indicate that if you really want to know how your customers feel about your company, you need ask only one question: "Would you recommend us to your family, friends, and colleagues?"

If the answer is a resounding "Yes!" you are likely meeting, and even exceeding, your customers' expectations. However, if the answer is not a spontaneous "Yes!" then there's work to be done.

Here are 10 techniques that will help you meet the challenge of developing a customer-focused organization:

1. Examine your company's culture

Right about now, you may be asking, "What is this thing called culture, and why is it so important?"

Culture is, simply, "the way we do things around here." Without a doubt, culture has a tremendous influence on your organization and the service it provides.

The most successful businesses have a culture that is driven by values—like trust, quality, respect, learning, integrity and teamwork. Such values are embedded in the organization, and everyone is focused on meeting and exceeding customers' expectations.

So start by examining your company's culture, and take time to articulate the values that are important to you. Ask yourself if those same values drive the way your company operates on a daily basis. If that's not the case, then make a vow to start living those values today.



2. Communicate with your internal customers about your vision for providing exceptional service

Who are your internal customers? Well, they are your employees!

In his best-selling book, *The Customer Comes Second and Other Secrets of Exceptional Service*, Hal

Rosenbluth tells us, "Make sure you maintain an environment in which people feel encouraged to reach for the exceptional."

Talk with your employees about how much you value your customers, and clearly define what, in your mind, constitutes superb service.

3. Listening to your employees is critical if you want them to listen to your customers

As Hal Rosenbluth says, "Seek input from your people. After all, they will be living the culture."

Have a brainstorming session with them about your key customers and ask them what they believe would delight those customers. They will be pleased to learn that you value their input, and they will likely have some insights that may surprise you.

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4. When hiring, make sure you look for applicants who have natural traits that lead to great customer service

Involve your employees in the hiring process to help determine whether a potential employee will be a good fit on the team. Ask job applicants probing questions based on your established values.

Remember: you can teach employees specific skills, but attitude and caring can't be taught!

5. It's a fact that people produce what is measured

Work with your staff to develop very specific standards for meeting and exceeding your customers' expectations.

Keep raising the bar, and those same employees will be motivated to do even better because they know that you trust that they will.

6. Consistently hold everyone in the organization accountable for the standards you set

You will build incredible trust, and your customers will ultimately benefit.

7. Recognize and reward outstanding service

Often, the focus is on what employees have done wrong rather than giving them positive feedback on all the things they do right. Take time to celebrate success.

8. Practice supportive confrontation

When an employee doesn't meet set standards, take some time to teach and coach. Analyze the situation not in an attempt to lay blame but to learn about how to do things differently in the future.

9. When the boss owns the problem, it rarely gets solved

Encourage your staff to find new and better ways to improve service. Empower them to handle complaints as soon as they learn about them. That way, they will begin to welcome complaints as a way to help them improve service.



10. Walk the talk—even on a really bad day

Whether dealing with a happy, loyal customer or a difficult customer, leaders must show the way.

Businesses that will survive—and thrive—in the days and years to come are those that have a clear competitive advantage in the marketplace. Creating an organization that is truly focused on providing superb customer service is the very best way to develop that competitive advantage.

Apply these techniques to your business consistently, and you will begin to develop an emotional bond with your customers that will not only keep them coming back for more, but will also have them recommending you to their family, friends, and colleagues.

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