

A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

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CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

Definition: Demonstrated concern for satisfying one's external and/or internal customers.

- a) Lives the business mission: to be the preferred supplier through total customer satisfaction
- b) Quickly and effectively solves customer problems
- c) Talks to customers (internal or external) to find out what they want and how satisfied they are with what they are getting
- d) Lets customers know he/she is willing to work with them to meet their needs
- e) Finds ways to measure and track customer satisfaction
- f) Presents a cheerful, positive manner with customers

IMPORTANCE OF THIS COMPETENCY

Customer Orientation means focusing one's own and one's unit's efforts toward meeting the needs of internal and external customers. The principle of customer orientation is at the heart of the total quality movement, which involves continuous improvement to meet and exceed customer requirements. Customer Orientation is also essential for survival in today's increasingly competitive marketplace. Only companies that effectively meet the needs of their customers will survive.

To achieve internal effectiveness and efficiency, organizations must also ensure that individual units are responsive to the needs of their internal customers.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING THIS COMPETENCY

This competency requires a particular orientation and attitude, rather than the extensive development of new skills. Thus the primary way to develop this competency is to put it into practice, by identifying your unit's internal or external customers, talking to them to understand their needs, and focusing the unit's efforts toward meeting these needs.

PRACTICING THIS COMPETENCY

- ◆ Meet with your unit to identify its major customers. List the customers who receive the work outputs from your group. Analyze and prioritize the list. Identify who are your most important customers and who will become your major customers over the next 2 - 3 years.
- ◆ Set up meetings with your key customers. Ask them how satisfied they are with what you are providing them now, and what you can do to provide better service.
- ◆ With your unit, identify ways to measure the quality and responsiveness of the service you are providing (e.g., number of errors detected in shipments each week; average time from order to delivery).
- ◆ Create a graph of each key service measure over time, and post the graphs where everyone in your work unit can see them.

- ◆ Identify and implement improvements in work processes that will result in better customer service.

OBTAINING FEEDBACK

Periodically meet with your key customers to review the service you have been providing and identify ways to improve it.

Periodically survey your customers to learn how satisfied they are with your unit's service. Create a survey that includes both quantifiable ratings and open-ended questions.

Identify what work processes or assignments are currently hindering your unit's ability to provide excellent service to its customers. Develop ideas for changing the work processes or assignments and discuss them with your manager.

If your job involves providing direct service to external customers, consider taking a course that provides role plays and feedback on customer interactions.

LEARNING FROM EXPERTS

Interview individuals with a reputation for providing excellent service to their customers. Find out what these individuals did and how they improved their service to their customers.

COACHING SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

If you are coaching someone who is trying to develop this competency, you can:

- ◆ Provide feedback and suggestions to help improve customer service.
- ◆ Demonstrate through your own actions a commitment to providing excellent service.
- ◆ Ask this person what you can do to enable him/her to do a better job of focusing on customer service.
- ◆ Observe this person in interactions with key internal or external customers and provide specific, constructive feedback.
- ◆ Recognize and reward behavior that demonstrates a commitment to customers.

SAMPLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- By February 15, I will meet with each of my unit's 5 key internal customers. I will ask how satisfied they are with the service we are providing and what we can do to improve it.
- By March 8, I will meet with Lila Welch to learn what her unit has done to provide excellent service to its internal customers. From this conversation, I will develop a list of specific ideas to consider for application in my unit.
- By April 30, I will complete a self-study course in customer orientation skills and identify a list of ideas to apply in my own unit.

BOOKS

Becoming a Customer-Focused Organization, by Craig Cochran. Chico, CA: Paton Press LLC, 2006.

Customer Centered Growth: Five Proven Strategies for Building Competitive Advantage, by Richard Whiteley & Diane Hessian. New York, NY: Perseus Books Group, 1997.

Customer Chemistry: How to Keep the Customers You Want-And Say "Good-Bye" to the Ones You Don't, by Mary Naylor & Susan Greco. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

Customer Once, Client Forever: 12 Tools for Building Lifetime Business Relationships, by Richard A. Buckingham. New York, NY: Kiplinger Books, 2001.

Customer Power: How to Grow Sales and Profits in a Customer-Driven Marketplace, by David C. Swaddling & Charles Miller. London, UK: Wellington Press Group, 2001.

Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service, by Performance Research Associates. New York, NY: AMACOM, 2006.

Great Customer Connections: Simple Psychological Techniques That Guarantee Exceptional Service, by Richard S. Gallagher. New York, NY: AMACOM, 2006.

Improving Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Profit, by Michael D. Johnson & Anders Gustafsson. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Relationship Marketing: Gaining Competitive Advantage Through Customer Satisfaction and Customer Retention, by Thorsten Hennig-Thurau & Ursula Hansen. Berlin, GR: Springer-Verlag, 2000.

Reorganize for Resilience: Putting Customers at the Center of Your Business, by Ranjay Gulati. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2010.

Satisfaction: How Every Great Company Listens to the Voice of the Customer, by Chris Denove & James Power. New York, NY: Penguin Group, Inc., 2006.

Service Magic: The Art of Amazing Your Customers, by Chip Bell & Ron Zemke. Chicago, IL: Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2003.

The Culting of Brands: When Customers Become True Believers, by Douglas Atkin. New York, NY: Penguin Group, Inc., 2004.

The Customer Delight Principle: Exceeding Customers' Expectations for Bottom-Line Success, by Timothy L. Keiningham & Terry Vavra. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books, 2001.

The Ten Demandments: Rules to Live by in the Age of the Demanding Customer, by Kelly Mooney & Laura Bergheim. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Trade, 2002.

E-LEARNING COURSES

Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service. American Management Association. Tel. 800 250-5308. www.amanet.org/selfstudy/b13392.htm

Keeping Customers for Life. American Management Association. Tel. 800 250-5308. www.amanet.org/selfstudy/b13783.htm

Managing the Customer Satisfaction Process. American Management Association. Tel. 800 250-5308. www.amanet.org/selfstudy/b14143.htm

EXTERNAL COURSES

Customer Service Certification Series. Three days. Soaring Eagle Enterprises. Tel. 800 345-9361. www.soaringeagleent.com/csprograms.htm

Customer Service Excellence: How to Win and Keep Customers. Two days. American Management Association. Tel. 877 566-9441. www.amanet.org/seminars/seminar.cfm?basesemno=5165

Customer Service Excellence Program. Three half-days. MRA - The Management Association, Inc. Tel. 800 679-7001. <http://www.mratraining.com/certseries.asp>

Developing Customer-Focused Organizations. One Week. United States Office of Personnel Management. Tel 202 606-1800. <https://www.leadership.opm.gov/Programs/Skill-Immersion/DCF/Index.aspx>

Empowering Your Front Line - How To Manage Customer Relations. Lauderbaugh & Associates. Tel. 800 500-9656. www.jjlauderbaugh.com/Programs/prog_summaries.html#empower

Improving Customer Service Skills. Impact Learning Systems International. Tel. 800 545-9003. <http://www.impactlearning.com/solutions/training-programs/customer-service/>

Knock-Your-Socks-Off Customer Service. Two days. National Seminars Group. Tel. 800 344-4613. www.nationalseminarstraining.com/Onsite/TrainingTopic/PCZ/index.html

Leading Extraordinary Customer Service. Two days. American Management Association. Tel. 877 566-9441. www.amanet.org/seminars/seminar.cfm?basesemno=05101

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