

How to Fix Customer Satisfaction At Your Company (and dominate in your marketplace)

By Bart Allen Berry

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I. Introduction: Need, Benefits, and Cost

Every business needs to improve customer satisfaction.

Why try to improve customer satisfaction? The real question is; are you serious about succeeding in your business? Customer satisfaction is the key to creating customers who will:

Return to buy from you again and again

Tell others about their satisfying experience

Build your reputation and market your company for you

These three satisfaction phenomenon combine together to create what is termed “your return and recommend rate”, the only real ongoing objective measure of customer satisfaction behavior we can track.

This book will show you how you can measure and quantify how you are scoring on the satisfaction factors that influence these phenomenon and give you the keys to improvement for an increase in business.

What is the cost of the effort to improve customer satisfaction?

It should not be thought of as a one time cost, but rather as an important way of doing business. Continuously improving customer satisfaction levels, you will see, requires you to look at many aspects of your enterprise. There may indeed, be some capital expenditures that will make sense for you. This book will give you the scientific rationale for making the decisions to spend more in certain areas if indicated.

Performing internal satisfaction audits and customer surveys will require time and some expense as well. On the whole, however, you will find that the costs of focusing on customer satisfaction are minimal and fit well within the budgets of your normal day-to-day business operations. The real costs are time, energy and commitment.

What are the benefits of improving Customer Satisfaction? Here are a few:

Being the preferred supplier

Having a reputation of being 'known as the best'

Establishing your brand in the marketplace that survives for many years
Profitability

Job security for your employees

Company Growth

Beating the Competition

Creating a brand name that is synonymous with quality

Low sales and marketing costs because customers do much of your work for you

The ability to create satisfaction with your customers by giving them what they really want

II. Understanding the Customer-Supplier Relationship

Many suppliers are guilty of falling into a complacent, reactive orientation with their customers and forget the most fundamental principle. ***‘Customers want to have a relationship!’***

Customers have a set of relationship expectations, and are internally applying them to every supplier they interact with. These relationship expectations have a set of underlying principals that every supplier needs to consider if they are serious about creating satisfied customers.

Principle #1 Customers start out with the expectation of a positive relationship.

The customer begins with the idea and belief that the supplier is going to understand and fulfill their needs. Suppliers must understand that the ball is in their court, and the customer-supplier relationship begins with the opportunity to demonstrate their sensitivity to the customer’s needs.

Customer’s want to believe that the supplier cares. First impressions are critical, as well as the actions that follow and customers don’t want to find anything disappointing, where they might have to compromise their needs. Many suppliers sabotage themselves in innumerable ways by making the customer fight to even get a relationship started. Low staffing levels, service personnel who ignore customers or treat them rudely, untrained or otherwise unprofessional front line representatives and many other factors can set the relationship off on a bad foot from the start.

Suppliers need to understand that their role is to have a relationship and to actively participate in it. Just getting the customer’s money without forming a relationship is a cold, impersonal dissatisfying and selfish way to run a business, and customers don’t like it. The larger a business becomes, (large box store retailers who focus solely on low price comes to mind) the less ability the supplier has to maintain close relationships with their customers.

The impressions communicated to customers of large impersonal businesses are that these suppliers could care less about a relationship with the customer. The human-to-human relationship connection is missing. Trends of accelerating personnel cuts and increasing automation exacerbate this phenomenon. The larger the business enterprise, the more proactivity in relationship management will be required.

Principle #2 Only Win-Win Relationships produce total satisfaction.

If the supplier is serious about producing customer satisfaction by fulfilling the customer's needs (and hopefully every business does actually fulfill a customer's need), then they should be prepared to have the customer benefit from the relationship. The Supplier gets the customer's money. The customer gets the product or service.

Both are satisfied, both are winners in the relationship. It may seem egalitarian, simple and obvious, but it is amazing how many suppliers operate with a different model in mind. In a win-lose relationship one of us is satisfied, and one is not. In a lose-lose relationship, neither are satisfied.

Only Win-Win relationships are worth repeating and are sustainable. When the perception of the balance of the relationship is skewed too much toward either the customer or the supplier, satisfaction will suffer, and the customer-supplier relationship will be at risk. The aim of improving customer satisfaction is to get customers to want to come back..

Win-lose relationships are favored by unscrupulous suppliers or monopoly enterprises that have the market cornered with no other choice for the customer. Customers naturally gravitate towards more satisfying relationships with their suppliers, and will jump to a more satisfying relationship with another supplier, should it become available.

Principle #3 Suppliers have a right to get their needs met.

The supplier is ultimately motivated by profit. The supplier is counting on all aspects of customer loyalty and satisfaction, which translate into direct financial benefit. Suppliers want to be known as the best and enjoy the benefits of customer loyalty.

Supplier's want to be known for their unique value proposition, and will structure their business and marketing efforts to establish and be identified with their brand or unique niche. The Supplier has a right to make a profit.

In the reciprocal relationship with the customer, the supplier will deliver the product or service and can't stay in business unless there is profit to sustain the business. How much profit the supplier decides to take is a critical part of establishing a sustainable customer-supplier relationship.

Principle #4 Customers have the need (and the right) to be satisfied.

There are ten domains of satisfaction present in any customer supplier relationship to some degree. These ten factors have a different weighting,

depending upon the product or service and work as an integrated set to create an overall customer satisfaction value in the mind of the customer.

This value, when measured on a one to ten scale, correlates with various satisfaction behaviors that range from class action lawsuits and boycotts of a particular supplier on the negative end, to world-class levels of loyalty and unsolicited positive testimonials and faithfulness to a brand that can span generations on the positive end¹.

Each of the domains of customer satisfaction can be managed and measured by the supplier to maximize benefit to the customer and increase loyalty, preference and return and recommend rates:

Quality
Value
Timeliness
Efficiency
Ease of Access
Environment
Front Line Service Behaviors
Inter-departmental Teamwork
Commitment to the Customer
Innovation

1. What Customers Want! Bart Allen Berry 2002 Aquarius Publishing San Diego California

Principle #5 Win-Win must occur at all levels of the customer-supplier chain.

The Supplier is under pressure to resource more than just the front line with customer attention and convenience. Any part of the customer's experience, in any department or with any person must share the same high level of customer satisfaction focus.

The supplier's responsibility is to also provide the 'behind the scenes' support, resources and commitment inside it's own organization and between departments to insure smooth fulfillment of customer needs. Suppliers who are outstanding at satisfying their external or end-user customers are often just as successful satisfying their own internal customers such as employees, contractors and their own vendors.

Principle #6 All relationships begin with self.

The Supplier's representative always has the choice of committing themselves to a quality relationship with the customer. Personnel should be recruited, especially on the front line, which have a natural affinity for relationships with customers. Although this might seem basic, it is often overlooked or is sacrificed because of poor training or low wage unmotivated front line personnel.

The supplier's personnel need to continually make the individual choice and commitment to connect with customers, to solicit their needs, and to do their best to fulfill them. The customer-supplier relationship is fundamentally a person-to-person relationship. When attentiveness, courtesy, respectful servitude, and enthusiasm are the norm, supplier's will be well on their way towards establishing a satisfying relationship with their customer.

If you're in business, the customer-supplier relationship should be getting your full attention. Continuously improving customer relationships means continuously improving the factors which influence customer satisfaction. These principles can be applied to all of your relationships, as they are all customer-supplier relationships at some level. Think on this.

III. What Customers Want!

The voice of the customer is more than a gut feeling or a general impression.

It can be defined as having ten major domains, with each playing its part in the impressions that are formed in the mind of a customer as they decide whether or not to return to buy again, to complain or compliment, to become a loyal customer or to vocally complain to you and everyone they know- about you.

Hundreds of thousands of data points from satisfaction surveys in many industries were studied to determine the common factors, which describe and determine satisfaction in any customer supplier relationship for any product or service.

These ten factors are measured individually during the entire customer experience and with a total score plotted on the Customer Satisfaction Behavior Curve.

This overall satisfaction score (consisting of the overall impact of each of the ten factors) correlates with return and recommend rate percentages and prediction of customer behavior.

Quality-

- Compared with the best available or the best the customer is familiar with
- Error Free/Defect Free
- Supplier personnel are subject matter experts and have general systems knowledge

Value-

- Value is compared with the best price the customer has experience with or knowledge of. If prices are higher, negatives must be offset by strong positive features or benefits
- Value is calculated after the sale when product/service continues to serve customer well over time

Timeliness-

- Product or service delivered early or at the agreed upon time
- Personnel take all the time required to meet customer needs
- Product or service is delivered as fast as possible with minimum wait times

Environment-

- The supplier's plant/offices/store are safe, clean and well organized
- Customer's fees psychologically welcome and valued as customers

Ease of Access-

- There are no barriers or inconveniences between the customer and accessing product or service (hours open, location easy to find, get to right person with information etc.)
- Pathway signage is clear and adequate staffing and interface resources are provided for customer's convenience

Efficiency-

- Supplier offers a single point of access with the minimum number of steps possible for fulfillment of customer needs without repeat or redundancy.

Self-Management- (front line service behaviors)

- Front line personnel are dressed appropriate with the benchmark of their trade and make good first impression
- Front line personnel are courteous and attentive with subservient/serviceful attitude
- Front line personnel give customers their full attention

Teamwork-

- Employees facilitate smooth customer hand offs between departments
- Employees in different departments and throughout the suppliers company work well together to meet the needs of the customer

Commitment-

- Supplier is honest and up front with customer about all terms and conditions
- Supplier treats customer as most important customer
- Supplier takes responsibility when things go wrong

Innovation-

- Supplier continuously introduces innovations and improvements to their product line

More detailed discussion of these points is covered in “What Customers Want! Fundamentals of Satisfaction for Your Enterprise” by Bart Allen Berry

Anecdotally, a good exercise is to assign a weighting to each of the ten variables as you ‘put yourself in the customer’s shoes. We do this with a more complex matrix process, but the easiest way is to get a bunch of you and your employees in a room and do this yourself the old fashioned way.

Explain each of the domains of satisfaction and then have each person list them in order of importance of the customer. Average all of the responses and use this as your guide to weighting each of the satisfaction domains in the mind of the customer. Yes I know it's your mind and not the customer's, but chances are, you'll be very close to on-target if you know your customer at all.

This might be an example:

Retail Bank customer in order of importance-

- 1- Quality-** customer wants an error free process with his money
- 2- Value-** customer wants good interest paid on his accounts and not too many fees
- 3- Timeliness-** customer doesn't want to wait in line
- 4- Efficiency-** customer wants to get in and get it over with and get out
- 5- Ease of access-** customer wants the bank to be open when he needs it and a place to park
- 6- Front line Service Behaviors-** it's ok if tellers treat him nice and are polite
- 7- Commitment to the customer-** likes to be recognized and treated as if he were a valued customer
- 8- Inter departmental Teamwork-** likes tellers and managers to work together well to meet his needs
- 9- Environment-** decorations should be tasteful and environment feel neat and well organized
- 10- Innovation-** bank introduced new products and services- not especially important

See the Customer Satisfaction Behavior Curve by clicking on this link:

<http://www.whatcustomerswant.org/satisfactionresearch/customerbehaviorcurve.html>

The Customer Satisfaction Behavior Curve reveals the three zones of customer behavior and further distinguished tendencies to return and recommend after the 7.9 threshold. 20% to 1600% R&R is possible.

Conversely, in the Zone of Customer Dissatisfaction (less than 4.1) the customer actually takes negative actions because of their dissatisfaction that can damage the supplier's business and reputation.

The first goal for any organization should be to move strongly into positive R&R territory and out of the vulnerability of the Zone of Customer Indifference.

Moving your overall satisfaction score 'to the right' is the purpose of this methodology.

IV. Internal Audit of Customer Satisfaction

The first place to look for a current understanding of customer satisfaction is within your own organization. The people who interface with customers most know what is going on, what they hear from customers and where they know they must be falling short. Often management makes decisions for the company based on gut level feel which is often very disconnected from day to day operations. Management would seem to be incompetent to disregard this free and easily accessible customer information, but it happens every day.

The man (or woman) on the line is a rich source of detailed information about the customer and the real state of the customer supplier relationship. Systems and processes, which support customer deliverables, are also great places to look for current information about whether or not your organization is satisfying the customer. It is often quite revealing to separate these departments or groups within the satisfaction delivery chain to find out how their experience and perception may differ from one another. The old story about the blind men describing the elephant comes to mind.

Once the ten domains of customer satisfaction are understood, it is important to implement an anonymous internal assessment to see how your employees and managers really feel about how well your organization is doing to deliver customer satisfaction. This information can be compared and contrasted with external customer satisfaction information from actual customers (see chapter V).

We have a well-developed internal organizational audit of customer satisfaction, which is **provided free here**.

<http://www.surveyprom.com/TakeSurvey?id=17022&responseCheck=false>

Send this email link to everyone in your organization you want to survey (sending it to everyone in the company is OK). Rest assured your responses will be kept confidential.

You can do this right now.

Once you complete this survey, send an email with your name and position, company or organization, number of employees you sent the survey to and any other relevant information about you that you want to pass along. A general statement about how you think you are doing with customer satisfaction would be great.

surveys@whatcustomerswant.org

I will send you back my survey report with some analysis.-FREE.

Hopefully, as this e-book gets more popular, I will get some support for this effort, but currently this service will be free for you.

This report will include an overall mean score for customer satisfaction at your organization. This will correlate with the customer satisfaction behavior curve and the appropriate return and recommend rate percentages you can expect. I will send you this information.

This report will also include mean scores for each of the ten domains of satisfaction, so you can pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses more specifically.

When we provide this audit process to our clients, we also identify departments and locations within a more customized study to develop a satisfaction profile of each sub-group at the company. (Too much work to give away for free).

This internal audit satisfaction baseline study may be all that is available for your company or organization. It may be impossible, cost prohibitive, or just take too long to implement an external customer survey as recommended in chapter V.

If this is the case, rest assured that many organizations are harder on themselves than customers, so if you set about fixing the things this audit indicates you will still be on target. This integrates set of satisfaction indicators is very comprehensive and covers the statistical predictors of satisfaction very well. There is not another more scientific customer satisfaction methodology that we know of.

V. The External Customer Satisfaction Survey

There is no real substitute for getting the real voice of the customer.

Customer satisfaction surveys should be the norm for every business or organization that provides a product or service. Assuming you 'know' exactly what your customers want is a lazy way to look at your most important relationships. The strong recommendation here is to use a scientific process and to gather all the information you can.

A well-designed customer satisfaction survey will include the following elements:

A data collection plan

This is your plan for who and how many you will be surveying. Do you want to survey different types of customers? Customers of different products or services? Customers in certain areas? The first step is to see what your database look like.

Your database of customers might come from a sales department or even the warehouse who has the addresses and contacts of your customers. Make sure you are surveying the real decision makers if you are surveying B2B.

How old is my contact list? Most current customers will be more relevant than older ones. How old is old? The rule of thumb is- if you don't have enough current customers keep reaching back in your history until you have a good population size.

Your data collection methodology for administration might mean telephone surveys, pen and paper field surveys, in person interviews or focus groups, email surveys, inter office mail or direct mail. The nature of your business relationship with your customers will be the biggest determiner here.

Population vs. Sample

The population is the entire group of customers you are potentially surveying. If you have 50,000 customers in your database, you could survey them all if you were using an email/web survey. If you had to mail them all with a stamped return envelope you might consider sampling from all of the customers represented. How many to sample? What can you afford?

The key is to get a good response rate. I survey everyone if I can and look for 15% response on the low side. Statistical significance aside, sometimes you just have to take what you get and it's often uneven, but data is data and that's what you're after so get all you can. If you spend the money to do a survey, don't scrimp on the sample size or you may end up with inconclusive data that can't be relied upon. You don't want to do organizational decision making with that.

Response Rate

I like to get 100% response rate but it rarely happens. If the customer base is small and they are approachable this is possible. Usually however, with a database of 1500 or more I like to have a minimum 15% response rate, that's about 200 returned completed surveys. (By the way if they are incomplete or inaccurate, throw them out rather than try to interpret what you 'think they were trying to say' (remember the past presidential elections?). If you can get a higher response rate GO FOR IT!

There are several ways to increase your response rate

Offer a premium like a free gift or a contest drawing. We've done free movie tickets and free pizza, and drawing for free appliances. It definitely helps.

Collect surveys at point of purchase such as filling out a survey while medical bills are being processed when checking out of a hospital. This method focuses on collecting a stream of data over time rather than a one time effort.

Have your field reps introduce the survey and collect it while on a sales call. This dirties the data somewhat because it may put the salesperson in a conflict of interest position where he has the opportunity to influence the customer's answers, which may be about him, but there are ways around this too.

Put a time deadline on survey completion, that way people won't put it off indefinitely.

Send out reminder notices- this is easiest with email surveys.

Send it accompanied with a letter- if it's a sincere letter from the president of your company thanking the customer for their business and re-committing themselves to continuous improvement and understanding customer needs- all the better.

Call them and ask them to complete it.

Obviously, the more transaction value per customer, the more you will probably be willing to spend to get the information you need to match your product or service to the customer's need. The bottom line- the more you spend the better data you get back..

Survey demographics

Some of the most irritating surveys in the world purport to be measuring customer satisfaction but are really vehicles designed to compile a customer mailing list. These typically spend a whole page asking you about where you live, what newspapers you read and where you shop. I know I don't like to give away that kind of personal information and I don't fill out forms for the fun of it. Clearly this is too much in the way of demographic data collection- besides, you

don't want your customer to get turned off before you get to the meat of the questions you really want them to answer.

There are ways of pre-coding your surveys (we're getting technical here) to match a specific database so that you know who you are sending them to and where you might be collecting them from, so instead of making the customer fill out redundant information in the demographic section of the survey, they can whisk right on to giving you the data you need before they get bored and 'circular file' your survey.

The key for demographic information is to ask questions about subgroups that make a difference to you. Do you need to know the age of your customer so you can track preferences and buying behaviors of different age groups? If this is valid- ask them, if not, don't waste their attention. If there are significant differences between male and female customers and you can do something about it if you find this out- then ask about this demographic indicator.

Other common demographics to include might be:

Specific product purchased or service utilized

Data of purchase

Location purchased at

New customer or repeat customer

Demographic variables give you the ability to segment the responses of subgroups and give you business intelligence that you can act upon. It also allows you to trend the data over time when you are regularly surveying customers to see if satisfaction is improving with older customers at XYZ location etc.. This kind of streaming customer data gives management the insight it needs to drive improvement.

What to ask-

The formula here is to include at least one question for each of the ten domains of satisfaction and more question sin the areas where you have weighted customer satisfaction more heavily. We want to make sure and overturn every rock and we want to find out more about the areas that make the most difference to our customer.

Including each of the domains of satisfaction also gives you the added power of our research on return and recommend rate prediction. Values from these ten areas should be averaged separately on a one to ten scale, and should mirror the internal satisfaction audit as closely as possible to insure an accurate comparison. The internal vs. external customer perspective is a valuable one to validate your understanding of customer satisfaction.

Additional Questions to add to your survey

Testing a new product idea or marketing concept

Who else's product do they buy

Where else they shop

Are they planning on buying again?

What are they planning on buying again?

What else does the supplier need to do to improve?

Barriers to buying the product or service

What could the supplier do to help them buy more?

Other customers they might recommend or refer

What is the supplier doing right or well?

What would you like to see more of?

These open ended questions cross over into the realm of market research, but as long as you're asking questions you might as well try and get some other valuable information.

It is not uncommon to see these types of questions mixed with satisfaction variables.

The danger of open-ended questions is that they must be analyzed for content. A simple pareto analysis of how many times particular things were mentioned by how many customers will lend validity to powerful comments often packed with emotion. It is easy to be swayed by a particular complaint that sticks in your head but the scientist in you must remain objective and analyze whether this is an isolated comment or an established pattern.

What else to watch out for in writing/designing survey questions

This is an entire science in itself. A badly written question will give you bad data back. Questions should be consistently written to be as brief as possible and only ask about one specific thing. The best form for satisfaction question is to state questions in the positive and then ask customers to rate the extent to which the supplier does X.

For Example:

This supplier's products are the best available.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A likert scale of responses on a one (least) to 5 or 10 (most) scale is helpful because it corresponds with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree in meaning and allows a range of emotion to be expressed. Some believe in forcing a positive or negative response by giving only a one to four scale. I personally don't subscribe to this approach for satisfaction surveys.

I believe the customer should be as comfortable as possible and natural in their answering of questions. I prefer the one to ten scale personally because I believe that customers can express more exact emotions, and the data is easier to calculate and report in a 1 to 10 format that most are comfortable with. I can still integrate one to five scale data in my database and make simple extrapolations to convert it to a one to ten scale or vice versa if necessary if there is a change in the future.

This is in no way a complete course on survey design here, and I may be doing more harm than good, but I believe that if you keep it simple and kick your survey design around with a few colleagues, putting yourself in the customer's shoes you will come up with something you can use.

Makes sure to send it around for editing and do a little internal testing before you send it out there to make sure people understand the meaning of your questions and don't misinterpret them in some fashion. Keep in mind most of us read on the fourth grade reading level. Surveys should be geared towards the lowest common denominator.

Survey Analysis

Statisticians will baffle you with many types of tests for validity and reliability but if you stick with the guidelines I've set for you here, you will be mostly in safe territory. The ten domains of satisfaction have been tested in many different ways which is another good reason to keep them as a set when designing a satisfaction survey.

The key statistics you will be analyzing are the most simple and easy to understand for everyone and the safest ones by which to do your analysis and report of your survey results.

You will want to include:

Total number sent divided by the number of responses=response rate percentage

Demographic variable analysis- responses from each group

Totals of all numeric question responses divided by number of responses=Overall satisfaction mean score

Overall satisfaction mean scores for each variable (question)

Overall satisfaction for each demographic group
Satisfaction variables for each variable for each demographic group
Open-ended comments- complete text
Open ended comments Pareto analysis (most frequently to least frequently occurring)
Open ended comments Pareto analysis for each demographic group

Make sure you also include some comments about your data collection approach – what type of data collection was used, how customers were selected for the survey, and any problems you came across in the process.

Your Findings and Recommendations will be the summary of your analysis and it's implications. Be careful to only stick your neck out as far as is supported by the data and don't state your findings as absolutes unless they are absolute. Areas of concern or areas requiring further investigation, or uneven results are terms favored in survey reports. Still when the data is taken as a whole there will be definite themes and patterns which will emerge that should be obvious to everyone. Customer satisfaction surveys often serve to confirm what we knew or expected anecdotally, and now have the data to back up so we can justify our actions.

Sometimes they reveal completely new insights that prove you are not as in touch with your customers as you thought.

Contact us for more help: surveys@whatcustomerswant.org

VI. Benchmarking the Competition

Ok, so now you understand the importance of the customer supplier relationship, you understand how to evaluate customer satisfaction, you do an internal survey and an external satisfaction survey. What piece of data might you be missing? How about how the competition stacks up against you in terms of customer satisfaction?

In most industries competitors naturally cross paths and some even have good working relationships. Most have a rough idea of what their competitors are doing, but the smart ones know precisely where their competitors are beating them and where they're beating their competitors. This is true business intelligence.

To those who read this book I will say- you have the formula here to overtake your competitors or at least put up the best possible fight with what you've got. If you're lucky your competitors have not read this book and do not understand how to evaluate customer satisfaction, but that is precisely what you need to do now with your competitor's product or service delivery system.

Get the intelligence however you can. Send your cousin in to make a purchase, pretend to be a customer and see what happens, and benchmark their pricing, quality, front line customer service behaviors, inter-departmental teamwork and all the rest. Send several different people to perform a satisfaction audit themselves and compare data with one another.

Once you have a value for each of the ten domains of satisfaction for your competition, compare them with your own scores and see where you are similar, where you really shine and where you're getting beat.

The improvement plan from here is obvious:

Fix what you can- especially in areas where your competitors are eating your lunch..

Downplay the importance of areas where you're getting beat and can't do anything about it now. (Make a plan to fix them later even if it takes awhile).

Promote the key differentiators where you are doing a better job than your competitors.

Sure you'd like to improve everything that you find wrong according to your customers, but you need to increase your business while you're in the process.

Improving customer satisfaction is one of the most strategic and competitive things you can do for your business.

VII. Interventions

Nobody's perfect. It is quite rare for us to find suppliers who have overall customer satisfaction scores higher than 8.5. That means every company can stand some improvement in its product or service delivery system.

What follows here are some typical interventions that companies might use to try to increase customer satisfaction in each of the ten domains of satisfaction. These are suggestions only and do not apply to every situation in every company, but they are listed here to get your thinking started along the right lines.

Another approach to fixing your customer satisfaction problems is some structured brainstorming with all levels of the supply chain participating. When professionally facilitated, this can be an extremely productive way to generate the ideas you need that are also realistic and can be implemented right away.

Each of the intervention suggestions relates to one of the points in the ten domains of Satisfaction.

Quality-

- **Compared with the best available or the best the customer is familiar with**

Benchmarking the competition and publish the differentiators widely. Mention the competitor's band and why you're better in what ways. Your education process is part of the necessary marketing process customers must see or hear about (some say 9 times) before they make a purchase. Beat your own drum loudly and continuously. Take the thinking out of making the comparisons for the customer.

- **Error Free/Defect Free**

Use quality control systems, study continuous improvement methodologies, measure and monitor everything. Get employees involved as process owners who take pride and responsibility in getting it right. Reward accuracy and improvement efforts. Communicate to customers when improvements to your product/ service line are made.

- **Supplier personnel are subject matter experts and have general systems knowledge**

Training, training, training. Even if you have to do it yourself. Don't let employees interface with customers if they don't know what they are doing, where everything is located, know company policies and mission, know return policies, and have detailed product knowledge.

Samsung Corporation requires 30 days of training in residency before reporting to the job the first day. How many days of training does your company do before they put a new employee in front of a customer?

Value-

- **Value is compared with the best price the customer has experience with or knowledge of. If prices are higher, negatives must be offset by strong positive features or benefits.**

Once again, benchmarking is important here. You should be familiar with competitors products/services and be able to justify your price. Focus on specific features and benefits you will be delivering that represent the added value for the higher price.

If your process are lower than the competition, make sure the customers know it as well, in which case you should be emphasizing it strongly in your front line customer interactions. Be prepared with price history and apples to apples comparisons to you can justify the prices you charge and don't forget to highlight any discounts or sales opportunities for your customers that might be coming up.

- **Value is calculated after the sale when product/service continues to serve customer well over time**

Reinforce the idea of long term satisfied customers with visible testimonials and customer history. If customers are still getting benefit from your product or service after a long period of time you should be talking about it to your customers.

Any references to durability and reliability are very reassuring to customers who have not developed a trusting relationship with your firm. Any emphasis on repeat buyers who come back to purchase again and again will also build your credibility.

Timeliness-

- **Product or service delivered early or at the agreed upon time**

Track it, measure it, communicate the importance of being on time to everyone, reward it, punish it when it doesn't happen. Become a zealot for meeting customer time requirements. Analyze your systems to see if they are realistic, and if not, change and improve them so you can meet your commitments more often.

- **Personnel take all the time required to meet customer needs**

You know when you're understaffed. Pay what it takes to give good service and customers will appreciate it. Teach front line service personnel to fully concentrate on one customer at a time, and provide enough staff so they can really do it. Don't allow them to answer the phone while trying to wait on another customer. Avoid interruptions when they are with a customer.

- **Product or service is delivered as fast as possible with minimum wait times**

Don't make people wait for anything. If you have to, find some ways to get them involved with some aspect of service delivery while they are

waiting. Entertain them if they have to wait and value and respect their time.

Environment-

- **The supplier's plant/offices/store are safe, clean and well organized**

Clean it up and organize it better. Fresh paint and new furniture or just a re-arrangement will do wonders for attitudes in your own office as well.

- **Customer's fees psychologically welcome and valued as customers**

Train front line customer service staff to create the best possible first impression with warm greetings, attentiveness and courtesy. Provide comfortable first introduction and atmosphere for customers.

Hang up signs reminding customers that you value them and that they are important to you. Treat every customer like a long lost friend.

Ease of Access-

- **There are no barriers or inconveniences between the customer and accessing product or service (hours open, location easy to find, get to right person with information etc.)**

Kill your voicemail system if you can. Stay open later. Find out what customers would prefer for hours of business and give it to them. Move your plant or store if it suits customers better. Be available when customers need you.

- **Pathway signage is clear and adequate staffing and interface resources are provided for customer's convenience**

Have some folks from outside your company walk through your customer interfaces and give you honest feedback. Listen to what they tell you and study where they have difficulty understanding where to go, whom to talk to etc. The system should be based upon the customer's convenience and ease of use. Big easy signs and lots of them are the rule. Don't assume that it's obvious; make it obvious on a fourth grade level.

Efficiency-

- **Supplier offers a single point of access with the minimum number of steps possible for fulfillment of customer needs without repeat or redundancy.**

Simple flowcharting and process analysis will teach you volumes about what is really happening to your customers. Examine your own processes in detail and generate suggestions from process owners. See what can be eliminated and do so. Combine or run parallel processes whenever possible.

Boil down each step to it's most essential components and resource it well with the best staff and equipment to make it run flawlessly. After you have improved it all you think you can, start all over again and you'll probably find something else you can improve. Repeat regularly.

Self-Management- (front line service behaviors)

- **Front line personnel are dressed appropriate with the benchmark of their trade and make good first impression**

Benchmark what your competitor's front line service personnel are wearing and do better. Set standards for hair, personal hygiene, tattoos, lipstick and nail color, how to wear company hats and everything you can to promote consistency and professionalism.

- **Front line personnel are courteous and attentive with subservient/serviceful attitude**

People who think giving good service and attending to the needs of the customer is beneath them should not interface with customers, period. Find people whose personalities are naturally helpful and whose egos don't get wrapped up in their work.

Great customer service is a lost art in America, but many European and Asian countries have refined it very well over hundreds of years. Study this and don't be too proud to wait on the customer, hand and foot.

- **Front line personnel give customers their full attention**

Enough said.

Teamwork-

- **Employees facilitate smooth customer hand offs between departments**

Learn to walk customers to the next department and make a personal introduction to the appropriate staff person. If not possible physically, then maximize the power of your telephone systems so you can do this while still on the line with customer and smooth handoff can be made.

Use technology to get customer or account information in front of the other company representative so the customer doesn't have to repeat their entire story again.

- **Employees in different departments and throughout the suppliers company work well together to meet the needs of the customer**

Train your employees to behave like a team and use teamwork. If a customer has a concern it's automatically everyone's concern and employees need to work together to take responsibility rather than passing the buck. Customers appreciate this.

Commitment-

- **Supplier is honest and up front with customer about all terms and conditions**

Don't be afraid to be honest. Customers will find out soon enough if you're telling the truth about your product or service. Stand behind your product or service and how you do things at your company. If the way your company operates turns customers off, or you are using some kind of devious bait and switch sales process- change it.

Win-Lose relationships are not sustainable. Focus your marketing better on the types of customers who are really interested in your particular value proposition. Don't hide the details from the customer and make them find out later. You will lose a lot of sales this way and waste everyone's time.

- **Supplier treats customer as most important customer**

There is no more important customer than the one you are with right now. Customers want to feel valued in the relationship so remind them frequently and demonstrate this every way you can. There are a million ways to appreciate your customers- can you think of five right now?

- **Supplier takes responsibility when things go wrong**

Customers want to know up front if there will be some disappointment in product or service delivery. As soon as you know, tell the customer. Prepare mistake recovery mechanisms that you can offer the customer for their inconvenience (free delivery, free desert, some kind of discount, etc) and empower employees to give it when needed, not have to ask for approval from the corporate office.

Innovation-

- **Supplier continuously introduces innovations and improvements to their product line**

If you have something new, tell customers about it. Make a reason to have something new on a regular basis. Hold something back to introduce it later as something new. Demonstrate how progressive and improvement oriented your company is. Show that you are up to date, technologically savvy, and are striving to improve delivery of what the customer wants every day. Then do it.

VIII. Shifting To a Customer Satisfaction Measurement Culture

One could easily see how customer satisfaction might become the flavor of the month at your organization. Management could get all charged up about improving satisfaction and lead some training, hold some meetings, maybe even change a few things but we all know what happens. Customer satisfaction will stay on the front burner until the next ‘most important thing’ comes along.

The thing is, customer satisfaction really is the most important thing. When we hear organizations talk about their customer satisfaction improvement programs they remark “Oh yes, we did a few things about it this year”, or “Yeah we had that training program”, or “I think X is in charge of doing something about that, we’re waiting to see what they come up with”.

These are sure signs that there will be no real long term improvements in customer satisfaction, which means business will stay about the same, or as is natural in all systems- atrophy over time without maintenance and attention. Your job is to create an organizational culture that focuses on customer satisfaction, not just with lip service, but with institutional policies, procedures, and actions!

Yes of course, this is ‘consultant speak’ making you feel guilty about what you know you should be doing but aren’t. So let’s hammer on a few major points here so that when you do decide to get moving you can go after the right types of things to help shift your organizational culture in the right direction.

- 1) **Customer Satisfaction is everyone’s job.** Everyone in the company should be able to trace what they do on a flow chart to the ultimate delivery of a product or service for the customer. If they don’t see their job that way, or understand how what they are doing makes a difference- they need to be re-educated or let go. Making this clear to each employee gives them a sense of purpose and a clear message that **what they do counts to the customer.**
- 2) **Map your processes.** It may seem like human interactions like a sales process are just too complex with too many variables to be mapped. Wrong. Guess what? When you start to study what you do and how you do it, you will see patterns of behavior emerge. The trick is to enhance the good ones and eliminate the bad ones. Understanding of what’s really going on with customer interaction means studying yourselves in detail.

- 3) **Measure everything.** How many customers don't buy and why. How many customers come into your store every day. What hours they prefer. What items are customers asking for that you don't have? How they like you as a supplier?
How long it takes to demonstrate your product or service. How long customers wait in line at what times of day. Get accurate measurements of all areas of customer satisfaction and let everyone know what they are. Set goals for improvement and chart results with daily, weekly or monthly reporting.
- 4) **Set up consistent data collection so you have a steady stream of customer satisfaction data coming in.** You can identify trends and patterns and correct them sooner if you are watching continually. If not an expensive formal survey then short topic survey collected over time wherever possible.
- 5) **Empower your workforce to take initiative and use their creativity in satisfying customers.** Teach them not to crash the plane of course, but give them the latitude to try their own approaches and solutions. They will feel a sense of ownership when things work out right that will give you a better employee. Involve employees and give them responsibilities for the customer satisfaction crusade. Build a competitive organization that wants to beat the competition. These will be tomorrow's enlightened leaders.
- 6) **Keep the Customer Satisfaction Focus in front of employees all the time.** From brown bag informal discussions, to customer satisfaction summits to hiring professional satisfaction consultants and speakers to intensive customer satisfaction or service training. Keep the resources available for continuous organizational learning. Make Customer Satisfaction really important. Your business will be glad you did.
- 7) **Invest where it makes sense.** You have all the science you need if you follow the process outlined in this book to support the commitment of the company's resources. Remember, you won't be acting on a hunch or spending money based on one manager's opinion, even if they are way up the corporate ladder. This is a scientific continuous improvement process that should be well supported.
- 8) **Reward it and publish successes widely.** Give highly visible support when employees service customers well or when they create new levels of satisfaction. Tell lots of stories and give credit where it is due. Share the wealth if it results in an increase in business if at all possible.
- 9) **Demand customer-focused behaviors from everyone,** and demonstrate the commitment to the customer from the top of the

organization on down. Develop a profile of the types of employees that naturally fit in best with this culture and hire to this standard. Include a heavy emphasis on Customer Satisfaction right from the beginning with new hires and in employee manuals.

- 10) **Make big promises to your customers** and align everyone in the organization behind keeping them. Develop a powerful reputation, not through gimmicks, premiums, sales techniques or sales, but through delivering:

Quality and error free products/service delivery

Great Value compared with any of your competitors

Timeliness that will impress your customer

A clean and organized environment where customers feel welcome

Products, services and personnel that are easy for your customer to get to

The best front line service behaviors your customer has ever seen

Teamwork between your people that handle customer needs without missing a beat

A trusting up front relationship with customers that demonstrates you have their best interests in mind and value their patronage

An obvious commitment to improvement and innovation to bring even more benefits to your customers.

In closing I will assure you that if you are serious about transforming your department, or your entire company to a customer satisfaction focused culture, and you use my methodology, you can expect that there will be some early easy wins. We call this first round of improvements 'low hanging fruit' and they will most likely have a substantial return associated with them.

As you move higher up the customer satisfaction behavior curve you will notice that improvements are not so easy to identify and perhaps will take a lot more work to implement, and won't happen as fast. This is the time when most will abandon continuous improvement.

Let me assure you of one thing I've learned from my work in customer satisfaction. Once you break through into positive return and recommend rate

territory (overall satisfaction scores of 7.9 or higher) you will receive a nearly exponential return for every .50 increase in overall satisfaction you achieve. This uphill going is often accomplished by getting a few percentage points of gain here and there in all categories. Little improvements add up so don't stop when the going gets tough, that's when you're almost there.

If you can sustain high levels of customer satisfaction in your organization you could join the ranks of world famous brands that inspire loyalty for generations. Your company brand name could become synonymous with quality.

This happens when you make the commitment to making it happen.

Bart Allen Berry

For more information, speaking, training, surveys, or consulting services

Contact us at:

www.whatcustomerswant.org