



Tips for Achieving Customer Focus

BY ELAINE BERKE

Here are some proven strategies to help your organization build a culture of service excellence.

■ **Get sponsorship at the highest level.** The CEO and executive team are the most credible sources to drive a customer-focused culture.

■ **Translate customer needs into behavioral standards.** Translate data in understandable ways to the front line.

■ **Talk to employees about customer service.**

■ **Identify managers who can act as change agents, able to influence attitudes.** For employees to embrace this idea, managers must first accept this belief.

■ **Tie performance standards to service metrics.**

■ **Confront marginal service behaviors and attitudes.**

■ **Use peer pressure to stop marginal service performance.**

■ **Stay the course to improve service.**

■ **Measure customer loyalty rather than customer satisfaction.** Questions that measure customer satisfaction provide less value since they only measure the absence of complaints at a specific point in time.

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7 Ways to a Customer-Focused Company

BY ROBBIE KELLMAN BAXTER

Here are 7 techniques used by successful companies.

1. **Eat your own dog food (if possible).** If you sell clothes, encourage your employees to wear them. If you sell call-center software, use it in your call center. Even if the product isn't exactly targeted toward your average employee, try to find ways to use it.

2. **Have everyone sell the product.** Employees, from the bottom to the top, need to have some first-hand understanding of how a customer interacts with your brand and products.

3. **Include the customer throughout the market validation process.** Include customers in each phase of product development. Ask existing or prospective customers if they've ever had XYZ problem to identify the "pain point." Later in the process, show customers the value proposition or the product prototype and get their feedback on when, how, why and whether they would use such a product. Recognize that you need to be open to negative feedback if this process is to work.

4. **Create a corporate culture that doesn't require mindreading.** If a team has an idea for a new product or product feature, and it tests it and finds that customers don't want it, do not to punish the team. Customer-centric companies should be rewarding individuals who come up with new ideas and test them early on—even if the idea is wrong.



5. **Notice when a customer is using a product in a way other than intended.** Assume for a moment that the customer is right. There may be a way to add a new feature or even a new product that serves

a whole new customer base.

6. **Make it easy for customers to give feedback.** Have an 800 number on your box, a form on your Website or other means in place for customer feedback.

7. **Treat your employees well.** Former UPS CEO Kent Nelson once said, "Employee satisfaction equals customer satisfaction at UPS." Take his words to heart.

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To find out more about AMA's course on customer service, visit www.amanet.org

AMA Soundings

The AMA/HRI Customer Focus Study identified the following top five customer-related beliefs:

1. Keep promises to customers
2. Believe that our products/services are the best in the industry
3. Believe the business exists primarily to serve customers
4. Are customer-focused
5. Offer superior service

For complete findings of the survey of 1,000-plus executives, visit www.amanet.org/research