



## CREATING A CUSTOMER FOCUSED COMPANY

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### REMEMBER THE LAST TIME YOU PURCHASED A NEW CAR?

As you drove it away you were surprised to see so many like it on the road already. Yet, the day before you hadn't noticed those cars. While psychologists call this "Cognitive Dissonance", we prefer to use it as an illustration of "Customer Consciousness", which is ironically the unconscious focus on things that had suddenly become important to you.

The growth of many companies, to the present, has been dependent upon broadening the base of existing Customers. The focus has been on obtaining new Customers. In the future, it is likely that there will be a shift, with increasing amounts of new business eventually coming from the existing base of Customers. In preparation for this and as a major strategy for developing new business, it is appropriate to alter the culture to become more "Customer oriented." In fields where the differentiation between competitors is not that significant, the most successful participants will be those who develop strong Customer-oriented cultures and close relationships with their Customer base.

This paper addresses specific strategies and programs that are an aggregate of some of the best techniques used by companies that pride themselves in being Customer oriented.

## What is the Major Obstacle to Becoming Customer Oriented?

For many companies, the major obstacle is that the majority of employees have very little company-driven Customer orientation, with the exception of sales and Customer support. This is probably most true in functional areas that have little day-to-day interaction with the Customer, and it exists even with on-site personnel where the focus is usually the task at hand, not the Customer's needs and issues.

Customer orientation means seeing your business through your Customers' eyes. It means constantly stepping back and appraising the value of what you are doing for them. It means constantly looking for ways to improve the service that you are providing. It means consistently feeling the "Hot Breath of the Customer."

## What is Needed to Create an Increase in Customer Orientation?

The basic strategic goal of the suggested elements of the program is to dramatically increase the Customer orientation within a company. The byproduct of this goal will become an environment in which programs to increase Customer Satisfaction and Quality will not only be developed, but will receive a sense of urgency. In addition, many of the individuals and functions that do not see themselves as directly involved with the Customer will begin to have a more emotional tie with Customers, and these individuals will eventually find Customer contact to be enjoyable, not an irritant.

## A Commitment from the Top

The orientation to the Customer must begin with a commitment, originating at the topmost executive positions. This pledge must be vocal, continuous and pervasive, and it must dominate the words and actions of all senior managers. It must convey that the Customer has the absolute highest priority with executives. The most effective method lies in the communication area where internal and external media pronouncements, delivered by top management, will be frequent and consistent.

## Clear Long-Range Objectives for Raising the Customer Consciousness are Needed

There are two major objectives, which should be obtained through Customer Satisfaction and Quality Improvement programs. These are to be a byproduct of increasing Customer consciousness:

### OBJECTIVE 1

Internally, every employee will become aware of their impact on the Customer, and will seek ways to improve it.

### OBJECTIVE 2

Externally, the company will evolve and be recognized as a Customer-oriented company; focused on continuously improving their services.

This will not happen overnight. If experiences of other companies are any example, it will take several years of consistent effort, but the result will be increased market share and profit.

## Realistic Goals Must Be Developed

It is difficult to determine if "you have arrived" if you are not sure where you are going. Therefore, the establishment of objective Customer Satisfaction and Quality goals is essential. This should be done with care and understanding to insure targets that will encourage people to stretch instead of giving up in resignation and frustration.

For a goal to be effective, it must meet several criteria:

- Goals should be a "stretch" but attainable
- Goals must be credible
- The method of reaching a goal must be understood
- There should be a definitive reward for reaching the goal
- There should be an understood penalty for missing the goal
- The goals should be objective and quantifiable
- The goals should be supported from the top of the organization
- A goal for groups should be based upon actions that they can affect

## The Need for an Internal Champion

In a corporate society, projects rarely succeed without a visible, influential champion. A champion, by definition, is intimately and totally associated with the cause. The higher the management position of the champion, the greater the credibility of corporate support and thus the greater the impact. This is a very important function. For this reason, the individual should be viewed in a relatively neutral political role.

At Xerox, during their redefinition of the culture from a technology-driven company to a Customer-oriented company, it was very clear that David Kearns, the CEO, was the Internal Champion. He exercised both the carrot and the stick. While it is ideal that the champion be the top executive, it is not essential. What is mandatory, however, is that the internal champion receives the obvious allegiance, support and respect from all executive management.

### Centralized Information/ Coordination and Evangelism

For Customer orientation to succeed as a strategy, two functions that support the internal champion are needed: a Centralized Information / Coordination Repository and Evangelists. Since strategically, the focus of this program is raising Customer consciousness, this aspect will initially dominate their activities. Customer Satisfaction and Quality programs will then emerge as Customer consciousness grows.

#### Centralized Information

Customer Satisfaction and Quality will succeed through the coordination of multiple activities. This includes targeted tasks, public relations, loyalty goals, etc. To manage a process as broad as this program, it is essential to have information pertaining to all elements easily available for any employee on a "need to know" basis. This centralized information source serves many needs.

- Management Coordination
- Tracking of project status
- Business opportunities
- A Sales force resource, for Customer needs
- Communication center
- Coordination and issuance of Status Reports

This function is much more than a library. It is also a central source for the communication of Customer issues, successes, business opportunities, and requests, as well as the logistical coordination point. It is an active, not a passive function. Information must be pursued; it will not easily arrive.

#### Evangelism

A second key need in any major program is that of "Evangelism". This is a communication role directed towards explaining, convincing, training, and supporting the development of Customer consciousness and Customer Satisfaction related activities. This is a vital function closely linked to the Internal Champion.

One of the most visible and successful implementations of this function was within Apple Computer Corporation during the development of the Macintosh. Steve Jobs was clearly the internal champion, but Guy Kawasaki was a very effective Software evangelist. His role, which he did very effectively, was to convince developers to create software for the yet-to-be-launched Macintosh. This illustrates that evangelism is as much an external activity as an internal activity.



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