
JoAnna Brandi

Going Beyond Satisfaction to Delight

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ABSTRACT

What is an internal customer? How can you get the most out of your employees? Want tips on how to maximize performance and create a great working environment in the office? Here are some excellent tips from ISSM Charter Senior Fellow JoAnna Brandi on how to provide good service to your customers and employees.

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Introduction

How do you move from customer satisfaction to customer delight? Here are some pointers to use with your internal customers.

Customer *satisfaction* occurs when you meet your customer's expectations. Customer *delight* occurs when you not only exceed your customer's expectations but you also give them what they want or desire.

For example, when you look for a drugstore, you expect to find one close to home that has convenient hours. You also expect to be treated courteously. You're a satisfied customer if that occurs. What you want is to be treated as an individual, with empathy and with sincere concern. When that happens, you're delighted.

Internal Customer Delight

How does this translate to internal customer service and delight? If your purchasing department is insufficient or slow, people will become experts at getting around the system. This may serve their department well, but it probably doesn't serve the organization well.

Find your internal customers' wants and needs. The more you know about your customers, the better off you are. Are your customers "big-picture" thinkers, or are they concerned with details? Do they enjoy some personal chitchat, or are they "business only" types? Do they avoid conflict, deal with it aggressively, or do they seek compromise? Some of your internal customers may have the need for increased self-esteem, while others might want to be pioneers, making sure their department has the latest technology. If you cater to that

pioneering need, when a supplier gets something new, you'll let that person know right away.

Remember also that perception is a major part of customer satisfaction or delight. If your internal customer expects something to be delivered, and her idea of speedy service is 5:00 p.m. today and yours is within 48 hours, you're going to have a problem. Be sure you and your customers agree on the definition of "speedy service."

From Satisfaction to Delight

Here are some pointers for moving from satisfaction to delight with your internal customers.

Look for patterns between individuals and departments in your organization. For example, when the marketing department comes to you, is it always a rush? Could you encourage them to develop some project-planning skills?

Use positive reinforcement. Once you've worked with the marketing department, and they do start bringing requests to you in a timely manner, make a fuss. Thank them. This will encourage them to continue to get requests to you on time, and make delighting them an easier task.

Make your internal customers aware of what purchasing does. Let them know, "This is where I'm coming from. Everyone's request is the most important to them."

Likewise, spend time in other departments. Get a view of how the organization runs as a whole.

Express where you and your internal customers have common ground. Remind them, "We all work for the same organization. It's better if we work together toward more realistic goals."

Build up your emotional bank account. When you help others get what they need, you build up “equity” with them. When you need something, such as an extension on getting a product or service, you’re more likely to get some leeway if you’ve already demonstrated your willingness to pitch in for them. But be careful not to make their expectations of you too unrealistic. If they think you’re always able to do the extraordinary, you will eventually disappoint them.

Build rapport with others by cuing into the kind of language they use. They may communicate more rapidly or more slowly than you do, so change your rate of communication to match them more closely.

The longer you can stay in rapport with someone, the better your chances are for successful communication. Visual people use visual words, while others may use more “feeling” words. You can communicate with them more effectively by matching that style: “I see what you mean.”

A Balancing Act

Customer delight is a very delicate balancing act. You have to be part diplomat, part soother, part good listener, and creative in the way you think. You have to help your customers solve their problems.

When you’re learning your internal customers’ needs, remember that the basic needs to feel important, welcome, and safe show up in the business world. For example, say one department is reluctant to hand over authority to you to acquire a service for them. They may think that you can’t possibly understand what they’re looking for, and thus, won’t be able to find what they need.

Meet their needs for security by clarifying with them: “I sense that you’re reluctant to hand this task over to me. Let’s take some extra time so that you know I have it right.”

Listen for particular phrases: “I want . . . ,” “I need . . . ,” or “If only . . . ,” which will help you cue into their wants and needs. Anyone who deals with customers - internally or externally - has a responsibility to keep his/her communication skills sharp.

Above all, always ask yourself, “How can I add value to the end product?”

The value might be in a good relationship, clear communication, or in not bogging the process down. Today, every employee has to add value for their internal customers, and ultimately, the final customer.

Glossary of Customer-Service Terms

Excerpted from “Back to the Starting Point with the Final Customer,” NAPM Insights, May 1994.

Value: “A product or service may be of relatively low quality, but because it is also very cheap it is a good value. Likewise, a product or service may be very expensive and yet be a good value because its quality is so high. Ultimately, individual preferences dictate whether there is good value or not.” (From the book *Return on Quality* by Roland T. Rust, Anthony J. Zahorik, and Timothy L. Keiningham, Probus Publishing Company.)

Value Added: The value added to a product or service at each stage of its production and distribution, based on its increased value at that stage (*Glossary of Key Purchasing Terms*,

published by NAPM, Julie J. Gentry and Debra S. Seaman.)

Customer: A person who buys, especially one who buys from, or patronizes, an establishment regularly; any person with whom one has dealings (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Third College Edition.)

Customer Satisfaction: Exceeding customer expectations to advance your competitive edge.

Customer delight: Not only exceeding your customer's expectations, but also giving your customers what they want or desire.

Purchasing's Three Customer Groups

The Internal Customer: Departments and groups within an organization that require services from purchasing and materials management.

The Supplier: Group that supplies goods and/or services to an organization.

The Final Customer: The customer buying a product or service within the purchasing chain (from supplier to consumer).

What other groups can you define within your own company?