

CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION PLAN

Follow these steps to implement best practices ideas and suggestions for service innovation within your own organization.

Step 1: Create a service-driven culture

1. Identify your company philosophy and vision and communicate it throughout the organization.

EXAMPLE

FedEx's CEO, Fred Smith, consistently reminds his employees that they do something important everyday: "We carry the most important commerce in the history of the world." These employees are a vital part of history-in-the-making.

From the Service Edge

2. Employ a common language throughout your organization to describe jobs, duties, customers, and employees as a reflection of their value and importance to organizational success.

EXAMPLE

Twenty-six of the 100 Best call their workers something other than "employees." Here are some of their terms:

- Associates - Capital One, LensCrafters, Marriott International
- Team members - Synovus Financial, David Weekley Homes
- Microstrategists – Microstrategy
- Partners - Starbucks

From Fortune, January 10, 2000, "The 100 Best Companies to Work For"

3. Become obsessive in your attention to the smallest of details within the environment. Little things make a big difference in customer service.

Step 2: Develop strong leadership

1. Hold employees at all levels, regardless of title or position, accountable for successful performance of their duties and responsibilities.
2. Provide frequent opportunities for executives to perform frontline duties as part of their regular job duties.

EXAMPLE

Ray Kroc was a firm believer in management's place among the frontline. When he thought managers were spending too much time in their offices and not enough time with their customers and employees, Ray had the backs of all managers' chairs sawed off to "make them a little less comfortable while sitting."

Step 3: Hire and keep quality employees

1. Implement recruiting incentives for current employees to refer their friends and associates for open positions within the organization.
2. Develop innovative recruiting strategies.
3. Take a fresh look at the recruiting process to ensure that initial encounters with applicants generate positive first impressions.

EXAMPLE

"In a business where careers are built from entry-level positions, ultimately, our greatest asset is our people," said John Young, executive vice president, Human Resources. "We believe that having an environment which attracts and retains good people will become even more of a competitive advantage in the future, especially in serving those whose definition of good service is about personalization, intuition and flexibility."

From *Four Seasons' website*

Step 4: Provide opportunities for employee's personal and professional growth and development

1. Provide training that supports organizational strategic objectives.
2. Ensure training objectives are targeted to achieve desired performance improvement.
3. Ensure the number of annual training hours per employee within your organization compares favorably to that of industry norms and service leaders.

Step 5: Listen to your customers

1. Identify the needs of your customers with:
 - a. Surveys
 - b. Informal, one-on-one conversations
 - c. On-site customer visits
 - d. Focus groups
2. Create employee committees or task forces to determine best methods for utilizing the information that customers offer.

Step 6: Empower your employees to serve your customers

1. Solicit employee suggestions and ideas for product or service innovation within the corporation.
2. Acknowledge and implement, when possible, employee suggestions.
3. Use examples or stories from within your own organization to demonstrate how employees are empowered to do whatever it takes to satisfy a customer.

EXAMPLE

In 1996, IBM established a "Customer First" initiative empowering employees with the authority to spend up to \$5000 per event to immediately remedy customer problems.

From Best Practices

Step 7: Reward and recognize employees

1. Implement formal reward and recognition programs to honor and celebrate employees who provide excellent service:
 - a. Service awards (pins, plaques)
 - b. Incentive compensation programs based on corporate profitability
 - c. Cash bonuses
 - d. Vacation packages
2. Utilize informal reward programs to provide immediate recognition for outstanding employee service performances. Consider these examples:
 - a. Dinner out on the town
 - b. Movie tickets
 - c. Gift certificates
 - d. Letter from the President, CEO, Chairman
 - e. Mention or article in the company newsletter

Step 8: Demonstrate community support

1. Identify community needs requiring financial sponsorship or volunteerism.
2. Select community projects to support that are most in alignment with the values and philosophy of your organization.
3. Increase employee awareness and opportunities for volunteerism in community events and projects.

Step 9: Utilize innovative technology to support customer service

1. Stay abreast of current information and resources to continuously upgrade or invent support operations technology.
2. Prepare employees to utilize new technology and transition from current practices and behaviors to the new practices and behaviors that may be necessary.

EXAMPLE

"FedEx is sharing its high-powered computer network with its clients to process customer orders and coordinate deliveries of goods from around the world, and it is even helping to assemble some of its clients' products. This new role FedEx is playing is essential to the development of electronic commerce among

business, according to shipping and management analysts. That's because it makes possible the seamless coordination of millions of individual transactions occurring daily over the Internet, whether it's a consumer buying a \$20 book from Amazon.com or a business purchasing manufacturing parts from its suppliers."

From Washington Post, Sunday, May 2, 1999, "FedEx's Ties with Fujitsu Show How Firm is Meeting Demands of E-Commerce"

With this 9 step plan for action, benchmark your company's service standards against these best practices of service leaders. Make a commitment to implement the strategies they've outlined for success. Continuously evaluate your progress, make necessary adjustments and continue your journey to excellence.