

Internal Customer Service - The Key To Productivity & Growth

By Carole Nicolaidis

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Carole Nicolaidis
carole@progressiveleadership.com

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Customer service is the foundation on which businesses are created. Unless you understand your customers and treat them with respect, you will go out of business. That is a well-known fact. However, too often leaders fail to see that creating high quality products, or delivering excellent services is dependant on people, not corporations. Individuals within your firm must be treated well and managers must be instilled with a caring attitude toward others in order for your business to function at its maximum potential. How can we expect our people to give customers good service if they are not given that from us - their leaders?

Superior internal customer service has a far-reaching arm. It extends to morale, productivity, profitability, external customer service, and every other area of your business. Those who receive excellent internal customer service exhibit pride, are quick to voluntarily offer assistance to others, and to identify and head of problems.

I have seen this phenomenon work every type of business imaginable. Companies that create a collaborative environment have a drastic reduction in employee and external customer service issues. Companies that suffer in internal customer service usually face more challenges.

Consider this real-life tale. A friend's husband works for a corporation that recently merged with a former competitor. The previous organization continually took a proactive role in internal customer service; offering bonuses, recognition, surprises, support and a variety of other "perks" to employees. Sick days were taken only when needed, employees were pleased to wear clothing adorned with the company's logo, they constantly volunteered to assist co-workers and proudly offered external customers their full attention when problem solving.

However, shortly after the merger, the new organization abruptly ended all of these internal customer service programs. Employee attitudes have drastically changed for the worse. Sick days are taken whenever employees would like to have an additional day off. The overall outlook of team members now is that there is no team. They have reverted back to the stone-age viewpoint of the company vs. the employee.

So what can you - as a progressive leader - take from the above example? Below are few tips that can help you out on building excellent relationships with your employees and making sure that they will want to give all they can.

1. Consider your employees as your customers. Too often employers forget this. Without them you are not going to succeed. This is your first step: to acknowledge them as the most valuable members of the team.

2. Be available and present for them. You would always make yourself available to your clients... do the same for your employees. They need to know that you are there for them, and that everyone is playing on one team.

3. Be willing to share the company's goodies. Does your office purchase holiday gifts? Purchase additional items for your employees. If you - as a manager - receive a gift from a vendor, share it with your team. It is not the actual item that has so much value but your willingness to treat your internal customers with kindness and respect.

4. Exceed your employees' expectations. You can create great relationships if you focus on this. Do more for them than it is expected. Take them out for dinner or lunch once a month just as a gesture of team spirit. Offer unexpected theater tickets or restaurant gift certificates for those who have few or no sick days within a period of time. Host a company "play day" at a local park. The possibilities are wide open... the results are long-lasting.

5. Communicate the company's direction. Keeping employees informed offers them a feeling of empowerment. It cements the fact that they ARE part of the team. It also helps with aligning individual goals with those of the organization. Take time to provide detailed information about the business's future and your internal customer's place in it.

6. Follow-up and ask for their feedback. Just as you ask for feedback from and follow up with your external customers, be sure implement open communications between you and your team. When you involve employees in the daily activities of the organization, they participate more, volunteer more and they take ownership more quickly.

7. Say thank you. Can you imagine a transaction that takes place with an external customer where 'thank you' is never said? You simply wouldn't tolerate that for long. The same applies to internal customers. When a project is finished... when a report is completed... at every opportunity, say thank you.

While internal customer service programs may take additional time and money, the company-wide results will far surpass the expenses. You will soon find yourself surrounded by those who are willing - and, yes, even excited - to work for your firm.

Carole is President and Executive Coach of Progressive Leadership, offering executive coaching, organizational development consulting and leadership development training. Improve your business relationships, communication, team performance and bottom line starting now. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & subscriptions to Carole's FREE

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