



Improving Service and Satisfaction

By Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

“... failure to navigate the rapid changes brought about in the marketplace may be a warning to all the businesses, institutions, and nation-states that are facing inevitable, even predictable, changes but lack the leadership, flexibility, and imagination to adapt.”

Thomas L. Friedman, Author
The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century

Having good people does not guarantee a strong organization; ensuring good people are focused on the right things does. In today's turbulent world, people cannot do everything, nor in fact, should they. As the Friedman quote suggests, success, actually survival, awaits those people and organizations capable of adapting to a changing world.

Improving Service – Managing Expectations

Attempting to respond and fulfill the needs of customers (or internal clients) is creating internal challenges, chaos to some extent. It is no wonder that many customer-centered, service-centric strategies prove unaffordable and are quickly abandoned. Serving customers is not about responding to everything they want, it is being able to understand what they need and value; knowing when to say yes and when to say no.

Imagine for a minute you own a bike shop. Who are your target customers? Who do you want to attract and cater too? Recreational bikers? Kids? High-performance bikers? These decisions may be based on profitability, your interests and experiences, or possibly based on the demographics of your community. If you decide to target the high performance biker, are you proactively aligned to serve them? Are your employees sensitized to their unique needs? Are they equipped to ask the right questions? Do you offer services tailored to the needs of high-end bikers?

Questions like these must be *proactively* considered by the owners/leaders of this store. They cannot be left up to the individual discretion of each employee. Answers to these questions will determine the work processes, performance measures, reward systems, and the look and feel for the store. They will define the image you want to convey, the reputation you want to build. The answers define who you will hire and how you will train them.

Significant discord and performance related issues can be traced to this lack of customer understanding and focus. People require the ability to make consistent and timely trade-off decisions. Leaders' have to enable this to occur. Establishing a shared vision and providing strategic clarity is important; however it doesn't stop there. Leaders must also streamline systems and services by proactively defining the organization's target customers and identifying their highest priorities and needs. This activity will facilitate greater empowerment, which in turn will yield a more fully engaged, productive and responsive workforce. Organizations (or teams) will be better equipped to direct innovative efforts toward higher value priorities – channeling creativity and improving resource utilization. People will be better equipped to reconcile differences, find common ground and discover creative solutions that add value and/or eliminate waste.

As a result, the social atmosphere, in terms of relationships, teamwork, resilience, creativity and productivity, will improve. Conflicting agendas and self-interests will be resolved in the broader context of how each contributes value and improves service. Creative tension is healthy, even necessary when well managed.

Proactively understanding client priorities and needs will allow one to establish agreed-upon service levels and better manage expectations both internally and externally. Client and employee satisfaction will increase, as will loyalty, trust and relationship quality. Improving service and satisfaction is not about responding to everything asked of you but instead ensuring you are in the best position to deliver what you commit to. *Bringing Meaning into Monday™* offers a process that can help institutions achieve it.

Mark D. Sauter is the founder and president of GTP Associates, Inc. With over 25 years of business leadership experience, Mark's work, while with Dow Corning Corporation, was profiled in, *Value Based Marketing for Bottom-Line Success* – McGraw-Hill, 2003. In 2009, Mark released his book entitled *Bringing Meaning Into Monday™: A Sustainable Approach to Bottom Line Success*. Additional information is available at www.gtpassociates.com.