

## Getting Results from Your Service Culture -- There's No Quick Fix !

**"We've provided Customer Service Training and implemented a measurement system, but our Staff performance has not improved much."**

All too often we hear the above comment from CEOs and Business Managers voicing frustration at their efforts to develop a sales and service culture.

What undermines many company's efforts at developing a sales and service culture is thinking they can simply run their people through training, give them a product manual, add a few other ingredients like tracking and, of course, some "incentives," and in due time the results will be there.

What they do not realize is the process of accelerating a sales and service culture includes many other components, some of which must be in place before any training is conducted, and tracking and incentives are even considered. People also do not realize all these components are only pieces of the process -- pieces that, alone, are not likely to generate long-term results.

To sustain a service and sales culture, three critical areas must be addressed as you can see in the pyramid: **Skills, Infrastructure** and **Organizational Development**.

**Skills** include training in customer service, product knowledge, sales and sales management.

**Infrastructure** is the processes and systems that are permanently woven into the fabric of your company. These include: goals, service standards, sales and service measurement, tracking, accountability and items mentioned in this article.

**Organizational Development** helps you get the buy-in and commitment of your staff and includes: communication, teams, recognition programs, orientation and climate surveys. Therefore, as you can see, we feel the total organizational approach yields the best results.

### SHARE THE VISION

To become a reality, the development of a sales and service culture must be an integral part of your vision. That vision must then be clearly articulated and inspiring enough for employees to want to be a part of it.

Following are some practical ideas to demonstrate your commitment as a CEO or business owner:

Hold an off-site retreat with your management team to unite them in a common vision and obtain their commitment.

Make sure your strategic plan identifies "*accelerating your sales and service culture*" as a priority. Then develop a tactical plan for achieving this goal.

Create a permanent "**Service and Sales Council**" with representation from each area of your company. Council members coordinate implementation of the action plan, serve as team leaders for each component of the plan, identify and address obstacles to implementation and generally act as "champions of the cause". In working with our clients, the council is key to implementation.

**Utilize Service Improvement Teams™ (SITs™) to implement items in your action plan. Staff participation is important to get buy-in.**

### MEASURE SALES AND SERVICE

Why is it that most companies measure profitability, many measure sales performance and a smaller percentage take the time to measure their service levels? If we are serious about taking a total approach to sales and service, we must also embrace service measurement.

#### Measure Internal Service Among Your Staff

Before you can focus externally on your customers, you must focus on the quality of internal service. How well your support departments serve your front-line staff substantially impacts the quality of service received by your

customers. To improve internal service, form a SIT and ask your managers and staff to interview their internal customers and determine their service expectations. How can marketing or accounting better serve all departments? From the feedback received, have your employees develop internal service standards. Following is a sample standard from one of our clients:

### **Marketing**

A copy of any new promotional material or campaign will be given to the front line sales staff to review two weeks before announcing to our clients and prospects.

Once the standards are developed, you can measure your internal service quarterly by distributing an Internal Service Department Satisfaction Survey. When we first developed such a system for our clients, the principal intention was to improve internal service. One exciting by-product was an increase in communication between support and front-line areas.

### **Measure External Service To Your Customers**

Ask employees from each department and office to develop standards of service to your external customers. Use results from a customer survey that centers around two questions:

- 1) **"What are your expectations of our company?"**, &
- 2) **"How well are we meeting those expectations?"**

Once you have your standards in place, measure your service to see how you are doing. For example, hire a firm to conduct regular mystery shopping's or consider designating quarterly "customer feedback weeks".

Each quarter ask your staff to hand out **"Tell Us How We Are Doing"** cards.

Be sure to use a numerical system ranking each question on a 1-5 scale so you can develop a customer satisfaction index for each office and your company.

### **BOOST SALES AND SERVICE RESULTS WITH TEAM AND PERSONAL GOALS.**

Both personal and team "production goals" can open the door to a successful sales culture.

*How can you set goals on a personal or team basis?*

One of the best methods is to set goals with a "tiered range." These goals are tied into performance evaluations. For example: For sales reps, a monthly range works best for billings generated, numbers of calls or service provided:

|                         |               |                      |       |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------|
| Monthly Billings        | Monthly Sales | Service              | Calls |
| \$50,000 = Superior     | 50            | 4.5-5 = Excellent    |       |
| \$40,000 = Excellent    | 40            | 4.0-4.5 = Good       |       |
| \$35,000 = Good         | 30            | 3.5-4 = Satisfactory |       |
| \$25,000 = Fair         | 20            | 3.0-3.5 = Average    |       |
| \$15,000 = Poor         | 10            | 3.0-less = Poor      |       |
| Hold People Accountable |               |                      |       |

Now that you have assigned goals -- don't expect miracles. If the goals are not included in the performance appraisals and impact raises -- your sales and service process is at risk of floundering. The message you want to send is that sales and service is a key part of your job. Lack of accountability is one of the reasons why many firm's sales and service cultures fail.

### **DEVELOP THE SALES MANAGEMENT FUNCTION**

A service and sales manager who is self-motivated and people-oriented -- and who understands how to manage a sales team -- can do more for your company's bottom line than a whole flock of sales-trained employees. With a little sales management training, your managers can be the driving force in your sales effort.

Management should fully understand the functions of a true sales manager. An effective sales or service manager assists with the following functions.

### **Training**

A service manager provides training in four key areas: Product knowledge, sales or customer service and understanding the competition. Whatever the format, be sure to include: your service's features, benefits to the customer, cues and opportunities, open-probing questions and typical objections.

### **Coaching**

When evaluating staff your manager can observe staff members serving a customer by phone or in person and then offer coaching and feedback. On customer calls, your representative can offer pre-call planning and accompany your officer to critique calls. Afterwards, they debrief on strengths and weaknesses to improve.

### **Setting and tracking goals**

Your managers must set realistic, achievable goals for all staff with sales or service responsibility. Once goals are set, results are tracked and publicized.

### **Recognition and Reward**

We mentioned earlier that employees showing only slight improvement need encouragement. But don't forget that top performers mean the most to your firm's revenue and deserve special recognition. Besides annual bonuses, a wide variety of tangible incentives can be offered such as extra vacation days, a roving trophy or gift certificates.

Exclusive sales and service clubs are commonly used in many organizations. When individuals reach the targets set for their group, they automatically join the club and receive special perks and recognition. For example, any associate reaching a 4.75 service score is a member of the Silver Club and 5.0, the President's Club.

### **Service meetings**

One of the most important roles of a sales and service manager is running service meetings. When conducted properly, these meetings provide tremendous learning and motivation. Service meetings are held at least twice a month and weekly meetings are even better. A meeting might include the following:

1. A review of goals and progress to date
2. A review of individual and team performance
3. A "sell and tell" or "serve and tell" session, in which staff share successes
4. A role-playing practice session
5. A guest speaker, such as a customer
6. A product knowledge quiz
7. Selections from motivational books or video sales programs
8. Recognition and rewards

### **PITFALLS TO AVOID**

Following are the most common obstacles we find hinders a company from accelerating their sales and service culture.

1. Wavering commitment by the CEO or owner.
2. Sales and service culture improvement is not a strategic objective.
3. Training alone is expected to be the "cure all" and a quick fix.
4. Lack of goals and accountability and other infrastructure items.
5. Not enough focus on the "service" culture.
6. Lack of staff buy-in, involvement and commitment.
7. Weak recognition and reward programs.
8. No integrated action plan that takes a total organizational approach.

In summary, we're sure you'll agree there is no quick fix. How happy are you with your sales and service culture?