

# Craft a Customer-Centric Culture

The secret is simple: Reduce pain, increase pleasure.

By Tron Jordheim

**Y**our customers are the source of your organization's revenue and the key to fulfilling your mission and goals. That's why it's so important to create a culture that puts them at the center of everything you do.

Here are six touchstones to establishing a customer-centric culture:

## 1. Know Your Customers

First, be clear about who your customers are.

**Your primary customers** are the people your organization exists to serve.

**Your secondary customers** might include foundations, individual donors, and other funding sources.

**Your internal customers** include your staff, board members, volunteers, and others who work for your organization.

You'll want to focus your efforts on your primary customers, of course, but don't forget your other stakeholders. They include everyone your organization touches and everyone you'd like to influence.

It's important to know who all your customers are, how they feel about your organization, and how you can meet their wants and needs. Reaching out to them, asking them questions, and listening to the answers will provide a solid base for all your efforts.

“An experience-audit identifies your customer type.”

## 2. Audit Your Customers' Experience

An experience-audit helps to identify your customer type and to model your organization based on their needs. When you put yourself in your customers' shoes, you know how to serve them best – and build a successful organization in the process.

Put yourself in the mind of your customers by conducting a simple audit of the pains and pleasures involved in their interactions with you. Make two columns on a piece of paper and title one *Pain* and the other *Pleasure* and walk

“It's vital to know who your customers are.”

through the entire process your customer walks through while dealing with you. Track each perception of pain or pleasure. You may be surprised at the number of negatives.

Next, eliminate, mitigate, or counteract each of the negative points. Then heighten each experience of pleasure as much as you possibly can.

Of course, some pain may be inherent in the activity, as when you ask people to open their wallets and hand over their hard-earned money. But you can counterbalance that pain by making it clear that the gains will be worth it.

Instead of a button on your website saying “Donate” or “Give,” for example, you might say something like, “Change a child's life” or “Move a family out of poverty.” Focusing on the concrete payoffs that customers will receive makes them willing to accept the pain of ending up with less money.

## 3. Learn Your Regulars

Your regular customers become your mouthpiece in the market: recruiting new customers and support simply by word-of-mouth praise. When you form longstanding relationships with your regulars and recognize their individual likes and dislikes, you can tailor an experience that feels distinctly personal.

## 4. Hire People Who Mirror Your Culture

All your effort to make your organization a one-of-a-kind, individualized experience is negated if your staff members don't mirror these values and ideals. Your employees are the keepers of your culture: the ones who maintain your operating standards, customer-service practices, and

“Your customers include everyone you want to influence.”

“Your employees are the keepers of your culture.”

the atmosphere that distinguishes you from any other organization.

You must be meticulous with your hiring practices to ensure you're bringing the correct people on board. Reject candidates who don't parallel your customer-centric model. Instill in your new hires your passion for meeting – and exceeding – your customers' wants and needs.

## 5. Trust in Feedback

Considering any and all feedback is a major part of running a thriving organization. Your experience-audit will help you determine the validity of the input you receive. But even if you don't take action on every piece of feedback, you should always heed what your customers are saying. Be sure you let them know you're listening to them, respect their opinions, and are happy to hear from them. Follow up with them, and let them know the results of their advice.

Or, if you can't act on their input, explain why. Ignoring feedback is a sure way to lose support and good will.

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## 6. Honor Your Promises

If your services don't live up to the assurances you give, people won't return. There must be a direct parallel between the way you treat people and what you promise them. Otherwise, your base will dwindle.

Your customers, like everyone else, are subject to conditioning. They want to repeat actions that bring them pleasure and avoid those that cause pain. They go through this process during all contacts with you, and it's paramount that they finish every one of those experiences with a desire to return. A customer-centric culture defines you and is the key to your success. 

*Tron Jordheim (tronjordheim.com) is an entrepreneur, public speaker, and blogger. He consults on marketing, people management, and cultural competency (jordheimconsulting.com).*



## More on Pleasing Your Customers

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[Are You Delighting Your Customers?](#) (Vol.18, No. 5)

[Surveys Provide Crucial Feedback](#) (Vol. 22, No. 5)

[Quick and Dirty Research](#) (Vol. 19, No. 2)

[How to Keep Your Customers Happy: Market Research Is the Key](#) (Vol. 14, No. 4)

[Turn Your Board Members into Strong Owners](#) (Vol. 28, No. 2)

[Total Quality Management: Adopting a Customer-Oriented Philosophy](#) (Vol. 11, No. 2)

[The Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Evolution](#) (Vol. 30, No. 6)

[Focus on Your Customers as Well as Your Clients](#) (Vol. 22, No. 2)

[Tell Me a Story: Using Case Research to Discover Unmet Needs](#) (Vol. 17, No. 5)

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