

Are You Delighting Your Customers?

Use this self-assessment to see if you're focusing on the right things.

BY JOHN PAUL

We've all seen it: individuals, teams, or organizations who seem to view their customers (or, if you prefer, key audiences, stakeholders, target markets) as a necessary evil or even an impediment to accomplishing the mission. We've all known someone like the librarian who complained she'd have no trouble achieving her performance goals—if it weren't for the people who came in to borrow the books! Be careful you don't make the same mistake (see Figure 1).

Your organization's health depends on your ability to identify, attract, and retain customers *for a lifetime*. Developing lifetime customer relationships should be a highly visible, planned, integrated, continuous process that is institutionalized in organizational values, leadership modeling, business systems, behavioral expectations, and rewards for individuals and teams.

Are You Satisfying or Delighting Your Customers?

Customer satisfaction is doing what your customer expects—in a sense, being adequate. Most organizations provide adequate service. They do precisely what they say they are going to do—no less and, usually, no more. Unfortunately, people don't talk about adequate service.

Instead, they tell anyone who will listen about really bad service or really delightful service.

Customer delight goes beyond satisfaction. It ensures that each contact with your customers reinforces their belief that your organization is truly special, one of a kind, the best at what you do. It involves an element of the unexpected. Pleasant surprises are found in the small details of a customer interaction.

For-profit corporations learned this lesson long ago:

- A hotel opens the *TV Guide* to the correct day and time for each arriving guest.
- A car dealership delivers its new automobiles with the radio programmed to match the settings of those in the trade-in car, including preferred stations and sequencing of buttons.
- An airport shuttle service provides complimentary coffee, cell phone, and newspaper for its passengers.

Nonprofits can do the same:

- Within 90 days of holding a fundraising event, send a handwritten note to participants. Describe how their financial support has made a difference to the organization's programs.
- Call to be sure that requested educational materials were understandable, appropriate to the expressed need, and sufficient to meet previously unexpressed needs.
- Fax news releases to key stakeholders before the information appears in the media.

Figure 1. What's the Right Focus?

In the press of day-to-day business, it's easy to lose sight of what's really important because too much effort is focused on:

The Wrong Things	<i>Rather than</i>	The Right Things
Internal operations		External strategies
Short-term resource gains		Long-term relationship investments
A single bloc of undifferentiated customers		Numerous customer categories with distinctive member characteristics
Untested, internally-generated assumptions about customer needs and desires		Routinely solicited and articulated customer needs and desires
Managing and controlling human resources		Leading and trusting human resources
Training for today's tasks		Continuously anticipating and building tomorrow's core competencies

That's customer delight. It means knowing who your customers are, what they value, and how you can offer it before they even think to ask. It results in positive storytelling, the benefits of which we'll explore in a future article.

Customer delight is not a single event. It is a process...a journey...a way of life. Focusing daily attention on customer delight will ensure that you stand out in

the crowd and become the organization of choice for your key audiences.

Use the self-assessment questionnaire below to identify areas of strength and weakness in your work group or organization. The discussion questions can help you develop strategies for delighting your external customers and internal partners every day. ■

Achieving Customer Delight: Where Are We Now?		
Instructions: Rate each item on a 1 to 5 scale (5 = no improvement is needed)		
Item	Rating	Discussion Questions
This organization is focused externally.		How much of our time and energy is spent on external strategies rather than internal operations?
Staff are fully empowered to delight customers.		Do we reward process or results? Can staff solve problems without first asking permission?
We are constantly looking for better ways to delight our customers.		Do we proactively raise performance standards at regular intervals? Or do we tend to rest on our laurels?
We listen to what our customers are telling us and act accordingly.		Do we really listen to and value customer input? Or do we think we know what's best?
We know who our customers are.		How current is our information? Accurate? Complete? Segmented?
We know what our customers want.		How and how often do we ask our customers what's important to them?
We have an ongoing process to monitor how delighted our customers are.		Do we routinely solicit customer feedback? What do we do with the information?
Our staff are trusted to do the right thing.		How do we treat thoughtful risk-taking? Mistakes?
All of our policies make sense.		Do our operating policies help or hinder customer delight?
We are actively engaged in building long-term relationships with our customers.		Do we view a customer interaction as process rather than a single event? Do we have a fiscal-year mentality?
Our plans are current and regularly updated.		Are our plans customer centered? Useful to decision-making?
Training is important to this organization.		Is training viewed as an expense? Or an investment?
Training is relevant to what we do.		Do our individual training plans build long-term organizational capacities?
We realize that the smallest things can make the biggest impact on how delighted our customers will be.		Do we tell customer delight stories that illustrate this concept?
We treat every customer the way they want to be treated.		Do we individualize our customer interactions?
Total (out of a possible 75)		

Position Your Nonprofit to Stand Out

This is the first in a series of articles to help you transform your nonprofit into one that fosters customer delight at every level. Based on *Achieving Customer Delight*, each article will include a sample worksheet to trigger insights.

John Paul is founding partner of Association Works (P.O. Box 741325, Dallas, Texas 75374, 800-986-8472, www.association-works.com) and co-author of Achieving Customer Delight, from which this article is adapted. The book is available from Association Works for \$20, including postage.

Nonprofit World • Volume 18, Number 5 September/October 2000 Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations • 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI 53719 • (608) 274-9777
www.danenet.org/snpo