

Revving up the Customer Service Engine

The customer service engine is fueled by two groups of employees: Front-line employees who are in direct contact with your customers, and the behind-the-scenes employees who provide support and service to the front-line. If your customer service focus is concentrated on the front line, you are missing the added energy potential of the rest of your employees.

Consider how front-line employees interact with their customers. They must work effectively in a world of changing expectations that require continuous attention. They must adjust policy, process, procedure and behavior with the objective of superior customer service. These employees experience real-time service feedback because they are constantly checking the pulse of their customers.

Compare this to what happens with most of those employees behind the scenes. How do they connect with *their* customers? Unfortunately, the support staffs in many companies do not have a clear customer connection. They are not often in touch with the external customers and often view those who are, as simply co-workers - just other employees.

The challenge is to find a way to spread the high-energy performance and result-focused mindsets of those in direct customer contact to every employee. This must be done in a *tangible* way if it is to be meaningful. It must *naturally energize* employees to focus on and react to their internal customer needs and relationships.

The solution is to create clear service expectations and performance measures at each internal service point. These drivers will cause support units to focus on their internal customers with the same intensity as frontline employees focus on the external customer. The tool that makes this work is to create Service Agreements between departments. These Service Agreements elevate and manage the internal customer relationship to the same priority level devoted to external customers.

A Service Agreement establishes service deliverables and performance standards between those serving external customers and the internal 'support' staff servicing them. It not only describes the needed services and performance requirements of the internal customer, it identifies the conditions that must exist for a support unit to be able to meet its internal customer's expectations. The process, dialogue and the Agreement itself create the value chain that links everyone to support a common corporate goal. The Agreement becomes the measurement tool for real time internal customer feedback and creates a self-correcting service loop that is adjusted as external and internal customer needs shift.

These Service Agreements create a *partnership* relationship between these departments, where each clearly understands their roles and responsibilities. This new partnership focuses on the results that must be attained to create the excellent customer service your company needs.

If you would like to hear more about how to use Service Agreements to rev up your company's service engine and some of the other tools we have for driving results, give me a call. Also, please visit our website (McDonaldConsultingGroup.com) for other topics of interest.