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Building a Customer-Centric Culture

by Lynn Hunsaker

What Does it Mean to be Customer-centric?

To have the customer's best interests as the focus of your attention — not to be pre-occupied in your own interests at the customer's expense.

To do this, you need to:

- (1) Really know the customer in order to anticipate their best interests.
- (2) Differentiate between primary and secondary motives.

Customer-Centric Primary Motives:

Making it easier and nicer for the customer to get and use solutions.

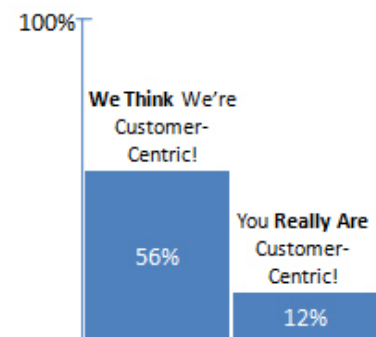
Self-Centric Secondary Motives:

Building revenue and profit through new product development, word-of-mouth, etc.

There's a myth that talking often to your customers (sales, service, surveys, etc.) means you're customer-focused. However, customer-focus goes beyond lip-service to the primary motives that drive your behaviors.

Gap in Desired Versus Actual Customer-Centricity

Half of companies say they're extremely customer-centric, but when customers of those companies were asked, only a tenth of them said those companies were extremely customer-centric.¹ Why is there such a huge gap? When you think about who makes business processes and policies within a company, it's usually the workforce that doesn't interact directly with customers. Three-fourths of companies say that customer experience is not well defined and communicated within their company.² Half of companies say they have fair or little knowledge of customer demographics, behaviors, psychographics, and transactional histories. Less than a tenth of companies say they have excellent knowledge of customers.² Three-fourths of companies say their employees aren't well versed in how to delight customers.²



Ways to Really Know the Customer

This represents an opportunity for those who work directly with customers to share valuable stories and

facts with the rest of the company, to help the entire workforce live up to their brand promises. We usually think of marketing, sales, and customer service as outward-facing, with only outbound deliverables.

Yet, if a company is customer-centric, then concentric circles around the customer mean that marketing, service and sales are the natural conduit for helping the rest of the company — engineering, finance, human resources, production, operations, technology, safety, accounting, etc. — understand their impact on customer experience and customer profitability. Three-fourths of marketing groups say they don't influence the customer service function⁵ ... so you can imagine how much influence marketing has on the rest of the company!

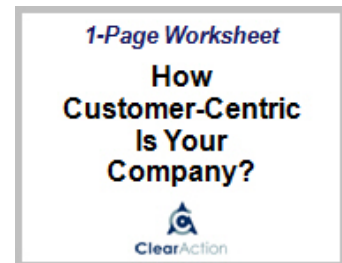
Customer-facing professionals can sensitize the whole company toward the customer's plight and priorities:

(1) Make sure customer stories reflect the customer experience spectrum.

(2) Use creative ways to share customer stories:

- Intranet
- Internal newsletters
- Bulletin boards & posters
- Lobbies, break rooms, war rooms, conference rooms, cafeteria
- Staff meetings

(3) Involve organization in learning and adapting their mindsets — this is the organization-wide journey guiding everyone on managing their personal impact on customer experience, called internal branding



Return on Investment

Your company makes huge efforts and investments in communicating your value proposition, which is the brand promise that shapes customer expectations. Customer satisfaction occurs when the customer's experience meets or exceeds their expectations. Trust — being true to the brand promise — is biggest the biggest factor in building a customer-centric culture that maximizes customer profitability.

Notes:

¹*CMO Council: Customer Affinity study.*

²*Peppers & Rogers: Customer Retention presentation.*

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.