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What it means to be Customer Driven

Bob Hazell examines some of the issues

Imagine a sole trader, a plumber, sitting at home and waiting for his first piece of business. The telephone rings. It's Mrs Jones, and she has a split pipe under her sink that is pouring water all over her kitchen floor. Would the plumber say "I'm having my lunch, so you'll have to wait?" No, he drops whatever he's doing and rushes around there straight away. What is the reason for this? He's desperate to get work and can't afford to lose the opportunity.

When he gets to the house and into the kitchen he finds that the cupboard under the sink is full of boxes of washing powder and other things. Does he say to the customer "You'll have to move that before I can start work" or does he move it himself? He moves it himself, because he wants to give the customer top quality service – he wants her to be pleased with every aspect of the work he does.

He does the job, checking for leaks afterward, and then helps Mrs Jones to clear up the mess and restack the cupboard. And the reason for this is he wants her to recommend him to all her friends and neighbours, because he needs the business.

A few years down the line, and our sole trader has done so well by caring for the customers that he now owns a thriving business – perhaps a limited company. Now he is a Manager of people, and there are the pressures of meetings to attend, computer systems to keep running etc. **THIS IS DANGER TIME.** The possibility is that he might get distracted from the people that actually paid for all this. He might lose his customer focus.

Ask most people in business what they are in business for and you'll usually get answers like:

- Profit
- Money
- Sales
- Job satisfaction
- Success

There is nothing wrong with making a profit. Neither is there anything wrong with the other four answers. However, when our focus isn't right we'll sometimes cut corners or overcharge to make a bit more profit. The long-term result of that could be that we lose the customer, and lose the profit from that customer for the long term. It also costs a great deal more to get a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. So we lose twice.

Very rarely does anyone say, "to give my customers outstanding care!" But if that were their true focus, what would automatically follow as a result? Surely the answer must be profit, money, sales, job satisfaction and success. So let's define what it means to be customer driven, customer focussed.

A customer driven organisation is one where EVERY decision is made based upon an overriding desire to give the customer a better service

Customer driven organisations don't simply have a mission statement SAYING that they will give their customers outstanding care. They are actually committed to DELIVERING it.

Think of a few decisions that have been made in your organisation recently. Did anyone actually ask how the change would impact on the service the customer would receive as a result? If not, the possibility exists that there is an INTERNAL FOCUS rather than a CUSTOMER FOCUS.