



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### You Need Good Processes to be Customer Focused

So, your organization wants to be more customer-focused!

For the most part, everyone has a customer they are trying to satisfy. If you have a job working with outside (real) customers, this should always be a priority. However, even people who don't work directly with outside customers usually have internal customers. Internal customers are the people that receive the output of the work you do, whether that is a product (like a computer application) or a service (like answering questions about a computer application).

You need to recognize that there is more to being a customer focused organization than just adding it to your mission statement and sending everyone to training. There are too many organizations where "customer service" is proclaimed in a big banner draped around the company. However, in reality, the customer focus is only an inch deep, and it does not take much before the customer's interest is put behind their own.

How do you become more customer focused? The first thing you may consider is to send your people to training classes. There is nothing wrong with that. However, it is just one piece of a large puzzle. What you really need to do is look at your work processes to see if they support a customer-centric organization. Evaluate all the processes that are in place, both formal and informal, and see whether or not they take the customer's interest into account. If they do, great. If they don't, you should align them whenever possible to a customer alignment. Just as importantly, if you don't have formal processes in place to satisfy your customers, you should define new ones.

Here are some places to look for customer focused processes.

- **Are you meeting customer requirements?** The fact that you have customers means that you are producing a product or a service for them. Do you really understand what the customer needs, wants and expects? When is the last time you asked them? Are you delivering products and services based on how it was done five years ago? Put into place recurring processes to validate your customer's needs and requirements on an ongoing basis - perhaps a couple times per year.
- **Are you delivering in a manner that is convenient to the customer or to yourself?** For instance, during the financial closeout process, your customers might have to work very late hours. Does the IT support group also work late hours? If the IT support group is on-call, but not on-site, you may be delivering service in a way that is convenient to you, not to your customers.
- **What guiding principles do you use to resolve problems?** If your products and services were perfect, you would expect high levels of customer satisfaction. However, one of the true tests of a customer focused organization is how you resolve problems. You need to resolve conflict situations in a way that the customer feels is fair. They may not get everything they want, but they should think the resolution was



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fair. If you always resolve conflicts in a way that you think is fair, but the customer does not feel good about, then you are not going to be viewed as customer friendly.

- **How well do you communicate with your customer?** If you have processes in place to communicate proactively and often, you are much more customer-focused than if you make the customer follow-up with you to see what is going on.
- **How serious is your organization to meeting customer commitments?** Some groups regard commitments they make to their customers to be sacred. They have to be achieved. Other groups take the attitude that if things come up, or if problems get in the way, they just won't meet the expectation. They find it easier to explain why the commitment was not met (after the fact), rather than focus on meeting it. This is not customer focused behavior.
- **Are you measuring your performance against agreed upon criteria?** The only way to know for sure that you are customer focused is to capture a set of metrics that your customer recognizes. The simplest form is a customer satisfaction survey. For example, some companies send out a short email survey after the completion of every support call. Over time, this provides them a sense for how satisfied your customers are with their support level. The company can also track how the satisfaction level changes when process improvements are introduced. You should measure as many customer focused processes as possible and practical, and strive to achieve targets that the customer helps establish.
- **Are your performance and recognition systems customer focused?** In many organizations, good customer service is not rewarded and poor customer service has no consequences. It doesn't matter what type of processes are in place, if people are not ultimately held accountable for how they interact with your customers, you will not get the customer-centric results you seek.

### Summary

Some companies say that the customer is king, but it only goes as far as their bulletin board. To really become a customer centric organization, you must have processes in place that focus on the customer, you must have customer-centric principals and you must have customer focused metrics to show how you are doing. All of your work and people processes must be evaluated to ensure that they reinforce, and don't contradict, your strategy. Being a customer driven organization is hard work. It's easier to just think of yourself. That's why not many companies are truly customer focused. But with the right level of commitment, training and leadership, you can instill that sense of dedication in your organization.