



February 2008

FROM JIM SIRBASKU'S DESK

Crisp and Vivid High Def Customer Service

That's a great picture on your new HD television, isn't it? The images are sharp and crisp and the colors so vivid. It's grand to kick back and watch a sporting event when you feel as if you are in the middle of the game or on the golf course. But wait. Why is the screen breaking up and going dark? Somebody DO something – before we see only a test pattern and a "technical difficulties" message!

Most of us give no thought to the parts responsible for that beautiful TV image until something goes wrong. Then disbelief and disappointment set in and sometimes we get an education we never dreamed we would need, with a vocabulary revolving around such things as resolution and pixels, those tiny dots that make up an image.

Customer service in our companies can fail in just the same way: Business seems to be humming along. You've told workers that customer service is your number one goal, and you hung the plaque on the wall in your office. Complaints are non-existent, and the financial reports are good. No news is good news, right?

Companies gladly accept traditional marks that they are doing well – such measures as few complaints and customer retention. But sustaining the big picture requires more than happy numbers. There's competition out there for whatever you do, and it's trolling for your customers. If you want to keep customers happy and your company healthy, you must nurture and maintain the individual attitudes that form employee behaviors, starting with top management.

Think of your customer service as a picture made up of thousands of tiny dots, or pixels. These combine and align to form a complete, brilliant image that pleases the eye. But if part of them malfunction, the picture might blur or break up in areas. It might even disappear completely, collapsing into a muddy smudge.

The first step in creating crisp, vivid customer service is developing a framework that describes the behavior surrounding customer service excellence. This includes getting down to the nitty-gritty of actions we expect from employees, such as urging customers to ask numerous questions, training workers how to develop rapport with their clients, or instructing employees to take the time to understand what a customer needs.

This framework must show how a company's desired behaviors align to its business goals, thus illustrating the bigger picture of what you are trying to achieve, and showing how these practices compare to those of other companies. Do your practices depart from industry standards? This could be problematic – or it could be just fine if your service behavior encourages excellence and supports corporate goals. Either way, it's good to see how you are doing in the broad scheme of things and note "why we do it this way" if you differ from national norms.

The next step in your customer service plan is an internal behavior audit. You need to measure attitudes toward the specific behaviors in your framework so you will know if workers are with you or not. Do they believe in the importance of following up with customers to see if they are satisfied with the service they received? Do they think good customer service includes telling a customer why he or she is wrong?

Once you have the numbers in front of you, it's time to mend the gaps in places where behaviors have broken down. Think of it as fine-tuning of individual employees or perhaps a whole department, if you discover a large percentage of staff with behaviors/attitudes outside the zone of acceptable customer service.

If you think of your framework in broad terms, it will help you hire the right people by exploring the attitudes of job candidates to ensure their beliefs about customer service mirror the company's.

Finally, remember that almost nothing thrives on neglect. The companies that perform the best measure often. They regularly "fine-tune" their image through training in areas where the picture is blurry. Through regular maintenance, they can kick back and watch the show without fear of technical difficulties or a distorted picture.

Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International

Spelling Out Good Customer Service

Telling employees what you expect removes all doubt
Airing customer service complaints allows employee to find solutions
Losing customers is not acceptable
Knowing what's best should not be a mystery

Aiming high works well if you have a target
Burying a problem rarely makes it go away
Owning the business makes everyone successful
Understanding creates a common language
Training employees is an ongoing event

Ingraining good service makes it part of the culture
Talk is not cheap when accompanied by action

CASE STUDY

Gaining Confidence with ProfileXT™ Job Match

In the highly competitive advertising sales arena, a productive sales staff is crucial to growth. Although success in sales is measurable, productivity is difficult to spot during the hiring process. How do you gauge the energy and effectiveness of people you do not know?

An advertising sales organization discovered that ProfileXT's™ Job Match Pattern provides clear answers and infuses hiring leaders with more confidence.

Participants

The company chose 26 advertising sales representatives to participate. Managers administered the ProfileXT™ to each employee, and also recorded the number of each worker's new customers, the ads each one sold, and each one's overall dollar volume.

Job Match Pattern

Four salespeople ranked highest in each of the three areas (new customers/ads sold/dollar volume). Fifteen employees ranked in the middle, and seven ranked lowest.

From this scale, the company developed a Job Match percentage and matched all 26 employees against it. An 86 percent or better match most strongly identified top performers. Leaders chose this percentage as the company's breakpoint for hiring.

Results

Of the 26 employees in the study, eight met or exceeded the benchmark. All four of the top performers ranked in this group. Only one of the seven low performers displayed the same match. Thus the pattern differentiated between the top and bottom performances made by the company's own evaluations, with these results:

- Top performers correctly identified by the pattern: 4 of 4 (100 percent)
- Bottom performers incorrectly identified by the pattern: 1 of 7 (14 percent)

This pattern now serves as the company's benchmark for matching employees.

Summary

Using the ProfileXT's™ Job Match, the organization has developed the ability to screen sales representative candidates with success. Leaders believe their hiring practices show more consistency with ProfileXT™. Their knowledge that the PXT is based on employee attributes gives them more confidence in hiring decisions. This process demonstrates how employee selection practices can improve using Job Match Patterns.

PRODUCT FOCUS

New CSP Report Shines Light on What Customer Service Means

For years, Customer Service Profile™ has waged war against poor treatment of the people your company needs to survive. Managers use CSP's placement, coaching and individual reports to see which job candidates' attitudes best match the organization's expectations for excellent customer service. For employees already on the job, CSP reveals which areas and/or individuals would benefit from more training.

Now a new CSP report gives organizations one more strategy to use in battling poor customer service. Called the **alignment report**, this revealing survey gives managers a dual-screen view of both marketplace attitudes and those of their own employees in one convenient document.

The alignment report works in two specific ways. First it shows Company ABC how well its customer service standards match those typical of other companies. Second, it reveals to Company ABC how closely its own employees agree with ABC's customer service values.

After viewing the results, Company ABC may want to make some changes – or may choose to do nothing at all. As with other reports, this one's power lies in the information it provides.

Here is a picture of the report at work: It takes Company ABC's answers to 50 important statements and matches them with industry norms. A sample statement says: "All of a customer's concerns are important; never dissuade them from asking questions." In column format, Company ABC's yes-or-no response to that statement is compared with that typical of other companies. Differences are highlighted. A third column shows whether a selected group from Company ABC agrees with the company's perspective. This answer is given in percentages when employees disagree. No percentage means overall agreement.

If Company ABC's answer to the statement differs from that typical of the marketplace, it may or may not be a cause for concern. A company might want to change its response to the statement. Based on corporate goals, only that company can determine what constitutes its best customer service practices.

Large percentage differences between a company's agreement with a statement and that of its employees might be of more concern. If Company ABC believes that all of a customer's concerns are important and 50 percent of employees surveyed disagree, more exploration is necessary, and perhaps more training.

The alignment report is one more nail in the coffin of poor customer service and one more step to establishing a customer-oriented culture in your organization. Call us at (254) 751-1644.

STRATEGIES FOR WINNING

Of Course I Remember You!

Nothing is More Important to People than Their Names

"Hey Bud, let me introduce you to someone I've just met. That is...um...I'm sorry, what did you say your name was again?"

Embarrassing? No, that's too small a word!

Take heart! Unless you're one of a small number of people worldwide suffering from *prosopagnosia*, a neurological condition rendering a person incapable of recognizing faces in spite of having good eyesight, then the following steps will save you the embarrassment of ever forgetting anyone's name again.

A Personal Story from Bud Haney

Almost everyone struggles with remembering the names of people. I was helped when I learned that if you have empathy for people, you will have an easier time remembering their names. I think I learned this principle by observing Jim Sirbasku in action. Jim used to have a problem remembering names because his "E" was bigger than his "EM." Here's what I mean: When he met people, his focus was on himself, or his ego, which I call the "E." Jim was more focused on "telling" people than he was on "learning" from people. I decided the way to help Jim start remembering names was to remind him to "Use your EM (empathy), not your big E." It was my way of reminding him to pay attention to people's names and what they did, and put his ego aside.

The biggest payoff for learning to remember people's names is the embarrassment you avoid. This chapter is full of ideas to help you improve your memory when it comes to recalling the names of the people you meet.

1. Switch Off the Internal Dialogue

As you're reading this strategy, take a moment to examine what else is flying around in your mind. It's no different in social or business situations where you're meeting people for the first time. Instead of focusing solely on the person you're meeting, your mind is filled with snatches of other concerns flying through it: "...mmm, the food looks good...when she's finished speaking, I'm going to say..." With all of that internal dialogue, it should come as no surprise that you find yourself embarrassed to have "forgotten" someone's name. In reality, you just didn't bother to try to remember it in the first place. Become conscious of your internal dialogue and make a conscious effort to focus your attention exclusively on the external dialogue. Every time you find yourself drifting inward, step out. Stay external – prepare to remember.

2. Listen

Hey, come back! Just because I'm repeating Rule #1 of good communication, a rule you've had hurled at you time after time, don't ignore this key element. Good listeners rarely forget names. Learn to listen

actively by applying the next few steps which focus your active listening engine. Then when a person's name is introduced into the conversation, be sure to hear it!

3. Bury the New Name in Your Memory

First, repeat it in a sentence. Plain and simple everyday courtesy phrases like, *"It's a pleasure to meet you, Marie"* will do it. This has two effects: it puts the name immediately into your short-term memory and it makes the new person feel good – most people love the sound of their own name. If it's an unusual name, ask her to spell it: *"Is that N-I-L-G-U-N?"* This implants it even deeper in your memory and builds further rapport. Finally, think about the name itself. Does it sound like anything else? Is there any way you can make a memorable association? Names like Wood, Holly, Marsh, Guinness, or Green are made for memorable association. If there's no obvious association, then consider what their names sound like: McCann (My Can), Harrison (Hairy Son), Kendall (Candle). The process of trying to make these connections helps to bury names further in your memory.

4. Make Eye Contact

When meeting someone, look at him. Make eye contact and smile. Imagine the name of your new acquaintance is written in big luminous letters across her forehead. Then observe: What makes her face interesting and different? Has she a parting in her hair or a gap in her teeth? Eyebrows that meet? A long nose? You don't have to stare them out to do this effectively. All of this can be picked up in a few quick glances, if you're prepared to make the effort.

5. Bring it All Together

Finish the job of remembering them forever. You've got the name, you've got some memorable association, and you've got some distinguishing physical features. Now, construct a mental picture for this person. Connect his or her unique physical features with the name's association to create a picture that will pop into your mind next time you meet. The sillier the picture, the better.

This is an absolutely infallible system. Apply it and you'll never forget someone again. With a little practice, this process becomes so automatic and instantaneous that you will find a mental picture pops into your head right away for every new person you meet, ensuring that every new face and name is filed away in your mental Rolodex. *Forever.*

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For Your Information - FYI - EffortlessHR

EffortlessHR is moving ahead! I have gone from no employees (just me) to five (5) full time employees! Talk about full speed ahead!

It really is an exciting time to see a dream start to unfold before you. Granted, the program is still in a "baby" stage - but it is growing and changing daily.

We have gone through "Alpha" testing and are now into "Beta" testing. We have laws and regulations added for all 50 states and are adding more daily. The Guide (FAQs) are also added daily. Forms are reviewed and updated or added to consistently.

We have a simple employee record keeping section, which will be more complex and complete over the next few months.

It is meant to be as simple and complete as possible and just as important - cost effective.

I hope you check it out - www.effortlesshr.com.

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February 2008

