



Improving Customer Satisfaction

A WHITE PAPER PROVIDED TO ASPE

Improving Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is essential to your success. Customers must receive professional quality, service and support. This combination will help ensure your recognition and success as the leader in your industry. Customer "problems" can be managed more efficiently when your employees have the proper tools.

Many times the problem is not in the hardware or software, but lies in the customer's lack of understanding of reasonable expectations. To begin with, what is a customer?

A customer is an individual or company who has paid for and expects to receive a quality product, free from defects and operational according to the specifications quoted by the salesperson. A customer may also be another employee who requires assistance on specific products. The customer has certain expectations, among them empathy, assistance, understanding, solutions, expertise, immediate response, handholding, comfort, reassurance, etc.

It is not an easy task to achieve these expectations, but there will be no customer satisfaction without a clear understanding of what can be achieved. Additionally, the company must maintain a high level of credibility. To achieve these results one must understand what credibility is. Credibility is the level of customer confidence in your ability to resolve their problems, real and perceived. Sometimes, this lack of credibility will detract from the performance of a person's duties. When a customer perceives that the only person who can resolve a problem is one specific individual, then it becomes a liability. Share knowledge and experience with others, or you will never move up the corporate ladder.

Help Desk or Software support is expected to know everything. Why else would you be called if the client did not expect you to resolve their problem? It is impossible to know everything, but support has to know where to go to get the answers they do not know.

By itself, knowing where to go is just one step in the process. You also have to know how to get the other people to cooperate with you to get the resolution. Everyone in the organization has his or her own primary responsibilities. They do not always appreciate being taken away from that responsibility to resolve a problem that they themselves may not have initially created. You have to impress upon everyone that the company is a team and teams will only succeed when they work together to get problems resolved.

There is an ongoing need to demonstrate professional attitude and performance. What does this mean? Professionalism means being able to remove oneself from the meaningless arguing and shouting in order to get things done. Not taking things in a

personal manner, but realizing that the customer is unhappy and experiencing difficulties with the product or service, and wants to get things working. Do not take their anger or frustration personally. You represent the potential cause of their problems even though many times it will be proven that they caused the problem themselves. Treat customers and other employees the same as you would like to be treated and you will get more respect and cooperation from them.

How can the Help Desk or Support Center develop, earn and maintain a good relationship with customers? Follow some simple common sense rules. Begin with rapport. Rapport is the ability to work with the customer and other people to make each person's job easier. Customers want to be treated as human beings and they do not like to be demeaned. Even when they seem to upset us, we have to understand what drives them and attempt to keep them level headed. When customers trust you, you can get away with a lot of things, like delays, wrong products, etc. It takes time to develop these two qualities, so do not expect it overnight. Never mislead or lie to the customer as this will always come back to bite you. Impress upon others in the company how important support is to the overall success of the company and you will get support.

Some companies have converted to offshore support. This will often add to the resolution of the problem by having less than stellar communications. The customer does not want to add to the problem by not understanding clearly what they need to do to get the problem resolved. You have to apply additional tools as well as communication. Tact, diplomacy and other interpersonal tools will help in the success of your responsibilities.

How well do you communicate? One has to understand that there are many communications skills and verbal is just one of them. Of course verbal is extremely important, but how much time do we spend with the others? Skills like Non-Verbal Communication, Listening Techniques, Questioning Techniques, Empathy, Understanding. Do you speak the client's language? By that we mean do you communicate at their level of understanding or do you use jargon that is completely foreign to the client? A failure to communicate at the level of understanding of the person you are speaking with is always going to lead to failure.

The customer may not always be right, but **THEY ARE ALWAYS THE CUSTOMER.** Customers always THINK they are right. It is up to us as Help Desk people to ensure that what the customer needs is what the customer gets. We must remove ourselves from who is right and, instead, concern ourselves with the solution to the customer's problem(s). When you do not blame someone for the cause, it is very easy to identify and implement a solution. Support has to separate the needs from the wants. Listening and knowing what is needed will go along way to be able to resolve the customer's problems.

The Help Desk Service/Support Department is a group of individuals whose mission is providing **superior** professional service/support to an individual or company that has a product produced or supported by the support center. The customer may or may not have paid a fee for this service. If the customers pay for this service, and you intend to stay in business by providing the customer with quality support and make a profit for the shareholders. If the support is at no charge, then you will often be perceived as a cost center or overhead and must justify your existence. Either way you are expected to provide professional services and support to the customer base, and other internal users.

Do you have a Company Service/Support Charter?

There is a need to identify to your customer and the rest of the company who you are and what you represent. Identify the purpose and mission of the department, and how you will achieve those commitments. It must be clearly defined so everyone understands what is expected of your group and what level of support you will provide. The mission will also concentrate everyone's efforts in the same direction. Know what is expected of you, the staff, and the customer. Set reasonable expectations that is both realistic and achievable. Know the limits of what, and particularly your specific department is capable of delivering. You can say NO if you know how. Support is an integral part of the company and should be recognized as such.

The **IMPROVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION** workshop upgrades the quality of service and support your customers receive. Additionally, you can reward your employees by making their jobs easier. Teach employees new skills and techniques that will result in improved customer satisfaction and better working conditions. These newly acquired skills and techniques will enhance your commitment to quality throughout your organization, and to your customers. Skills and techniques such as:

- * **Communication Skills**
- * **Managing stress**
- * **Developing credibility**
- * **Listening techniques**
- * **Negotiation skills**
- * **Customer awareness**
- * **Customer empathy**
- * **Customer perception**
- * **Personalities**
- * **Eliciting help**
- * **Interpersonal skills**
- * **Professionalism**
- * **Telephone techniques**
- * **Tact and diplomacy**
- * **Company objectives**
- * **Problem Management**
- * **Teamwork**
- * **Follow-up**
- * **Managing hostility**
- * **Customer involvement**
- * **Customer satisfaction**