



Customer Feedback Leads To...

- ✓ Improved Service,
- ✓ Better Products, and
- ✓ Customer Satisfaction

Patricia Larkins Hicks, Ph.D.
President

The best way to ensure customer satisfaction is to connect with your customers. Obtaining their feedback in a planned and intentional approach will provide you with the information you need so that you are proactive in improving your services, products, and customer satisfaction. In other words, do not leave knowing what your customers think to chance or providence, and don't assume you know! Creating a customer feedback system is essential and should be an integral part of your organization's operational procedures.

According to William Martin (1989), there are 2 roadblocks that you must be aware of when planning your customer feedback system.

#1 Most often, Customers do not like to complain.

#2 Most often, Customers do not take the time and energy to provide positive feedback.

These roadblocks exist because customers do not believe their feedback will make a difference and that they don't have access to the person who can make a difference.

Picture a moment in time when you complained about a service or product. Did the person you complain to act disinterested, bored, or indifferent? Did the person you complain to get argumentative, challenge you, or become unfriendly? Was the person slow in responding or getting someone in management to respond? Did you get a polite response? Too often these are the kinds of responses customers receive; therefore, they are less willing to exert their energy and time to participate in customer feedback calls and surveys. So, how can you get your customers to tell you what they think? The answer is simple - *it's all in your actions, the way you behave.*

10 Tips to Assist You in Getting Customer Feedback.

- **Listen to understand.**
Make sure you have clarity about what you hear; don't assume.
- **Make it easy for customers to give you their feedback.**
If you want them to complete a written survey, provide them with the pen or pencil.
- **Integrate eliciting feedback into everything that you do.**
Ask those in attendance to give you feedback during the meeting.
- **Respond immediately.**
Find a way to handle a request or complaint quickly.
- **Fix problems and/or make changes.**
Do something with what you hear.
- **Let your customers know that you heard them.**
Use their words.
- **Let customers know what you are doing with their feedback.**
Communicate the action that you are taking or will take in response to their feedback.
- **Let customers know how you have responded to other customers' feedback.**
Communicate to all customers when you have made changes or fixed a problem that was the direct result of customer feedback.
- **Consider your customers' culture.**
Make sure the words you use, the methods you select, and the rewards you offer are culturally appropriate.
- **Spend time with your customers.**
Build a personal relationship - get to know your customer.



THE SITUATION

OMG is responsible for fulfilling orders and disseminating a product for one of our clients. The client's expected outcome is that purchasers of this particular product will use it to bring about a change within their organization. In order for this outcome to be achieved, OMG thought it essential that a customer feedback system be built as a part of its fulfillment and dissemination processes.

Planning

The OMG Team involved with this product met. This team included the Project Manager, Product Designer, Financial Manager, Product Coordinator, and Marketing Manager. *Make sure all the right persons are involved.*

The Team reviewed the outcome, discussed strategies for engaging the purchaser in providing feedback, and selected a strategy. *Consider method, person(s) responsible, timing, monitoring, tracking, and communicating.*

Team members took responsibility based upon what was needed and their knowledge/skills. *Make sure the right person is doing the right task.*

Designing

(Make sure this process gives consideration to the cultures of the targeted customers.)

Surveys were designed for the identified time periods when customer feedback would be elicited.

The outcomes were defined for each time period and then the survey questions were developed. For example, within 10

days, we wanted to know: Did the customer receive the product? Was it in good condition? Were they satisfied with what they received, how they received it, and the timeline? Did we have the correct information in the database about the purchaser? Who was going to be the person responsible for the product? Additionally, a software program was selected for the purpose of entering the customer feedback so that it could be converted easily into meaningful information and reports.

Protocols were developed that identified the process team members would engage in to elicit feedback. For example, 10 days after the product has been sent, the Product Coordinator will call the purchaser.

Tracking Mechanism was designed. A tracking component was added as a feature to our product administration software. For example, this component automatically alerts the Product Coordinator when a customer needs to be contacted.

Testing and Training

Prior to implementation, the OMG Team tested its survey, protocols, and tracking tools to make sure they worked as designed.

Additionally, after the Product Coordinator had been trained on the process for conducting phone calls to the customers, the Product Coordinator actually called the Project Manager so that she could be evaluated.

Implementing and Evaluation

After testing and training, the Team decided the feedback system was ready for implementation. Each member then was responsible for executing according to the established protocols. Meetings were held to review and analyze feedback, and make recommendations for problem resolution or changes that would enhance the product. Additionally, team performance was also discussed and evaluated.

Communicating to Customers

OMG communicates regularly to its client regarding the results of the customer feedback system. Monthly meetings are held with the purchasers in which changes are reported. Changes are also posted on the client's website.

For additional information refer to William B. Martin, Ph.D., (1989) *Managing Quality Customer Service*.



Creating better products and providing services that meet your customers' needs require that you have a Customer Feedback System.