Understanding customer needs

We need to ensure that we always deliver on our promise to the customer, as well as to our employees. It's always better to under-promise with time scales and services, and over-deliver by giving an earlier response or added value service.

The more you know about your customers, the more you are likely to understand customer needs and expectations and find the right ways to achieve outstanding customer service.

Here are some practical tips for understanding customer needs:

- **Ask yourself and your team members these simple questions:**
  - Who are our main customers?
  - What market are they from?
  - What are their needs?
  - How does our product or service meet their needs?
  - What would further help our customers?

- **Then step into one of your key customer shoes’ and ask yourself:**
  - 'In my world, what are my challenges and needs?'
  - What do I need whilst using this company’s product or service?
  - What would make my life easier or better? Then reflect on these answers to identify how you can improve your customer service to meet these needs.

- **Utilise external surveys to gauge customer satisfaction:**
  Consider using an external customer survey to measure your current customer service satisfaction levels prior and following the implementation of your customer service improvement plan. Products like "Survey Monkey" can be utilised quickly, cheap and easily. Alternatively, you could consider employing an external agency. Either way, clearly map out the aspects of customer service you want to measure, usually covering the whole service journey.

- **Analyse your customer feedback:**
  Identify trends and gaps in your service or product offering from all of your customer feedback. Share the results with your team and identify ways to best address the gaps, whilst building on the good service elements valued by your customers.

- **Get personal feedback from your customers:**
  Find out how they found your service experience at each stage of the buying process:
At reservation time (of service or product):

- How well did we meet your needs when selecting the service or product you chose?
- What could we have done more or less of, or differently to help you?

After purchase:

- On a scale of 1 to 10 how well did our service or product meet your expectations?
- What could we do in future to achieve 10?
- On a hotel reception desk, a simple question like ‘How was your stay?’ may be enough to gauge your customer’s true thoughts and feelings about your service, as you can see how congruent their verbal language is with their body language.

The after sales service:

- After the first week of purchase ask: ‘What in hindsight, could we have done better to have supported you?’
- After the first week, month or year ask your customer: ‘How have you found our product or service?’
- Ask the customer to give you some selected feedback on your core service standards or key measures either on-line, over the telephone, or email, ensuring you make the process simple, quick and easy to complete.

- Facilitate customer focus groups and special events:

  Bring regular customers together to learn what they like about your product or service, as well as what they would like to see improved or changed in some way. Make your customers feel special by offering events or unique services to regular customers and using the event to get to know them better.

  Also use focus groups to identify customer’s changing needs and use this data to influence new or improved deliverables. Brush up on your facilitation skills with our tips for facilitating groups or bring an external facilitator to help you. Please note that we also offer facilitation skills training for companies in the UK.

Next: Engaging with your customers