

It's More Than Satisfaction

It is easy to understand that a person can experience contentment when a particular want or a need is met. Yet when we look beyond simple contentment and satisfaction, we can see that there is a huge range to what satisfaction really means. For instance, there is an enormous difference between having your hunger satisfied by eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and having it satisfied by eating a delightful seven-course meal from a top chef at a highly-rated restaurant. We can be satisfied in both situations, but clearly in the example of dining on the scrumptious meal, we have gone well beyond simple satisfaction into a realm of enjoyment and gratification. Now, most of us aren't able to feast in such a way on a regular basis, yet we can all appreciate the difference between being satisfied because our hunger needs were merely met, and in being delightfully satiated because the flavours, aromas, ambience and overall experience of a meal was exceptional in quality.

Quality in Practice

Striving for more than mere “customer satisfaction” is a key strategy that highly performing organisations focus on because they see the value of exceeding a person's expectations. When it comes to satisfaction in services, numerous organisations have found that they may receive a high percentage of “yes” responses from service users on the question: “Are you satisfied with services?” These same organisations may not be achieving as high of ratings on other quality indicators and outcomes.

Studies have shown that most people will say “yes” to the “satisfaction with services” question; interestingly enough, this has even been found to be true in surveys completed within the prison system.

Consequently, many organisations have come to the realisation that achieving high marks on “satisfaction with services” is not enough. In the business world, companies know that in order to retain and keep customers that “customer delight” is a far better predictor of loyalty than “customer satisfaction.” It is the quality of the experience that is the critical factor, not so much whether or not a person was satisfied.

In a paper on “Listening to the Customer, the Concept of a Service Quality Information System” Leonard L. Berry and A. Parasuraman argue that organisations ... “intent on improving services ought to consider establishing on-going listening systems across the organisation using multiple methods across different groups. Deeper insight and informed decision making comes from taking a continuous series of snapshots through various angles and from different lenses, which form the essence of systematic listening”. It is essential that organisations include multiple stakeholder groups in this ongoing listening process, “the quality of listening has an impact on the quality of service....without the voices of these groups guiding investment in service improvement, all that can be hoped for are marginal gains”.

continued

It's More Than Satisfaction (continued)

Moving beyond satisfaction at the individual level:

- Understand the need of really getting at what people are experiencing from their services and steer clear of simply asking: “Are you satisfied with services?” Instead, continually find out what people want by listening to their preferences, asking pointed questions, and taking action on what is learned from these ongoing conversations.
- Help people to dream and to feel comfortable asking for what they really want from life.
- Keep promises. Knowing that you can be relied upon is a major ingredient of any great relationship. The follow-through on commitments is what reveals that “we do what we say we’ll do”; this demonstration of reliability aids tremendously in circumstances where a person isn’t initially candid or forthcoming due to trust issues.
- Satisfaction and quality are both personal and at times might be difficult to measure...it could be fleeting/ever changing. When a staff member has taken the time to develop a strong and supportive relationship with an individual, they are better off in knowing how to assist that person to excel in reaching their priority outcomes.
- Obstacles to determining satisfaction might include not having enough information about what else is available. For example, “I was satisfied with Hershey’s until I tried Godiva chocolate” or “I was satisfied with regular chicken noodle soup with plain flat noodles until I tried the chicken noodle soup with little tiny stars...mmmm good”. Knowing about different possibilities and alternatives helps in making choices that fit one’s unique preferences.

- As control continues to shift towards greater levels of self-direction, the competition for better and more individually tailored services can become a deciding factor to individuals choosing who will be providing their services. High quality services that exceed expectations and are personalised will be the services that are most favoured.

Moving beyond satisfaction at the organizational level:

- Create a can-do culture across the organisation; one that strives for, and recognises excellence.
- Use listening system strategies to discover how to make improvements by asking stakeholder groups regularly and informally. Make use of focus groups, advisory panels, service reviews, and the insights from employee reporting to gather ongoing and real-time information to act upon to make changes.
- Be involved and accessible — create an environment that promotes openness and a willingness to hear about both successes and failures. Accept feedback openly and deal with complaints — act quickly to resolve any issues dealing with criticism.
- Finally, when staff members are empowered and equipped with the skills to interact and apply their knowledge, they have a greater capacity to support quality interactions and experiences for service users which results in better quality organisation-wide.