

## The Client Coworker

The idea of being customer service and customer satisfaction oriented is not a new paradigm in the business world. Even in businesses that are not directly working with the public, the idea of structuring the company to satisfy the needs of the people that make it possible for the company to stay in business - it's customers - is a core value for a large percentage of businesses, especially those that are successful.

But there are segments of every business that have no contact with customers so it is difficult for them to develop a customer service mentality. And if the business itself is not structured to deal with the public or have conventional "customers", that approach to the business world can be lacking in the workplace. That is why a big business trend in all type of business settings is to change the work ethic internally so that workers view those who use their work as customers.

When properly implemented, each employee actually begins to view each other, their bosses and especially people who rely on their work in other departments as customers or clients. In theory, this approach has as its objective to build that customer service mentality even in workers for whom the outcome of their work is only for internal departments or other workers in the company.

It's an innovative approach to changing the corporate culture of any business. By altering the mindset especially of an office worker to that of someone who comes to work with that entrepreneurial or retail oriented outlook, the employee is freed to become more creative, more aggressive about completing quality work for their "customers" and get a greater feeling of satisfaction from satisfying their internal customers.

It's a noble effort to try to alter the traditional culture of an office based business setting. The traditional culture of a "cubicle farm" type of office setting often resembles the comic strip Dilbert. That strip can be painful to read if you are a manager trying to keep a creative and proactive team moving forward in a business setting. But Dilbert does point out some of the communication problems that are common in an office setting. The distrust of management, the tendency by employees to drift toward unproductive attitudes and behavior and the low morale of many office settings is lampooned by the strip.

The client coworker business concept attempts to empower the employee to strive to perform to his or her best even when only performing duties for the department or another department internal to the company. The client customer model calls for viewing that other department as a customer and providing customer service to that internal relationship with the same "eager to please" attitude that is necessary when serving external customers whose revenue drives the company.

There are some real values to be had by introducing a customer service attitude

even to internal support functions within the company. When combined with other empowering techniques such as process improvement and open communications with all levels of management, it can unify an office and put some real life into your staff.

However, the negatives of the client customer model have to be avoided. This approach can create animosity between coworkers and hard feelings when one employee feels that he or she is not being treated like a customer by another. The client customer model can create distance between peer employees and reduce comradery which has a great deal of value in a team oriented corporate culture. But a wise manager can implement the client customer model to a business setting and harvest from it the productivity gains while skillfully avoiding the pitfalls.

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