



BY J.A. CUTTEN

EMPLOYEES AND CLIENTS

connecting the dots

Business plans can only be considered successful when the implementation of related activities creates better outcomes for your organization and your customers.

When employees buy in, their actions have a direct and measurable effect on the satisfaction of clients. It's very powerful when you can demonstrably connect the dots between proactive employee behavior and an increase in customer satisfaction.

Over the past three years, I have worked with a business services provider that, back in the 1980s, was truly a Blue Oceans innovator who had built a marketplace leadership position in Canada.

However, by 2006 there was little differentiation between this company and its competitors. The marketplace was in a state of uncertainty as traditional services weren't meeting the demands of a younger and more sophisticated client audience. Both employee and client turnover were at unacceptably high levels and morale within the company was slipping. A new CEO was brought in to revitalize the company and its service offerings.

Shortly after I started working with them, I interviewed all employees. The results were sobering and provided invaluable input into the development of a four-pronged business improvement effort:

- Set the company's vision, goals and related plans;
- Excel in all facets of communication;
- Launch a revitalized and meaningful commitment to employees; and
- Retain and grow the customer base.

A key component of the planning initiative geared to clients was the adoption of a four-principle program designed by the CEO, which was labeled RULE:

Relationships
Unsurpassed client service

Leadership Execution

Employees became fully engaged in implementing process improvements, with a concentration on meeting customer commitments; doing things right the first time; invoicing promptly and correctly; and communicating effectively with clients. There was also an effort to build multiple relationships with employees at client organizations.

A client survey was also done around this time and the results were lukewarm at best. There was a sense the company was drifting and there were problems with both on-time delivery and quality, and it was apparent the company's reputation in the marketplace was on a downward slope as well. The overall satisfaction index was only 68 per cent.

Fast-forward to the fall of 2009 when another set of employee and client surveys was undertaken. The results were shared with all employees in January of this year. The presentation included a comparison of current employee and client views with those in the earlier surveys.

The highest rated items in the latest employee survey included:

- An understanding of the vision, belief in the ability of the company to achieve it and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to see their role in achieving it;
- Pride in working with this company;
- Satisfaction with management's communications to employees; and

- The value of RULE.
This last is really interesting, because employees often see improvement programs as just another program. Almost 97 per cent of employees agreed with the statement "RULE is an effective tool for working with clients and colleagues."

Significant findings and comments per the latest client survey were:

- Delivery on time and on budget now a major asset;
- High quality and level of professionalism;
- "They get us" – we aren't just a client; and
- They are always working to solutions.

I found that every client interviewed would now recommend this company to others. There was an improvement in the overall satisfaction index from 68 to 80 per cent – a significant improvement over a relatively short period of time.

Demonstrating to employees, with due recognition, how their activities over the past couple of years have positively impacted client satisfaction levels created a very positive and empowering atmosphere. The employees had accepted a daunting challenge and worked diligently to succeed through tough economic times and were very pleased to hear about the impact of their accomplishments through the voice of the customer. Now they want to get to 90 per cent! ✕



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