



HOW TO BUILD A CUSTOMER FOCUSED BUSINESS

You can have the best products, the plushiest offices, the best location, but unless you are a 'customer focused' business, all of this counts for nothing, you will never really hit the heights you deserve.

So what can you do to build a business which focuses outwardly on the customer, and not inwardly on the business?

Build Passion and Commitment

The first building block is passion and commitment. This is the very foundation stone of a customer focused business. Without passion and commitment the structure you will build above will be weak and prone to collapse at the first sign of stress.

The passion and commitment has to come from you and your staff. All of you have to totally believe in the concept of the customer being the centre of everything you do. From the moment you step into work everyone has to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer.

As the key person in the business what can you do to build passion and commitment? Lead from the front and set an example. Keep the concept at the top of the agenda and demonstrate it in everything you do. Keep talking about it. Celebrate all the great examples of putting the customer totally in focus.

Build Processes Around Your Customer Not The Business

All great businesses have clearly laid down processes on how to get things done. Whether you have a formal Process Manual or a Quick Reference Guide, which sets out your processes, a clear procedure provides confidence and clarity for both your staff and the customer.

But don't just build your processes around making things easier for you, build them to make things easier for the customer. Look at every step in the process and ask yourself, "Can we do something to make it even easier for the customer to do business with us?" Are there steps which can be refined or even eliminated all together? Be inquisitive, bold and challenging!

Build a Relationship

Building a relationship with your customer is at the very heart of a customer focused model. Build a strong, firm relationship and you will have a customer for life. The basis of relationship building is A.B.C. – Always Be Communicating. Here are some ideas on building an enduring and profitable relationship through ABC:

- Make a point to periodically call your customers. Set up a diary system to provide you with a regular reminder or prompt. Call them even if you have nothing sell! A strange concept perhaps but you never know what will come out of the conversation
- Issue quarterly newsletters telling them about your latest products, what you have planned for the future, a customer profile, news about new employees. Find anything which would be of interest and at the same time binding both of you closer together
- Make it a point during any conversation to find out something about the business you didn't know before. File away any interesting fact and think how you can use it in the future. Imagine how powerful it would be when you ask how the idea they mentioned in your last conversation was going!
- Do memorable things. Send birthday or anniversary cards to your key contact, a simple thank you note for doing business with us, send articles or newspaper cuttings, which you think will be of interest to them

Build a Culture of 'Wanting To Know'

If you are to build a reputation for being customer focused you should be making an effort to find out on a regular basis what they want from you. This can be achieved by either an informal phone call or a more formal survey via mail or e-mail. Find out what they like about your business, what they don't like and what changes they would like to see.

Having gathered together all the information, suggestions and ideas, set out an action plan to follow up. Once you have acted upon the workable suggestions, get in touch with the customers again and tell them what you have done in response to their comments. This will demonstrate that you have taken their ideas seriously and really care about what they think. Powerful stuff!

Being customer focused can be very rewarding and help in building a great business. Which of these steps are you going to put into practice today? Remember this – let the customer be your focus and you will become their focus.