



Using Customer Feedback to Create a Better Organization

Description

I have spent three decades utilizing surveys. They help provide opportunities for recognition and/or opportunities to learn and improve. A few weeks ago, for example, I shared a [column](#) on why companies should periodically “take the temperature” of their employees with a quick survey. This helps to measure engagement and improve retention.

This week I’d like to talk about another kind of survey that’s just as important: customer experience. These surveys provide crucial feedback that you can use to figure out what’s working well and where you might improve. This allows you to take the right actions to create memorable experiences and increase customer loyalty and retention.

Of course, what *really* matters is follow-up. It’s what we do with the information we get back that makes the survey valuable.

I am a co-owner of Double-A Minor League Baseball team the [Pensacola Blue Wahoos](#). After each game, we survey fans on their experience.

Having done many surveys like this over the years, I have discovered some practices on how to use the results. Here are learnings I recently shared with Blue Wahoos staff on how to best use the survey results. Many of these apply to all different types of businesses as well:

1. Bring the best “you” to every customer encounter. Stay away from general questions like, “How are you?” People will say “fine” even if they’re not. Use more specific language. For example: “What brings you to the game tonight?” “Have you been to other games?” “We just put in new turf; what do you think?” “What do you like best about Wahoos games?” “Is there anything you feel we can do better?” “We like to recognize staff; has anyone stood out to you?”

Add items as you see fit. For example, if the person you’re surveying is a season ticket holder, ask if they have been to the remodeled lounge. If yes, get feedback. If no, encourage them to try it.

2. Pay attention to what worked. The more results are broken down into areas and/or people the better. For example, in a baseball stadium, what is the usher with the high marks doing that some others may not be? Why did that food area receive higher marks than others? They had the same weather, the same crowd, and so forth. In other words, study what worked and replicate it. Research from Chip Heath and Dan Heath, authors of [*Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*](#), shows finding [*“bright spots”*](#) and figuring out what we can learn from them is a major success strategy.

This same idea is the basis for what I call [*“success plates”*](#)—templates created when we immediately capture what went well, and *why* it went well, right after a successful event, a good day, or some other positive occurrence. I included success plates in my book [*The Calling: Why Healthcare Is So Special*](#), and I’ve also written about them in one of my weekly columns (click [here](#) to read it).

3. Recognize the positive. The more specific you can be the better. The more public the recognition the better. Recognized behavior gets repeated. It also inspires others to take similar actions.

4. Look for patterns. Are there some people/areas that get recognized more often than others? Are there some consistent complaints?

5. Keep comments in perspective. While comments will grab your attention—and it’s true they can sometimes be very interesting—be aware that the objective data tells the more complete story. I have seen leaders give the comments more weight than the objective results from the survey.

6. The sooner people with complaints or questions are responded to in a constructive manner the better. Service recovery is important. Figure out a way to respond quickly. I do not believe responding within 24 hours works any longer. By then they have already shared their experiences with many others. The sooner the response the better.

7. Don’t let the [*“less than 6”*](#) responders detract from the 7s and 8s. We use a 1-10 rating system. Responders of 9 and 10 are promoters. They spread the positive. Responders of 7 and 8 are passive promoters. They are satisfied, but not raving fans. Those who give ratings of 6 or below are detractors. They spread negative word of mouth. There will always be a certain amount of people rating items less than a 6. While service recovery is important, don’t focus on these individuals to the point it takes too much attention away from those who gave higher ratings. How do you move those 7s and 8s to 9s and 10s?

One suggestion is to actually contact some 9s and 10s. Find out what made them rate something a 9 or 10. This will help you in replicating good results.

8. You are a role model. Think like an owner. Think of survey results like they are yours personally. Make an effort to sincerely care about the changes you’re putting in place because of them. Don’t just go through the motions. Employees will notice and follow your lead.

9. Trust employees. Empower them to fix problems. Let staff members know it’s okay to offer discounts or coupons to customers who are not happy.

10. Communicate your [*“fixes”*](#). If patterns show up and they are fixed, put this in your communications (i.e., [*“We heard you and here are the changes made. Thank you for helping us be*](#)

better.â?•).

Finally, look at survey responses as gifts and encourage employees to do the same. People who take time to complete a survey are showing us they care. Their feedback, positive or negative, helps us improve our goods and services. These are the kinds of customers to be grateful for. We need to do all we can to delight them and keep them coming back.

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