

Great Systems Customer Satisfaction Work System Improvement Tips

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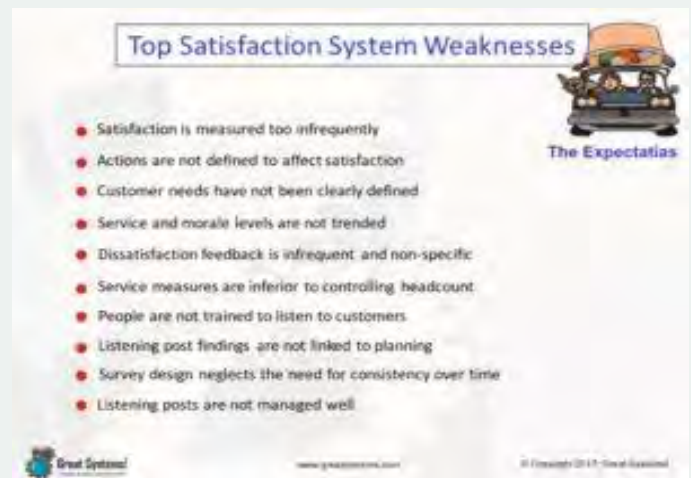
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How to create a great customer satisfaction work system

Too many organizations take customer satisfaction, let alone customer amazement, for granted. They will tell you that it is important to exceed customer expectations, but what does reality say?

When you look at how one measures customer satisfaction (or doesn't measure), do they really measure excellence? How effective is your customer satisfaction work system?

Too few companies formally define the key requirements of their customers. Even fewer regularly engage their customers to help the organization improve its processes. Most of the time, you will realize that the customer



"The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice."

amazement message is much more 'talk' than 'walk.' Additionally, we tend to essentially ignore our internal customers - our employees. We often do this to the point where one could consider them to be 'forgotten customers.'

How do you know what it takes to satisfy your customers?

Do you have a great customer satisfaction work system? Too many leaders assume that they know what their customers want. They rely on sales figures to tell them if their customers are happy or not. Is internal customer satisfaction the true driver of external customer delight?

Do you mistakenly believe that external customer amazement is possible even when your employees are dissatisfied?

Organizations who are serious about pursuing operational excellence don't take internal or external customer satisfaction for granted. They use multiple approaches to measure both customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Plus, Improvement process designs include key internal and external customers on a regular basis. Additionally, efforts are made at least annually to improve these approaches.

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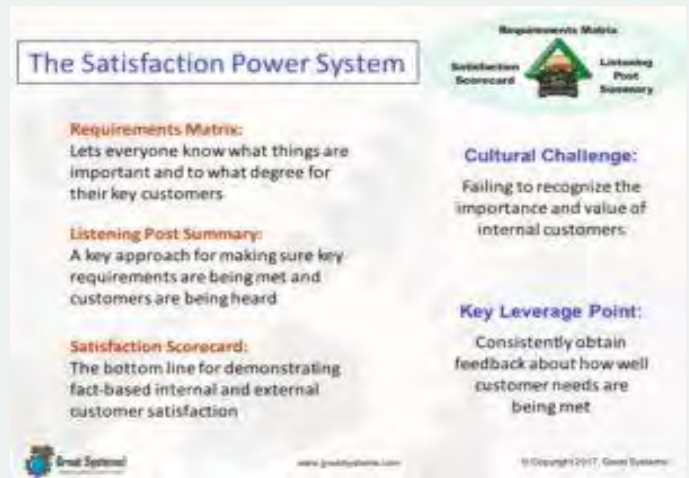
Who are your key customers?

Who are your key customers? It sounds like an easy question to answer, doesn't it. In fact, the answer seems obvious. It's the people who spend money for our goods or services. While that answer may be right, a simple answer may not be the best one. Any given organization has several types of customers, whether they recognize that fact or not.

Great organizations segment their customers to gain a better definition of their customers and what each customer group expects. Some go even further by defining their key stakeholders. How do you define those groups that hold a stake in the success or failure of the enterprise?

Do you want to raise your levels of customer delight to higher and higher levels? If so, you must first define your key customer segments and stakeholders, along with their key requirements.

If you really want to sustain great results over time, it is important that everyone in your organization knows what each customer group needs. To what degree do you define your key customer segments?



Do you know how customer needs differ in importance between segments? What percentage of your workforce spends time with their external customers? Who are your key customers? How do you determine if you give them what they really want and value?

How strong are your customer connections?

I have worked in companies where I did not even know who the customers of the products we made were, other than to know that they were the people that bought our products. Later in my career, I had the chance to work in organizations where all employees would interact to some degree with their external customers. I saw the power that comes with strong customer connections.

Another insight of mine was how customer service quality increases as the amount of contact between each employee and each customer group increases. I saw a direct correlation between the percent of time employees spent with customers and the level of customer service they would provide.

One reason more time led to higher service was that we could attach a name and face to the 'customer' label. By the reactions on their faces, we could better understand their likes and dislikes.

High performance organizations spend lots of time with their customers. They install listening posts to increase the percent of time that EACH EMPLOYEE spends with different customer groups.

For example, key face-to-face listening posts that most high performing companies use include focus group participation, planning involvement, and product and service development sessions. Making regular visits to both the customer's location and in-house, and point of purchase relationship building, are also consistent system features.

What do your customers really want?

How does your company decide what products and services its different customer segments really want? Do you use focus groups and surveys? Do you observe your customers in the field as they buy your product or make purchase decisions that involve it?

There are a variety of ways to determine customer requirements, However, too few companies use more than simply their own opinions to gauge customer satisfaction.

That's right. Many decisions about what each customer segment wants are made in meeting rooms. Leaders simply review written summaries of customer meetings or discuss what they think the customer wants. How do you know what your customers truly value?

Listening Post	Stakeholder Group						How Information is Used	Frequency of Use
	Supplier	Trainers	Recruiters	Employees	Site Visitors	Partners		
Market Surveys	X	X	X	X	X	X	Annual planning processes	Annual
Complaint Process	X	X	X				Process and focus team meetings	As needed
Interview / In-visit	X	X	X	X	X	X	Monthly reviews, annual planning	As needed
Team Meetings / Forums			X	X	X		Quarterly plan reviews	Quarterly
Team Involvement	X	X	X				Review key approaches	Ongoing
Focus Groups				X		X	Quarterly plan reviews	Quarterly
Internal Observations	X	X					Shared all process team meetings	Ongoing

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Great companies use a host of fact-based approaches to create a list of possible customer wants. They systematically prioritize those wants, and then convert 'high value' wants into product and service features.

They recognize that different customer segments expect different things from the products and services they purchase. Leaders place a high degree of value on the use of fact-based approaches to determine how these requirements differ.

How does your customer satisfaction work system define customer requirements?

The example tables and lists on this page give you several tools that make up an effective customer satisfaction work system. One tool I include is the customer requirements definition blueprint shown here.

Another key improvement you can make is to simply increase the number of times you 'touch' your customers and allow them to touch you back over a given amount of time. When you increase the number of customer touches, you get more opportunities to observe them, listen to them, and measure their levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Customer Segment		Requirements	How do you address them?	How do you measure them?
Specialty Coffee Retailers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taste profiles • Competitive price • Organic delivery • Easy to use mobile app • Variety of flavors • Assistance with promotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Retailer survey (through website) • Retailer contact with sales representatives • Quarterly focus groups • Visits to manufacturing facility • Review of customer complaint logs • Internal observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales per store trend analysis • Repeatable rates • Survey satisfaction scores • % purchases in form group • Customer retention rates (%) • Customer complaint rates 	
Regional Distributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk orders • Competitive price • Quick order fulfillment turnaround • Easy to use mobile app • Flexible packaging and shipment • Quality packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Distributor survey (through website) • Regular contact with sales representatives • Internal focus groups • Visits to manufacturing facility • Review of customer complaint logs • Operational observation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales per county trend analysis • Repeatable rates • Survey satisfaction scores • % orders processed through app • Customer retention rates (%) • Customer complaint rates 	
Private Label Processors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk profiles • Competitive price • Quality delivery • Inventory visibility throughout • Accurate order product information • Retailer to retailer loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Processor survey (through website) • Regular contact with sales representatives • Internal observation process • Visits to manufacturing facility • Review of customer complaint logs • Operational observation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales per customer trend analysis • Repeatable rates • Survey satisfaction scores • % orders processed through app • Customer retention rates (%) • Customer complaint rates 	
Online Consumer (Amazon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk acquisition • Equitable competitive rates • Quick fulfillment • Inventory in complete clarity • Investment in product quality • Flexible packaging options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributor processor survey • Monthly focus group trend through • Monthly internal processor feedback • Review of monthly sales trends • Review of customer complaint logs • Review of customer trends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-annual processor survey • Customer trend • % sales in form distribution • Acquisition rate trends • Customer retention rates (%) • Customer value through app 	

Plus, you can employ the use of several mechanisms to stay engaged with the customer. In doing so, you can obtain data from a variety of sources. You can compare the results of such research and look for patterns across different data collection mediums.

The patterns that appear most often reflect the requirements your customers consider to be the most important. If you do choose to use a variety of approaches, make sure that you pull them all together into a listening post summary table. This practice will help you invest your customer research time and money in the right places.

Do you treat your internal and external customers differently?

One of the workshops that I like to facilitate focuses on the forgotten customers - in other words, your internal customers. When you look across the ten most common work systems, you might notice that I do not distinguish between internal and external customers.

The need to define customer requirements and measure levels of customer amazement (more than satisfaction) and dissatisfaction are just as key with this group. I consider both groups to be equally important and essentially the same.

It is true that their needs are different. However, this does not mean that you should spend more effort, or use better approaches, with one group versus the other. You need to meet and exceed the key requirements of both customer types to sustain organizational success over time. Neglect one group, and your performance will eventually falter.

Do you judge customer importance in terms of the time and money that you invest in one group versus the other? If so, I think you will find that in most cases the level of investment is greater for the external customer group. This may seem logical, since the external group gives your organization money. However, internal customers either make money or lose money for you as well.

If we want to take our organizations to a higher level of performance, we might want to question this investment difference. It is difficult to realize and sustain high levels of external customer satisfaction unless you realize and sustain high levels of internal customer satisfaction first. Do you share this belief?

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

Most organizations use surveys to measure customer satisfaction, if they measure customer satisfaction at all. When an organization uses surveys to measure customer satisfaction, it is often more typical to only measure external customer satisfaction. Internal customer satisfaction is often taken for granted.

Typically, most companies rely on customer complaints to measure customer dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of those customers with unmet expectations make the effort to tell the organization about it. Many estimate this percentage to be as low as 10%.

Build Strong Customer Links

- Know your internal customers, their requirements, and your relationship strength with them
- Meet regularly with your internal customers to share expectations and to resolve differences
- Identify actions to better and more consistently meet expectations
- Develop a shared vision of what is expected from each customer group

Change Systems to Shift Cultures

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Example Satisfaction Scorecard

Customer Group	Loss	Loyalty	Benefits	Satisfaction
Internal	Turnover Rate	Retention	Retention Frequency	Survey Index
External	Lost Customer Rate	% Repeat Sales	Customer Complaints	Survey Index

Internal Survey Index

- Work Environment %
- Wages %
- Benefits %
- Leadership %

External Survey Index

- Service %
- Price %
- Features %
- Relationships %

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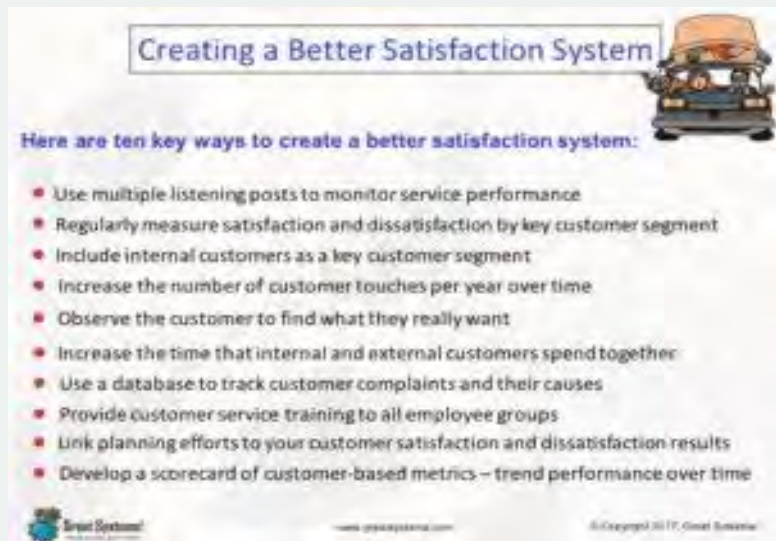
High performance organizations use a balanced scorecard approach to measure internal and external customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. An example scorecard is shown here. In the example, note that the card measures satisfaction in four dimensions. You can use a four-part, survey-driven index to assess satisfaction for both customer groups. The index reflects an average of survey results from four different focus areas.

How can Great Systems help you improve your customer satisfaction work system?

For over forty years, I have been involved with designing internal and external customer satisfaction systems in a variety of different companies and business arenas.

My experiences have helped me discover value added, simple ways to set up manual and digital systems to measure customer satisfaction levels.

Plus, I have found best practices to create internal customer surveys that link to the annual planning process. I can also help you reduce customer complaints and help your organization better define and exceed the key requirements of your different key customer and stakeholder groups.



Failing to hear from your customers as often as you should is the primary power restrictor for the customer satisfaction work system. Try to find effective ways to manage and improve the various listening posts that you use to help you achieve higher levels of business performance. Use a satisfaction scorecard to look at multiple dimensions of customer satisfaction performance.

Additional Customer Satisfaction Work System Improvement Help

To the right you will see ten steps to help improve your customer satisfaction work system.

To learn more about the customer satisfaction work system improvement tools that I offer, please send me an e-mail at kevin@greatsystems.com.

About the author

As Chief Excellence Officer of Great Systems LLC, Kevin McManus provides virtual coaching and content to help people use proven best practices to enhance and optimize their daily work systems.

Over forty years of work experience in roles such as Industrial Engineer, Training Manager, Production Manager, Plant Manager, and Director of Quality give Kevin a 'real life work' perspective relative to daily work process optimization, work team engagement and empowerment, and sustainable operational excellence.



As a contract trainer for the TapRoot® root cause analysis process, Kevin has taught over 450 courses and further enhanced his ability to help leaders proactively minimize risk, reduce errors, and improve reliability. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and an MBA. He served as a national Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Award Examiner for twenty years, including a three-year term on the national Judge's Panel.

Kevin has authored the monthly performance improvement column for Industrial and Systems Engineer magazine for over 20 years, is an Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineering Fellow and has been a member of IISE for over forty years. His newest book, "Different Company – How the Best Build Great Organizations", will be published in late 2025."

If you would like more information about the improvement tools and systems I have to offer, please send me an e-mail at kevin@greatsystems.com.

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Kevin McManus, Great Systems!

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- 150 pages of ideas and examples that will help you accelerate and sustain your process improvement efforts
- Over 25 examples of 'best practice' assessment tools that leaders can use to encourage and support high performance work
- 12 team exercises that can be used to begin applying each concept as it is learned



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- 128 pages of ideas and examples to help you make your existing measurement systems more meaningful
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- 162 pages of strategies and dialogue questions to help you stop daily goofs for good
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Facilitating and Leading Teams

- 182 pages of ideas, tools, and examples to help you improve work team, project team, and focus team effectiveness
- 10 assessments that will help you identify areas of strength and weakness relative to work and project team support
- Over 20 team exercises that will help you optimize your use of teams and improve meeting effectiveness, while also practicing your facilitation skills



How to Develop a High Performance Work Culture

- 162 pages of ideas and examples to help you begin changing your existing work systems so that they are less likely to hold back your culture change and performance improvement efforts
- Over 30 examples of tools and techniques that are used by high performance organizations to help shape their work cultures
- 14 team exercises to help you create work systems that support and encourage a high performance work culture

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