

Great Systems Customer Satisfaction Work System Improvement Tips

By [Kevin McManus](#), Chief Excellence Officer, [Great Systems](#)

How to create a great customer satisfaction work system..... 1

How do you know what it takes to satisfy your customers? 2

Who are your key customers? 2

How strong are your customer connections? 3

What do your customers really want? 4

How does your customer satisfaction work system define customer requirements?..... 4

Do you treat your internal and external customers differently? 5

How do you measure customer satisfaction? 5

How can Great Systems help you improve your customer satisfaction work system? 6

Additional Customer Satisfaction Work System Improvement Help..... 7

About the author 8

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

Top Customer Value Work System Design Flaws

- Satisfaction and engagement are measured too infrequently
- Engagement improvement tends to be limited to sales
- Customer needs have not been clearly defined by segment
- Internal customer service and morale levels are not trended
- Dissatisfaction feedback (complaints) serve as primary 'satisfaction' indicator
- Controlling headcount takes priority over service measure improvement
- People are not trained how to listen to, and engage, customers
- Listening post findings are not linked to improvement planning
- Limited use of proactive surveys that gauge product / service experience
- Listening posts are not aligned, coordinated, and improved



The Expectatias


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

help the organization improve its processes. Most of the time, you will realize that the customer 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?

The Customer Engagement Work System

Requirements Blueprint:
Lets everyone know what things are important and to what degree for their key customers

Listening Posts Blueprint:
A key approach for making sure key requirements are being met and customers are being heard

Satisfaction Scorecard:
The bottom line for demonstrating fact-based internal and external customer satisfaction

Requirements Blueprint

Satisfaction Scorecard  Listening Posts Blueprint

Cultural Challenge:
Failing to recognize the importance and value of internal customers

Key Leverage Point:
Consistently obtain feedback about how well customer needs are being met



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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.

Listening Posts Blueprint								
Listening Post	Stakeholder Groups						How Information is Used	Frequency of Use
	Students	Teachers	Parents	Employers	Sch. Board	Post-Sec		
Formal Survey	X	X	X	X	X	X	Annual planning process	Annual
Complaint Process	X	X	X				Process and focus team meetings	As needed
Internet / Intranet	X	X	X	X	X	X	Monthly reviews, annual planning	As needed
Town Meetings / Forums			X	X	X		Quarterly plan reviews	Quarterly
Team Involvement	X	X	X				Improve key approaches	Ongoing
Focus Groups				X		X	Quarterly plan reviews	Quarterly
Informal Observation	X	X					Shared at process team meetings	Ongoing

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?

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.

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.

Customer Requirements Blueprint				
Customer Type	Type of Listening Post	Who Does the Listening?	Customer's Main Contact Requirements	How customer needs are put into practice
National Account Shipper	External Customer Survey NITLG Show Personal sales visits / calls Customer Service contact Freight pickup and delivery	Director of Quality VP Sales, Natl account reps Natl account rep Customer Service Specialist P&D Driver	Rapid response to all requests Prompt alert about potential problems Timely and accurate service reports Periodic visits by sales personnel Timely and accurate billing	Reinforced through company mission and philosophy New hire / in service training Recognition / reward programs Use of available technology
Regular Regional Shipper	External Customer Survey Personal sales visits / calls Freight Terminal contact Freight pickup and delivery	Director of Quality Regional sales rep Customer Service / Dispatch P&D Driver	Rapid response to all requests Prompt alert about potential problems Timely and accurate service reports Periodic visits by sales personnel Timely and accurate billing	Reinforced through company mission and philosophy New hire / in service training Recognition / reward programs Use of available technology
Regular Consignees	Freight Terminal contact Freight pickup and delivery	Customer Service / Dispatch P&D Driver	Freight on time and in good condition Pre-delivery info is timely and accurate Customers receive accurate billing	Claims Reduction process Customer Account management Billing Accuracy Team
Occasional Use Shippers & Consignees	Freight Terminal contact Freight pickup and delivery	Customer Service / Dispatch P&D Driver	Freight on time and in good condition Customers receive accurate billing	Claims Reduction process Billing Accuracy Team

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.

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

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%.

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.

Example Satisfaction Scorecard

Customer Group	Loss	Loyalty	Defects	Satisfaction
Internal	Turnover Rate	Absenteeism	Grievance Frequency	Survey Index
External	Lost Customer Rate	% Repeat Sales	Customer Complaints	Survey Index

<p>Internal Survey Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work environment % Wage % Benefits % Leadership % 	<p>External Survey Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service % Price % Features % Relationship %
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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

How to Improve Your Customer Engagement Work System



Here are ten ways to build a better customer engagement work system:

- Use multiple, aligned listening posts to monitor service performance
- Regularly measure satisfaction and dissatisfaction for each customer segment
- Include internal customers as a key customer segment
- Measure and increase the number of customer touches per year over time
- Observe the customer to find what they really want
- Increase the time that internal and external customers spend together
- Use a database to track customer complaints and their causes
- Provide customer service training to all employee groups
- Link planning efforts to your customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction results
- Trend performance of a balanced set of customer-based metrics over time



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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

On the previous page, 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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- 150 pages of ideas and examples that will help you accelerate and sustain your process improvement efforts
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- 182 pages of ideas, tools, and examples to help you improve work team, project team, and focus team effectiveness
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- Two assessments to help you gauge the degree of support your lean efforts require and how much progress you make

kevin@greatsystems.com
206.226.8913

greatsystems.com

