



8 Steps to a Customer Service Improvement Plan

Ever wonder how companies like Southwest Airlines, Starbucks and REI consistently offer great customer service? Each of these organizations makes customer service an integral component of their business strategy! Every customer centric organization has a customer service vision plan and a customer service improvement strategy.

There are 6 factors any business can implement to differentiate their business from that of their competitors. Customer Service is one of the factors. Differentiating your business sets your business apart from your competitors. You no longer need to compete on price alone.

Here are 8 steps to create a Customer Service Improvement Plan to differentiate your organization:

1. Define your culture

What is “business culture” and how does it impact your business? In the words of anthropologist [E.B. Tylor](#), culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." In more contemporary terms, culture is the beliefs, actions and behaviors that define how a company interacts with its employees, customers, suppliers and stakeholders. Your organization’s culture is important because it directly reflects what the organization finds important and meaningful.

Take a good look around your organization, observe employee interactions, look at how tasks are accomplished; what’s important and what isn’t. Embrace those actions and beliefs that you choose to embrace and work to change those that detract or run counter to the organization’s core values.

Changing a culture is not easy. Change takes time and attention. I suggest a series of small steps to chip away at the unwanted action or behavior. Remember, change can be scary for some people, Any changes you feel are necessary need to be included in your customer service improvement plan.

2. Write your Customer Service Vision Statement

Start by gathering any existing documents that may be helpful; Mission statement, customer service slogans, quality standards, etc. Next pole your employees, Jeff Toister, the author of [Getting Service Right](#), suggests asking your staff this question: “What do you want our customers to think of when they think of the service we provide?”

Keep these three ideas in mind as you craft your vision: a) is the vision simple and easy to understand, b) does it accurately describe the service we provide for our customers. c) does it reflect who we are and what we aim to be?

3. Spread the Word - Communicate the Vision

Formally roll out your Vision. Provide tangible and relevant examples to assist everyone in understanding the Vision and how to use it. Make sure everyone on your staff knows what the Vision is, what it means and how they can contribute.

4. Training

Do your employees understand the products and services they sell and support? They should. An employee feels more connected to their job when they know and understand the products and services their employer provides to customers. Training is a way to invest in employee growth, this translates into more engaged employees.

Employees with direct customer contact need additional training in listening, empathy and communication skills.

5. Hiring

Once you have the customer service vision statement, you now have a template for making hiring decisions. When interviewing potential employees, craft questions to determine if their values and skills align with those of your organization. In addition to the basic skills the job position requires; do they embrace teamwork, are they customer service focused, are they engaging and do they possess strong communication skills.

Take the extra time to make the right hire.

6. Empowerment

Every customer service improvement strategy should include employee empowerment. What is employee empowerment? Employee empowerment is a management strategy which provides your staff with the tools, resources and support to work independently and to make confident decisions.

Ensure your employees understand the company's Mission statement, Vision statement and strategic plans. Armed with more information about the firm's goals your employees are positioned to improve the bottom line and grow as individuals.

7. Leadership

Owners and managers must fully support the Customer Service Vision. Your every word and action communicates your commitment to providing the best customer service possible, The Vision should be referenced at employee reviews, announcements, the way you speak about customers, anywhere and everywhere you can work it in.

Use the Vision as a guide in decision making. Employees will notice if decisions you make align with the CSV. Your credibility and employee adherence to the Vision are impacted either negatively or positively by your or your manager's actions.

8. Celebrate

Develop a system for rewarding employees for great customer service. Spend time developing suitable rewards and acknowledgements. Above all, celebrate a job or jobs well done! More than money, employees crave recognition, here is your chance to include recognition in your customer service improvement strategy.