

Who Are Your Customers?

The importance of focusing on your deliverables



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Whether we realize it or not, each of us provides a product or service that someone else needs so they can do their job. Regardless of job title, the people who need what you have to offer are your customers. Therefore, one of the most critical questions we can ask ourselves is, "Who are my customers?" At first glance, this may seem like a rhetorical question, but the answer determines how effective you are in managing your job, your success and ultimately the success of others.

Let's assume that you are an acquisition agent. Your customers could range from the project manager and engineer to a local public agency or a property owner. Now thinking of your colleagues or agency representatives as customers

may require a bit of a mind shift. But identifying who they are is critical to building, maintaining and growing your relationships with them.

The concept of effective customer service is not new, however, you may be wondering what's involved. Following are some key components of effective customer service:

Focus on Excellence: Our performance and ability to complete a task depends on those who provide us with what we need to do our job. Any delays can jeopardize our completion time. In other words, we are as good as what our suppliers provide to us. In turn, can you see that your customers are as good as what you supply to them? If a project

manager needs acquisitions completed on time, it's vital that you make every effort to do so. Remember, your project manager is your customer.

Good Enough Isn't: We're constantly pulled in different directions with demands that can be dizzying. When we feel stretched and worn out, it becomes easy to do what I call "enough to get by." We compromise our standards and when that happens, it's the customer who is affected. Regardless of the distractions that surround us, we must stay focused and organized to deliver a product that we are proud of. That means no shortcuts, no delays and no partial deliveries just to get by. Good enough is never an option.

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Put Yourself in Your Customer's Shoes: This comes down to one major ingredient: empathy. Empathy allows you to show your humanness and encourages your customer to do the same. It paves the way to a better understanding and will help you to put your best foot forward. So how do you put yourself in your customer's shoes? Think about things from their perspective. Learn what it takes to do their job, understand their priorities, spend time with them and take an interest in their family and hobbies. The more you can identify with your customer, the more you'll align with their needs, values, beliefs and concerns.

Keep your Customer in the Loop: If you're approaching a specific deadline and you're down to the 11th hour without an easement, appraisal or environmental report, it's critical to let your customer know in advance of the due date. Contact them beforehand and tell them when you will deliver, or discuss this with your customer and create an alternate plan. This effort enables them to plan and make necessary adjustments on their end. Your customer will appreciate your professionalism, honesty and trustworthiness.

Be Adaptable: Every customer is different, and some may seem to change from week to week. Become someone who can handle surprises, sense the customer's mood and adapt accordingly. Be willing to learn. After all, providing good customer service is a continuous learning process.

Manage Expectations: Sometimes your customer may need a reality check. When they ask you to rush a new project, simply say, "I'm working on one of your other projects right now, so which one do you want first?" Managing your workload and your time is critical in serving all of your customers in an efficient and organized manner. Being assertive and

maintaining flexibility will help you to satisfy the needs of your customer, while managing your own time.

Work Smarter, Not Harder: Although this may take some creative imagination, the payoff is huge. For example, when I used to go on ride-alongs with my customers, it always proved to be time well spent. Visiting job sites with my engineer gave me the opportunity to learn more about the proposed work and how it affected right of way acquisition. In some cases, we were able to strategize ways to adapt the design so that it would have minimal impacts on the property owner. These ride-alongs provided me with a deeper understanding of the goals and minimized the questions, discussions and changes during the acquisition process. All in all, putting in this extra effort helped me to become more effective in my job.

Putting the key components of effective customer service skills into action will bring enormous benefits to both you and your customers. And a strong partnership with your customers will bring job enrichment, satisfaction and deeper purpose to team performance. 🌟



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