

## Winning the Customer Service Race

### A Case Study of Excellence in Customer Service

Our client's vision is "to be recognised for excellence in customer service" in their industry. Employing approximately 800 people, this organisation ended the 2003-04 financial year in a strong position, having expended \$726 million on managing, improving and expanding their services. Alliances in the delivery of services were also developed, which presented opportunities for Government, industry and the community to work collaboratively to deliver exceptional value-for-money outcomes - beyond 'business as usual'.

This organisation has an internal and external customer base that is both large and diverse. Their Customer Service Strategy 2004-2007 was developed with input from employees, key stakeholders and customers. The organisation encourages employees to ensure that their service-based culture is reflected in everything they do.

In line with this commitment, the Applied Innovation Centre was appointed in June 05 to deliver and evaluate a major customer service initiative, which is being rolled out throughout the entire workforce in metropolitan and regional locations over a six month period.

This unique initiative allows our client's workforce to translate the organisation's value of "extraordinary customer service" into action by working together to implement a number of strategies that allow their customers to provide input and be involved in their projects.

Through facilitated workshops, each branch/business unit identifies and classifies their internal and external customers, and receives face-to-face feedback from a selected panel comprising both internal and external customers. Subsequently, participants explore areas for improvement and key actions are identified. These actions are then developed into specific action plans for each business unit.

Each workshop is opened by members of the executive team, who contextualise the event in terms of the organisation's commitment to customer service. Senior managers and branch managers participate in the workshops and receive a copy of the action plan developed during the workshop.

These managers then accept responsibility for implementing the action plans to an agreed timetable.

In addition to the improvements in customer service, other benefits of this initiative have included team building for each branch in an atmosphere of fun and positivity, systematic review of current operational plans, empowerment of staff, beginning new partnerships with some of the external customers, and general alignment of the workforce with the organisation's strategic plan and vision.

Some of the feedback provided by participants included the following comments:

- *The program is excellent.*
- *Good information & ideas sharing.*
- *Helped me to think outside the square.*
- *Helped bonding & identification of customer needs.*
- *It Identified issues that otherwise would not have been discussed.*
- *Gained a greater understanding of what customers want and expect from us.*
- *Good to work in a team environment of the workshop to solve issues we deal with daily and improve the way we do business.*
- *The facilitator did an excellent job: one of the major benefits was getting the entire branch staff together and interacting with one another on an equal footing.*

In addition to the qualitative feedback provided by participants at the end of each workshop, a number of more objective evaluative measures are being used. These include assessments using the Australia Business Excellence Framework (ABEF) and the International Customer Service Standard (ICSS).

If your organisation sees benefit in optimising customer service levels and creating conditions conducive to workplace innovation, you may wish to contact the Centre for a free consultation.

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