

Ineffective work teams

How teamwork impacts customer service quality **By Pamela Schuck**

Teamwork is a popular buzzword, but just because you say you are a team does not necessarily make it so.

Developing a quality team takes hard work, development of team skills, time and patience. It is not something you can decide to have one day, then achieve overnight.

What is a team? The entire organization is part of the same team working toward meeting the requirements of your customers. Whether management, front line or behind the scenes employees, **everyone's work contributes to the end result.** There are also specific work unit teams (departmental) with specific goals and assignments.

Why do we need teams? Teams working together can and should be responsible for identifying problems not previously recognized; finding the root causes of problems; suggesting who should work on problems; solving manpower assignments and scheduling improvements; and providing communication throughout the organization.

To be effective, teams in the workplace must develop standards and skills, then implement ongoing training and coaching to ensure they are put into practice.

Company policies, procedures and rules

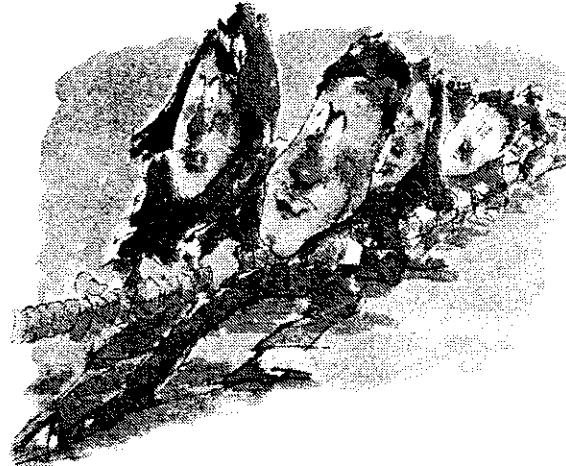
If policies are ineffective, employees lack comprehension and it is difficult to explain to customers the why of the policies. Policies are only good if everyone understands them and can explain and defend them.

Planning is deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, who will do it and when it will be done.

If your employees don't know why your business does what it does, where the business is going and how you will measure success, how can they communicate your business value to your customers?

Integration and value of different personalities

Teams are successful when team members complement each other. We need to respect each other's differences. There is nothing wrong with team members having different personalities because differences can be a strength.



Each brings unique and different perspectives to the team. If teams don't respect each other, they do not respect your customers' differences, and it will show.

Develop strong communication skills

Strong communication skills are made up of myriad other skills: focused listening, the ability to collaborate on projects, a vision to reach team consensus and effective problem solving skills.

Consider developing a continual feedback process. It will allow team members to learn, from each other and from the customer, what is going right and wrong and what needs to be changed.

Stress consistency in communications. Customers hear consistent messages and feedback, so walk the talk. If team members have different perceptions of what they are supposed to do, how it is to get done, who is to do it and what the deadlines are, there is a communication problem.

■ **Trust** — Have trust in others and their commitments. If your employees don't trust each other, your customer will know it and will not trust your business.

■ **Empowerment** — Give responsibility and the power

to influence outcomes. If your staff doesn't have the empowerment to influence outcomes, customers feel like they are getting the runaround.

■ **Decision-making skills** — Encourage creative thinking to find innovative solutions. You must meet your customer's needs through effective problem-solving by creative thinking and by finding innovative solutions, then deciding on the best solution.

■ **Constant awareness of change** and the need for it — Whenever possible, involve the people who will be affected by the change.

■ **Ability to deal with conflict** — The same skills needed to resolve internal conflicts are needed to deal with conflict with your customer. Unresolved internal conflicts between departmental teams all too often create the customer conflict.

To be really successful, teamwork must exist at all levels of the organization, including the very top. The advantages of teamwork on the lower levels of an organization also produce benefits on the top levels. Working as a team should be viewed as a management philosophy that greatly benefits everyone in the organization and your customers.

Most businesses do not do enough to ensure their workplace teams practice good team skills. What happens internally happens externally. Practice of good team skills internally will transfer to the relationship with external customers.

If your teams are ineffective, they produce ineffective service for customers. Ineffective teamwork adversely affects your service culture.

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