

Inside-out service

What happens internally, happens externally **By Pam Schuck**

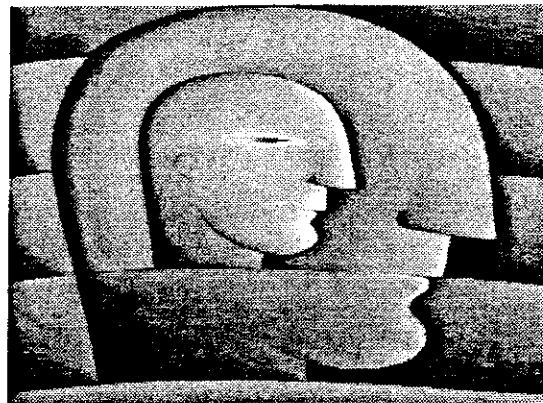
Who is the customer? Typically we think of the external customer — the people who buy our products and services. They are the source of the revenue that funds continuing operations. Without external customers, businesses wouldn't last long. Efforts directed toward improving customer service practices and standards are usually directed toward the external customer.

But consider the internal customer. Who are the internal customers? They are the people who work for the organization. **Everyone in your business is an internal customer** of others who work there as well. They depend on the work others do in the business in order to complete their own work, often so they can serve their own customer.

The easiest example is that of a salesperson and the many people that person depends on to get his or her work done successfully. Once a sale is made, it must be processed by an internal operations person.

The salesman becomes the internal customer. The operations person is the internal customer of the shipping and receiving person who picks and packs the order. The picking and packing person is the internal customer of the truck driver delivering the order. All the efforts together contribute to the whole experience given to the external customer.

Customer service is everyone's job. We've all heard that, read that and been to training seminars that have



told us that if you are not serving the customer, your job is to be serving someone who is.

Service excellence requires 360-degree vision to identify your customers — internal and external.

Everyone in an organization should ask themselves:

- Where does my work go?
- Who is my work important to?
- Whose work depends on the job I do?

Everyone in the organization has internal customers. Every employee's customer is whoever benefits or suffers from the work he or she does or doesn't do.

Encourage each individual to identify his or her internal and external customers. Once everyone who works together understands they are internal customers to each other and sees each other that way, you can begin efforts directed toward improving customer service practices and standards.

To improve customer service, first apply improvements internally. What happens internally in an organization happens externally. Listen to and observe the internal service your employees give to each other, not just front line people to each other, but all levels interacting with each other. That includes managers and supervisors to their employees, front line people to their supervisors, front line people with each other.

Good customer service is applicable across the board. It only happens when the people who work in your business treat each other with respect.

The best service starts internally, in the way employees treat each other as internal customers.

Look from the inside out to begin making changes in your service excellence. **Inside-out service will give you the service competitive edge.**

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