

WHO CARES

Excerpt

Chapter 6 - Managing Your Clients

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Better Systems for Managing People

Who Cares

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“I lost one of our major clients yesterday.”

I was having lunch with the president of a Computer Services Organization and he was responding to my inquiry as to why he was looking so glum. I asked him if it was a surprise. “Right out of the blue” he replied. When I asked him who was responsible for the client, his response was fuzzy, “Bill, I guess. He’s the Account Manager, but I think Chuck was more to blame.”

“Do yourself a favor”, I told him, “When you get back to your office, make a list of all your clients and put the name of one Account Manager beside each. Write a general memo to all employees and attach the list. Explain that the recent loss of a major account has inspired you to implement a client management process and that you have attached a list of the clients along with the names of the individuals you are going to personally blame if their respective client is lost due to lack of attention to service.”

And further explain that when it comes to service everyone in this company works for these Account Managers.

This chapter is about how to implement this process, how to empower the Account Managers and provide a network for all of your people to help them keep their clients satisfied. First we need to define who a “Client” is and what “Service” means in a context that will help us understand what we need to do to manage our clients.

Client – Definition

Anyone who has to live with your products or the results of your actions is a client. Your boss, for instance, is one whom we covered in Chapter 4. For a project you are managing, your client is your Project Acceptor, covered in Chapter 7. In this chapter we are talking about managing your customers. They may be internal customers, where you are supplying professional services to the other divisions of your company; for example, Information Technology services or Human Resources services. Or they may be your external corporate customers, to whom you are billing for supplying your products or services. In any case, the relationship between supplier and customer has to be managed as a trust relationship.

If you have been reading this book from the beginning you will be in agreement by now that organizations are not capable of trusting. Only individuals have this capacity. So if you are an Account Manager, singularly responsible for managing the business relationship between your organization and a specific customer organization, you must also have one individual, from this customer organization, singularly accountable for the business relationship of his/her organization with yours. Otherwise you do not have a “Client”. All you have is a customer

organization full of people, none of whom care enough about the business relationship for you to be able to manage it.

Bottom line: your “Client” must be an individual person, empowered, by the visibility of his/her singular accountability, to represent his/her entire company or organization with respect to your service.

If you are accountable for revenue and profitability for your organization, and you don’t have Account Managers who are visibly and singularly accountable for each client, you are not capable of managing your clients, no matter how good your products or services are.

Service – Definition

The first thing we have to understand is that, at the operating level, service is all about *caring*. Your Client is going to believe in your service if he/she believes that you care as much about the service as he/she does.

You don’t lose Clients because you *have* failed to deliver in the past, or *are* failing to deliver currently, regardless of what the “Contract” or “Service Agreement” says. People don’t base their decisions on their knowledge of the past or the present. They base them on their *perceptions of their future*. You lose your Client when he/she is no longer confident that you *will* deliver what they need. And that will happen immediately when he/she believes, for whatever reason, that you *don’t care*, even if your service has been satisfactory up to this moment!

And don’t make the all too popular mistake of believing that you’re not in the “service business” just because you are selling a “product”. If you are in business and you hope to survive, you *are* in the service business!

During my tenure with IBM our only product was computer hardware (software and consulting support were bundled into hardware prices). We had at least seven competitors who were providing better, more powerful hardware for less money. Yet we maintained eighty-five percent of the market-share through a ten year period of phenomenal growth while they shared the other fifteen percent. I know this was because they thought they were in the hardware business and we *knew* we were in the service business.

We had a policy where the President of IBM Canada invited the President of each new IBM 360 Customer to visit our head office plant along with his/her guests and the IBM Account Manager and his/her guests (including me on more than one occasion). The visits were timed such that the presidents could view their own new computer on the assembly line. The plant was spick and span and so were the workers who got to meet and chat with their real customers every day. *They* knew we were in the service business and so did their guests.

The Client Management Network (CNET)

In Chapter 1 we introduced the “Three plus One Caring Networks” that you need in order to satisfy all the stakeholders in your organization: the owners, the employees, the customers, and the projects. The Client Management Network (CNET) is the third network, the one you use to link everyone into satisfying your Clients/Customers.



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