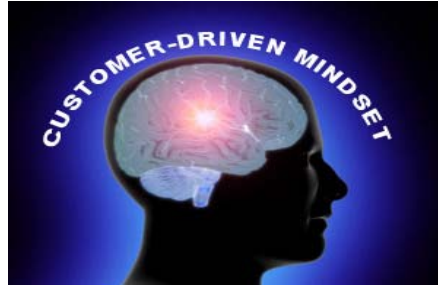


# Develop A Customer-Driven Mindset<sup>1</sup>

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(May 19, 2010)



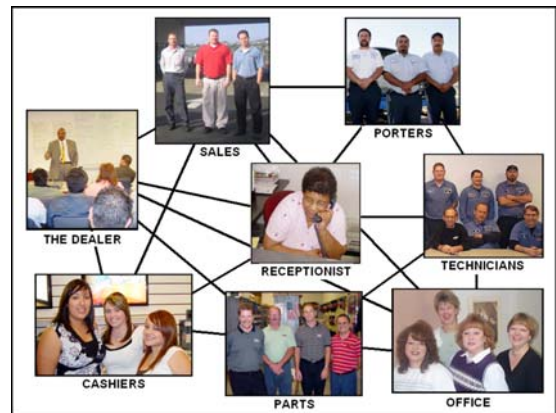
There is no disputing that cultivating customer-driven employee behavior throughout an organization is an important element of the organization's success.

To help accomplish this, I use a technique I call *Inter-Section Problem-Solving*. This technique is designed to get people throughout an organization to see other people in the organization as customers—*internal* customers—while at the same time keeping a focus on *external* customers.

In describing this technique, I am using the word “section” to refer to an organizational unit. It may be a division, a department, a workgroup, etc., depending on the structure of the organization. It could also be a manager, supervisor, or employee group. In other words, it is any subgroup of people in the organization.

The *Inter-Section Problem-Solving* technique involves a series of steps;

- ◆ I begin by determining internal customer relationships. If the organization is small enough, I meet with everyone at the same time. Otherwise, I meet with people section by section.
- ◆ I describe to every section that “internal customers” are other subgroups in the organization that are dependent on their services or to whom they provide a service.
- ◆ I ask all of them to indicate which subgroups in the organization provide them with services. In addition, I ask them to indicate the subgroups to which they provide services.
- ◆ I then “map” the internal customer relationships between sections, such as the map from a Ford Dealership shown at the right.
- ◆ I next ask people in each section to think of themselves as “internal customers” and form a “panel” to examine how their work is in any way made more difficult by something another section does.
- ◆ I ask the panels to come up with a series of recommendations to other sections about processes those sections could change that would help them do their work more effectively.



<sup>1</sup> From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm> —Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: [www.arniedahlke.com](http://www.arniedahlke.com)

- ◆ I then facilitate a series of “panel meetings” in which each panel shares their suggestions with people in other sections throughout the organization. These meetings gave each section an opportunity to discuss their suggestions as internal customers of other sections in an attempt to arrive at changes that could be made by those sections to make their work easier and more effective.



- ◆ During my facilitation, I keep the discussions focused on problem solving, rather than griping and faultfinding. The discussion in each panel meeting is transcribed and given back to each section.
- ◆ Using the transcriptions, each section meets to see where they can redesign their processes to make them more responsive to the needs of their internal customers.

An example comes from the Building Inspectors in a County Permitting Department. The inspectors found that during final inspections in the field, customers would become upset because an inspector could not find documentation showing that certain permits—such as an environmental permit—had been properly signed-off prior to the final inspection (which was a requirement of the County). This, of course, caused a delay in the final inspection, because the customer had to go back to the Permitting Department to get the sign-off.

As a result of the Building Inspector’s panel meeting, people in other sections met, looked at the meeting transcript, and came up with suggestions for improving the effectiveness of their documented sign-offs to help make the Field Inspector’s job more effective. Needless to say, the Field Inspectors were very happy.

The *Inter-Section Problem-Solving* technique is very effective in getting people to think about everyone else in the organization as customers or potential customers. Further, this thinking quickly extends to external customers. People do develop a more *customer-driven mindset*.

In addition, the *Inter-Section Problem-Solving* technique has three side benefits:

1. Many inter-section problems get solved during panel meetings. Many more are improved later as sections pour over the meeting transcriptions.
2. As a result, people learn to adapt a *problem-solving mindset*. Rather than find fault or point fingers at others when things go wrong, they quickly look for ways to solve the problem.
3. This technique also provides people with a more comprehensive picture of the organization and everyone in it. People come to see and appreciate what other people are contributing to the organization’s success, highlighting everyone’s interdependence. Everyone comes to view the organization as a blend of many levels and many sections, working together to produce customer-valued products or services. In other words, they develop an *interdependent mindset*.

The connections between subgroups in an organization, all in the service of customers, can be pictured as a funnel, as shown to the right, using a County organization as an example. From the top level of the County to individual employees—departments, sections, and work groups—processes are interconnected in an effort to produce customer-valued services at the end of the funnel.

