



Employee Mirror: How Do Our Employees Think We Are Performing? (And Why Should it Matter?)

Companies are at an advantage if employees can wear the customer's hat – that is, thinking and experiencing the services and/or products as do their customers. What does this mean? Well it can mean several different things depending on the type of business you're in, but most generally it means *understanding and applying those same standards, used by your customers, to judge the quality of the service or product experience*. It also means knowing which aspects of that service or product are of greatest importance to customers and using that information as a basis for decision-making.

Consider the benefits of hiring/developing customer-sensitive employees. To wit, an employee realizes, even before the customer does, that a service or product is not up to par...perhaps it's broken, the wrong color, or their preferred appointment time isn't available. The employee can either fix the problem before it gets to the customer or, acknowledge the problem to the customer and then work with the customer to identify a satisfactory corrective action. In either case, the employee has avoided a potentially bigger problem, down the road, which may or may not have been brought to the company's attention by the customer and which could even have led to that customer's defection. Moreover, that same employee may determine that the problem is not unique and requires backroom attention and repair before other customers are affected.

Or, think about the employee who *really* understands how a customer uses a product. Not only will that employee be more sensitive and aware of possible product failings, but can also offer helpful suggestions that may not be in standard instructions. Here also, is someone who holds a wealth of knowledge and perspective – including the customer's perspective-- as the organization develops new products and services, or revamps processes.

It's not hard to understand how employees can be your edge in the marketplace. Unfortunately all too often, we see examples of just the opposite -- employees who are not in synch with customer needs and expectations and don't even seem to care. These employees can easily sabotage customer relationships and jeopardize corporate success.

Closing the gap between employee and customer performance standards and perceptions takes work. It starts with hiring the right employees, providing the right orientation and training; and continues with more (on-going) training, plus the right reinforcements and incentives. It also requires having access to the right information to reveal whether gaps exist, where they are, as well as how significant they are. Follow-up on any corrective action taken will also need to be assessed.

The Loyalty Research Center's Employee Mirror Survey provides a way to assess the level of customer-centricity among employees within your organization. With customer feedback in hand, employees are asked to complete the same or similar survey as that given to customers. Minimally, employees are asked to rate those areas that customers have indicated are weak. What you find when comparing the two sets of results – customers and employees – will provide insight as to whether or not your employees can effectively represent your customers internally, serving as the 'voice of the customer.'

Mirror results may suggest different conclusions and actions depending on the size of the perceptual gap as well as the level of performance quality. Where gaps are few and minimal, employees are considered as likely effective in not only identifying areas where changes need to be made but how best to make those changes with customer needs in mind. On the other hand, large gaps generally indicate that employees are out of step with customers. Depending on the direction of the differences, results can even suggest the existence of internal operating problems.

Taking measurement results to the next level is where the Loyalty Research Center can step in and help organizations at both the tactical and strategic levels. By applying qualitative research techniques, the Loyalty Research Center can work with your employees to zero in on specific areas of perceptual discrepancy and help identify possible solutions. At a strategic level, the Loyalty Research Center will not only interpret findings of where your employees are today on customer-centricity, but also help define implications on any future efforts to build a more customer-focused culture.