

Creating Demands for Our Services: *Customer Satisfaction is Key*

“I can’t get no satisfaction...I can’t get no good reaction. I try...and I try...and I try...and I try...” (Rolling Stones)

Most of us can think of experiences when we have felt this way as a customer. In order to create demands for our services, we have to make sure that our customers don’t react to us this way.

Imagine...If you were a customer at your place of employment, what would be most important to you? If you had a loved one that was a customer at your place of employment, what would be most important to you? What is most important to you as a professional?

Customer satisfaction might be defined as the fulfillment of a need or want; contentment; a source or means of enjoyment; gratification. To increase our value to the customer, we must satisfy the customer beyond their expectations. *Why?* Increased customer satisfaction drives the demand for our services which increases recognition by our peers and supervisors; which drives salary increases; and potentially means more work, better pay and more job satisfaction. In other words, happy customers increase our perceived value, income, and job security.

Customers today have higher expectations than ever before. Just keeping up with the day to day is not enough. Customers want us to identify potential problems, bring viable solutions and implement things that work. They want us to keep them informed by bringing them new and important information. They want us to ask what THEIR needs are--what’s important to them—and then fulfill those needs. Customers want more than just someone who maintains things. Customers expect IMMEDIATE solutions to their problems and concerns.

So how do we keep our customers satisfied? We need to take 5 Steps for Customer Satisfaction.

Step 1: Identify Your Customers

Clearly define who your customers are. In long term care, our customers include not only the residents, but also the families, our staff, our supervisors, the community, the government (surveyors and ombudsmen). The answer to the question, “Who are my customers?” should actually be “anyone who isn’t me”.

Step 2: Understand Your Customers’ Needs

The customer’s ultimate question is always, “What’s in it for me?” To answer this question, you have to view your service or product through the customer’s eyes. Ask your customers why they continue to use your product or service. Do you save them time? Money? Hassle? Do you improve their health? Reduce their need for more expensive procedures? Do you improve their quality of life? What is it that you do that is of benefit to your customers and how?

Step 3: Actively assess customer satisfaction by obtaining customer feedback.

Know where you stand now and what you need to do to improve. Always stay a step ahead of “the competition” and always stay a step ahead of what customers want and value. How? By continuously asking for feedback and improving on services. This can be done through customer satisfaction surveys that are either formal or informal. You can use verbal questions, written questionnaires, face to face interviews, or do them via phone, fax, email or mail. Determine what it is your customers value, and then ask the right questions to get the right feedback. Here

are some examples of questions that might be used to determine customer satisfaction related to meal service.

Rated Statements

Rating System: 1= Strongly agree; 2=Agree; 3=Neither agree or disagree; 4=Disagree; 5=Strongly disagree

- The food looks good
- The food tastes good
- My preferences are honored
- The staff is friendly
- Meals are on time
- If I don't like what is served, I am offered an alternative
- The dining atmosphere is pleasant
- I get the assistance I need in a timely manner
- Overall, I'm satisfied with the food service

Set a goal to conduct a Customer Satisfaction Survey. Plan your survey well, and be sure you use a standard format (Ex. yes/no questions or scale of 1 to 5). Gather your information so you can move to the next step.

Step 4: Evaluate and utilize feedback to monitor and maximize customer satisfaction.

Listen to your customers, and then apply what they tell you and make improvements. Get your whole team involved in the improvement process. Call a meeting with key staff from dietary, nursing and ancillary departments. Include some key residents, families, and your administrator and discuss the results of your customer satisfaction surveys. Set some goals on what you want to do to improve. Make a plan of action and assign responsibilities. Get your whole team involved in the improvement process. Everyone needs to be focused on one thing: PLEASING THE CUSTOMER. It takes a plan and it takes effort to provide: staff training, motivation, supervision and monitoring, and rewards based on customer satisfaction results.

5. Perform ongoing monitoring of customer satisfaction

Perform regular information gathering. Identify key customers and talk with them on a regular basis. Ask basic questions and obtain feedback on how you are doing. Make adjustments to service as needed to keep customers satisfied. Constant quality improvement is the goal.

Sum It Up

Know what your customers want, and provide it well—give 110%! Devote yourself to constant improvement. Be visible with your customers. Keep reminding them of the value you offer (answer the WIFFM question for them). Knowing and serving your customers well will guarantee your success! Create more demands for your services through excellence in customer satisfaction. The rewards will surely follow.

Excerpted from the presentation: **Creating Demands for Our Services: Customer Satisfaction is Key.**

©2004 Becky Dorner & Associates

Becky Dorner, RD, LD is a speaker and author who provides publications, presentations, and consulting services to enhance the quality of care for our nation's older adults. Visit www.BeckyDorner.com for free articles, newsletters, ezine and information, or call 1-800-342-0285