

# The Secret to Customer Loyalty and Employee Performance

By Vistage Speaker Jay Forte

There are two crucial elements for business success: Customer loyalty and employee performance. The key to gaining customer loyalty is to become a company worthy of their loyalty. The key to employee performance is earning the trust and respect of your employees. You can achieve both by staying close to your customers and employees.

Staying close is a three-step process. First you must ask meaningful, open-ended questions that invite customers and employees to talk, share and explain. Next, listen to the answers. And lastly, respond in ways that show you care.

## Know thy customer

Consider asking the following “stay close to your” customers questions. The answers to these questions will help your company provide a better product or service to your customer.

1. What's the most important thing you look for in a retail (service, construction, manufacturing, etc.) business? How do we compare with this?
2. Are we your first choice for products (service)? Why or why not?
3. We pride ourselves on our extraordinary service. What's the most extraordinary thing we have done for you? Why did this impress you?
4. If we could improve just one thing, what would be the most meaningful thing for you? What would the benefit be for you?
5. We're committed to creating a family here at \_\_\_\_\_. Have we made you feel part of our family? How? What else would you like to see to feel like family?

The best time to ask a customer questions is during the time of service or transaction. Let the customer know that you're taking notes or recording the response and what you'll do with the information. Remember to thank them for their input. If your service isn't face-to-face (i.e., conducted over the phone or online), create a casual short survey to email with a thank-you letter. In your letter, stress your commitment to improvement as this frequently encourages both a greater and more honest response. Once responses are received, present them at a recurring team meeting where you review customer comments and survey results. This builds the solicitation and review of customer perspectives into your organization's daily culture.

## Trust your employees

Employees are the key to delivering extraordinary service, and those who are good at what they do and love doing it tend to activate customer loyalty. A successful customer-focused organization is first an employee-focused organization. Here are five questions you might ask your employees to help get a sense for what might make them more satisfied, productive and enabled.

1. What are you good at and what do you love to do? How do you get to do this (these) in your job?
2. What two things do you need in the workplace to help you perform better?
3. What makes you feel important, valued and part of our workplace family?
4. What skills would help you feel more competent and confident in your job?
5. What other responsibilities or jobs in the organization would you like to be involved in?

The answers to these questions offers barometer of workplace effort, attitude and engagement. The CEO should openly share that overall workplace sentiment with all employees, comment on how it impacts business and what, if any, changes might be in the works based on the responses. While not all responses demand changes, all comments should be heard, recognized and considered.

When employees see a direct connection between their comments and the success of the organization, they are encouraged to offer continuing comments and perspectives, which keeps the CEO informed and connected.

Employees are your eyes, ears and voice to the customer world. They are your idea generators, your efficiency experts and your image-makers. Connect to them, know them, respond to them. An employee who feels listened to, well supported and personally cared for will provide the same responses for the customer. Great employees create great customer service.

Jay Forte is a speaker, consultant and nationally ranked thought leader. He applies years of research, along with his training as a CPA, working with organizations that want to successfully activate and inspire exceptional employee performance. Jay is author of “Fire Up Your Employees and Smoke Your Competition” and the new job seeker resource, “Stand Out and Get Hired.” For information on keynotes, speaking, consulting or to see the Get Fired Up Blog, <http://www.LiveFiredUp.com> or call: 401-338-3505.