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UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Organizations need to understand what customers want, and how they value what they receive. The organization can then provide the level of service to meet the customer's specific service expectation, or work with the customer to modify its expectations in line with what can be effectively provided.

There are two separate facets of the customer-value proposition on which an organization must focus. First, an organization needs to understand what a customer values or will value (the voice of the customer). Once the organization understands the customers' needs and expectations, they can incorporate them into the design of their processes.

To accomplish this, the organization needs to have a well-developed process to identify customer needs and desires. Customer needs are often not apparent, and expectations are not always stated. It is imperative that the organization has a process to gather and understand these needs and expectations. Some organizations use a tool called "quality functional deployment" (QFD) to accomplish this task.

The second aspect is to convert those needs and expectations into products and services that meet those needs and expectations. Those services and products are provided through end-to-end processes. The challenge is to continually incorporate the voice of the customer into the processes that deliver the product and services offerings to meet those needs and expectations.

From your customers' perspective, how can you be "easy to do business with" (as Michael Hammer often talked about)? That requires a customer focus. You need to understand what your customer wants, and design your processes to meet that need. To the customer, the interaction needs to be seamless, and maybe even pleasurable.

An example is a great restaurant experience. That experience doesn't just happen. It is planned, and practiced. Every employee of that restaurant is involved in the delivery of the experience. If one part does not work, the whole experience suffers, and the customer does not receive the planned service. It may be ok, but not memorable (which may not lead to a return visit).

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Other restaurants may not deliver a great experience, but a consistent experience. For most customers, that is what they want: a high value, consistent, and timely dining experience. Customers will continue to return as long as their criteria are met. This service delivery may not require the same level of detail planning to create an experience, but the design and execution of the processes is just as key to provide the customer with the consistent experience that they require.

These two restaurants are targeting different customers. Some of the processes are close to the same, but overall have critical differences that define the customer experience and are designed to meet different customer expectations and requirements. To their target customer, they are “easy to do business with”.

Some other examples of service providers that are easy to do business with:

- An auto repair shop that drops off a loaner at your house, picks up your car, and returns it at the end of the day when you are home
- A cable installer who arrives on time for your 8:30 installation
- A hotel that puts you in the right room without being asked at check in (a quiet room away from the elevator, not facing the street)

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