Back to Basics in Customer Service

By Elizabeth M. Keim,
Managing Partner, Integrated Quality Resources, LLC

Being a quality professional, I spend a lot of time thinking about customer service and the dilemmas we face trying to balance providing exceptional service and managing the costs of that service. In service industries, customer service is the single thing that differentiates one company from another, so we must solve this dilemma with the optimal solution.

Excellent customer service is getting harder to provide. Customers have ever-increasing expectations. Their expectations are more diverse with increased globalization. Each generation prefers to interact differently and each has their own priorities. Some industries face new regulations. Customers transfer expectations of one industry to other industries, such as wanting hotel-like room service meals in hospitals.

We all have stories about good and bad customer service. These are examples of the dilemma. In each, the company is trying to manage costs, but managed to dissatisfy and even lose a customer in the process.

I interviewed a man, Bob, about the experience he had trying to rent a car. Bob’s first call started with listening to an automated system and pushing a lot of buttons to be able to reach a real person. The real person spoke quickly and had a bit of an accent. Bob is 80 and suffers from some hearing loss, so he was having difficulty understanding the person on the phone. She was very efficient, a reservation was made, and the call ended quickly, but Bob still had unanswered questions. The next day Bob called the company again. This time after some effort he was able to reach a real person in the local office. Bob thought this person was not very helpful, so he got frustrated and canceled the reservation. Next, Bob called another company to make a reservation.
While he was on the phone with the second company, someone at the first company called Bob back. After making a reservation with the second company, Bob attempted to return the call to the person at the first company. Bob informed the person answering the phone that he was returning a call. She said she had no idea who of the 50 people in the office had called Bob, so they ended the call.

I recall a company I worked with that was trying to manage talk time on a technical support desk. Once a call was taken, the information was logged in an incident record and the record was sent to the technical group for resolution. The calls were about 48 minutes long and the goal was to reduce the time to 45 minutes; these were very complex technical calls. The call center staff worked hard to get the information and get the customers off the phone in 45 minutes, then forwarded the incident record to the technical resolution group. The incident record was often incomplete so it was routed back to the call center for completion. The call center staff would call the customer back, complete the incident record, and send it to the technical resolution group again.

A woman I interviewed, Jane, won't shop at a large department store "ever again" because of a $4 billing error that the department store employee would not reverse. Given Jane's shopping habits and the number of people she has told about the incident, this is not a trivial loss.

We must figure out how to optimize our services while managing our costs. We also must realize that most of these situations are handled by our customer-facing employees. We have put our futures in their hands. Have we equipped them with the right tools, guidelines, and skills? Leaders in customer service need to think about how we train and motivate our customer-facing employees.

In Jeffrey Likert's *The Toyota Way*, he said that a basic principle at Toyota is respect for the individual. When we hire people, we hire the best people we can find. After they are hired, we don't always continue to treat them as though they are the best. We can't expect our people to respect our customers if we don't respect our people. Everyone deserves respect: our employees, our business partners, and our customers. If we are short or rude with our customer-facing people, they will be short and rude with our customers. Are we willing to sit beside them and do their jobs? Are we leading and teaching by example? Are we taking time to get to know our employees? Are we empathetic with them? If we expect excellence from our people when dealing with customers, do we strive for excellence in our dealings with our employees?

We need to ensure our customer-facing employees can communicate effectively, be empathetic, and display common courtesy. These are not things we can assume they learned at home or at school.

We also need to think about how we motivate employees. Daniel Pink, a career analyst and author, discusses some pertinent research in a TED talk that can be found here. The research he cites states that rewards for performance narrow an employee's focus and do not help the employee see the bigger picture. It goes on to say that for routine work, rewards can be beneficial; however, if we want employees to consider the bigger picture and a greater number of possible solutions, the rewards can be detrimental.

Pink goes on to state that our employees are motivated by autonomy, mastery, and a sense of purpose. If we truly want our employees to engage with our customers rather than just comply with a set of standards, we need to give them autonomy and a sense of purpose. Their purpose is to serve our customers to the best of their ability. We need to care for our employees, give them a purpose, give them the mastery of the right skills, and then give them autonomy.

Consider Zappos. Zappos' employees know that their objective is to ensure every customer is satisfied. Time on the call does not matter, in fact, longer is better. The employee’s job is to connect with customers on an emotional level and work with the customer however long it may take to help the customer. Employees and customers have a high level of loyalty to Zappos.

We need to rethink how we train our customer-facing employees. Perhaps we need to train them in very different areas and then give them more autonomy and fewer "rules."

What else can we do? Be a good customer. Everyone deserves respect, especially those who serve us. Are we courteous, empathetic, and communicating effectively? We can't expect people to serve us well if we don't contribute to the quality of the experience.
A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

With 2016 now behind us, I want to take the opportunity to formally thank the Service Quality Division (SQD) member leader team for all their incredible work in 2016. This is the group of individuals who work hard to provide our SQD members with programs geared toward service quality information and skills development. What you may not realize is that this team is made up entirely of volunteers; people who are passionate about service quality, and want to share this passion with others. You have helped make this past year a success, and have made my first year as chair a very fulfilling and rewarding opportunity.

Since our last issue, there has been a lot going on within our division. The most significant was our 25th Annual Service Quality Conference. With some incredible speakers, and highly engaged participants, the conference was a great success. Not only did we continue to deliver on our 2016 theme, “Evolving the Customer Experience,” but we also took the time to celebrate the past chairs for their contributions to making this division what it is today.

Within this issue of Competitive Advantage, we were able to include an article from a past chair (Liz Keim with her article “Back to Basics in Customer Service”), a valuable sponsor (CMMI Institute with their article “Build Quality with CMMI: Take Your Organization to the Next Level”), and an industry leader who has supported the Service Quality Division many times over the years (Joe De Feo with his article on “How Can We Perform Better? Developing a Systems Perspective”). I think this content will give you some food for thought, and will help guide us service quality practitioners into 2017.

This year will again be a period of evolution for our division. We are looking for your input to guide us in the right direction moving forward.

I offer a big thank you to you, our members, for being a part of our division. And I look forward to a productive and successful 2017!

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Build Quality With CMMI: Take Your Organization to the Next Level

Capability is the backbone of an organization. A lack of organizational capability can lead to cost overruns, missed or close deadlines, poor morale, quality problems, customer complaints, and the inability to repeat previous success. But while organizational leaders recognize the need for capability improvement—according to a McKinsey & Company survey, executives view capability building as a top three strategic priority—they often don’t know how to address their need.

CMMI Models

Capability maturity model integration (CMMI) provides a solution to increasing capability gaps. Proven effective in organizations and governments globally over the last 25 years, CMMI consists of collected best practices designed to promote the behaviors that lead to improved performance in any organization. CMMI’s pathway to capability improvement can be customized with three models for different environments:

- CMMI for development: Build capability when engineering or developing products and services.
- CMMI for acquisition: Build capability when acquiring products and services.
- CMMI for services: Build capability when providing services.

These models provide a framework for developing, improving, and sustaining business performance in your environment. They enable you to determine if your current way of doing things is working (if you’re improving) and they lead you toward greater continuous improvement.

CMMI Maturity Levels

A key component to capability improvement is CMMI’s maturity levels. Maturity levels provide a rigorous benchmark rating method that enables you to compare your organization’s capability to its competitors, its industry, and itself over time. CMMI provides five maturity levels that demonstrate a visible path for improvement: initial, managed, defined, quantitatively managed, and optimizing.

As an organization advances its capabilities, it can expect to achieve a higher maturity level by identifying areas of improvement, working to correct these areas, and integrating these solutions across the organization. High-maturity organizations have both lower risk and increased quality. The higher the organization’s maturity, the better its performance. By achieving a high CMMI maturity level, an organization demonstrates a deeper commitment to improving capabilities using statistical and other quantitative methods. A focus on continuous improve-
ment means that high-maturity organizations are constantly evolving, adapting, and growing to meet the needs of stakeholders and customers.

CMMI Around the World

Thousands of organizations have implemented CMMI. In 2015 alone, more than 1,900 high-performing organizations earned a CMMI maturity level rating. By implementing CMMI and communicating their maturity level to stakeholders, organizations highlight their capability and commitment to excellence.

CMMI has been implemented in 101 countries around the world, with 11 governments investing in CMMI to support economic development in their countries. For over 25 years, high-performing organizations in a variety of industries, including aerospace, finance, healthcare, software, defense, transportation, and telecommunications, have earned a CMMI maturity level rating and proved they are capable business partners and suppliers.

In early 2016, ISACA acquired CMMI® Institute. ISACA and CMMI Institute share a vision for advancing organizational performance that centers on driving excellence in the IT, information systems governance, data management governance, software, and systems engineering functions in organizations across a spectrum of industries.

Learn about organizations that have implemented CMMI to improve their capability here.

Get Started

Ready to dive in? Download a model to get started:

- CMMI for development
- CMMI for acquisition
- CMMI for services

For a deeper dive, the CMMI Institute offers several training courses and certification options. Elect for on-site training or take the online introductory Fundamentals of CMMI Elearning course from the comfort of your own home or office. Learn more about your CMMI training and certification options at http://cmmiinstitute.com/grow-your-career.

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DO YOU HAVE A QUALITY STORY TO SHARE?

SQD IS SEEKING ARTICLES FOR FUTURE ISSUES OF THIS NEWSLETTER!

We are looking for articles that explore the key concepts of quality and target the interests of specific sectors and varying experience levels. For 2017, we are particularly interested in articles that support this year’s theme of “Delivering What Customers Truly Want.”

The following types of content are particularly appealing to our audience:

- Case studies: Step-by-step descriptions and results of specific projects that you or your organization completed
- Perspectives pieces: Your own assessment, based on experience and/or research, of trends and developments in quality
- Tutorials: How-to discussions or illustrations for quality practitioners at any level of experience
- Human-interest features: Less technical discussions of your own role, experiences, or insights about working in the quality profession

Visit asq.org/service/interaction/submission-guidelines.html for more information.
What’s Your Career Path?

Demonstrate that you have what it takes to help your organization build and improve its capabilities. Training and certification are proof that you have the skills and experience to be an asset to your employer.

The CMMI Associate Certificate is a great place to start.

Whether you are new to capability and performance improvement, or already serving as a subject matter expert on CMMI-based project teams, the CMMI Associate Certificate can get your career on the right path or take it to the next level.

1) Successfully complete one prerequisite CMMI training course.
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   - Introduction to CMMI for Services
   - Fundamentals of CMMI Elearning

2) Prepare for the CMMI Associate exam.
   - The Fundamentals of CMMI Elearning course is a great way to get ready.

3) Take the CMMI Associate exam.
   - The 30-question, 90-minute exam is online and open book.

4) Receive your certification.
   - Pass the CMMI Associate exam and your certification will be granted.
   - You will receive a certification diploma and be listed in the online CMMI Associate Directory.

Thousands of CMMI-related job postings.*

Jobs that require CMMI certification pay well — really well.

A 2015 Dice Tech Salary Survey shows that CMMI skills command a salary of

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To learn more, or to register for Fundamentals of CMMI Elearning, visit:

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How Can We Perform Better? Developing a Systems Perspective

By Dr. Joseph A. De Feo, Chairman and CEO, Juran Global

In the current economic downturn, a lot of organizations are doing more with less. Fewer people, less money; same ambitious goals. Businesses have been slow to hire because of the higher productivity of the people they have retained.

If you have seen your organization’s strategic plan, you have a good idea what its goals are and some ideas about how you can help achieve them. At the same time, you are probably busy enough to not be looking for more work. So how do you make your job more interesting and your role in the organization more valuable without burning yourself out with the effort?

The answer is to work more efficiently. The way to do that is through process thinking. A smart question you can ask is, “What’s the process?” The question gets people thinking about flaws in the process rather than focusing on people. Inevitably, focusing on the process triggers questions about what can be done to fix it.

If your organization has formal approaches to process management and improvement, you should learn what they are and how you can use them. If your organization doesn’t have formal approaches—or if it does, but reserves them for sanctioned process management teams—you’ll benefit from learning and applying the basics of process thinking.

The first is to understand what a process entails, which is captured in this SIPOC diagram (see above diagram).

About the author

Dr. Joseph A. De Feo is a leading quality management practitioner and successor to Dr. Juran as president of Juran Global. He is recognized worldwide for his expertise in enabling organizations to achieve business excellence.

Dr. De Feo’s varied areas of expertise include coaching executives to understand key factors in driving organization-wide change programs and deploying breakthrough management principles like lean, Six Sigma, strategic planning, and business process improvement. To learn more about Juran Global, visit juran.com.
Every process has customers and suppliers. You may be a supplier of inputs to some processes and a customer of the outputs of others. For example, if you are working on a financial report, you are a customer of whoever is supplying you with the data you need to produce the report. You are also a customer of IT, which manages the technology that puts those numbers at your fingertips. You are a supplier to the people who send the report to. What you do to develop the report is the middle (process) part of the diagram.

A process is often a sub-process within a larger process. To use the same example, your financial report may be one element in an organizational financial report. Your process for putting together your report is a sub-process to the bigger organizational financial reporting process. And the people who receive your report and integrate it into the larger report are your customers.

What can you do to make your processes work better, your job easier, and you more effective? There are several steps you can take. You can start using some of them immediately, but several require more knowledge and practice than this guide can provide. If you have a career development component to your annual performance review, consider asking your manager to add training in one or more of these areas. You can make a compelling argument that the training will help you do your job better and help improve the performance of your group and department.

However, if you are looking at your performance from a leadership standpoint, one excellent place to begin is to embrace the concept of a systems perspective.

Performance improvement assessments such as the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the EFQM European Quality Award provide a systems perspective for managing your organization, and its key processes to achieve results—and to strive for performance excellence. The seven categories with the Baldrige Criteria for example, the core values, and the scoring guidelines form the building blocks and the integrating mechanism for the system. Successful management of overall performance requires organization-specific synthesis, alignment, and integration.

Synthesis means looking at your organization as a whole and building on key business attributes, including your core competencies, strategic objectives, action plans, and work systems. Alignment means using the key linkages among the requirements given in the Baldrige Criteria categories to ensure consistency of plans, processes, measures, and actions. Integration builds on alignment so that the individual components of your performance management system operate in a fully interconnected manner and deliver anticipated results.

Henry Ford Health Systems (HFHS), a 2011 Baldrige Award recipient, is one of the country’s largest healthcare systems, exceeding $4 billion in revenues; it is a national leader in clinical care, research, and education. It includes the 1,200-member Henry Ford Medical Group, five hospitals, Health Alliance Plan, Henry Ford Physician Network, 32 primary care centers, and many other health-related entities throughout southeast Michigan.

HFHS’s commitment to patient safety is emphasized through its evidenced-based global harm campaign to reduce or eliminate some 23 sources of harm. A prime example of this success is Henry Ford Hospital’s reduction in central-line infections from 10 per year to three since 2008. HFHS has accomplished a 40 percent reduction in mortality since 2004—a result of successful implementation, consistency of plans, processes, and measures, and the spread of several improvements.

A systems perspective includes your senior leaders’ focus on strategic directions and on your customers. It means that your senior leaders monitor, respond to, and manage performance based on your results. A systems perspective also includes using your measures, indicators, core competencies, and organizational knowledge to build your key strategies. It means linking these strategies with your work systems and key processes. Additionally, it means aligning your resources to improve your overall performance and your focus on customers and stakeholders. Thus, a systems perspective means managing your whole organization, as well as its components, to achieve success.

Using both short- and long-term planning horizons, HFHS senior leaders make decisions that effectively balance the need to provide quality care while also sustaining and building the business.

“We started our journey with the intent of using the Baldrige framework to become a better organization—not to just win an award. We integrated the framework into our strategic planning and business operations. It became part of our everyday work. If we hadn’t adopted the framework, our culture would not have changed.”
Since 1979, Juran has been providing research and pragmatic solutions enabling organizations to increase product and service quality, streamline business processes, reduce costs, and heighten their competitive edge.

Planning for your self-sufficiency is part of every Juran engagement. Our goal is to transfer our knowledge to you, enabling you with education and experience. The process improvement and problem-solving steps we use are clear, transferable, and applicable to the wide-ranging issues organizations face. We’ll work with you to understand the unique issues that your organization deals with and help you to make the sound decisions that will achieve your strategic goals.

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Congratulations on 25 years of excellence!
Webinar
Quality and CSI: Drivers for a Successful Program

You’ve established a quality improvement program. You’ve assigned quality and continual service improvement roles within your organization. You’ve even had some project successes. But interest is waning. The program seems to be withering away as another failed attempt at the elusive target of service excellence. Everyone is back doing their “real” day-to-day work.

All too often, the most well-intentioned quality and service improvement programs fail. Why does that happen? Are there ways to avoid pitfalls and have a thriving culture of CSI?

Based on lessons from several implementations of improvement programs, this discussion outlines observed snares and snags to highlight the key requirements of a successful and impactful improvement program within your organization.

Check out the webinar here: https://asq.webex.com/asq/lsr.php?RCID=b93f516163a749558f7c58e31b96854f

About the Webinar Speaker: Ron Read

Ron Read is a management consultant with more than 30 years of experience in roles that span process improvement and IT service management delivery for clients and partners across Canada, United States, and South America. Read is a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, delivering optimization, process efficiencies, and improvement solutions resulting in substantial benefits for a wide spectrum of industries.

In addition to serving as an account recovery manager for multiple clients inclusive of Fortune 100 companies, Read provided a measurement and validation framework to evaluate global delivery capabilities for the identification and replication of best practices across the organization, providing consistent and predictable service delivery.

Read has developed continuous service improvement and strategic planning programs based on Lean Six Sigma for a variety of delivery organizations, provisioning additional value and enhanced competitiveness within existing engagements. He has also had the opportunity to develop and deliver Lean Six Sigma training and provide coaching for both Green and Black Belt candidates as they pursued their improvement projects and certification.

Read has two daughters and two sons-in-law (who are brothers)! He and his wife have made Calgary home for almost four decades. When he is not working, you are likely to find him playing bass in an old-time rock ‘n’ roll band!
Recap of Conference

25th Annual Service Quality Conference | October 24 – 25, 2016 | Chicago, IL

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all the enthusiastic, passionate attendees of the 25th annual Service Quality Conference. It was hosted on October 24 – 25, 2016 in Chicago, IL. The theme of this year’s silver anniversary conference—a true milestone in the history of the ASQ Service Quality Division—was Customer Experience Evolution. The quality and content of the sessions and speakers were incredible! More than 100 quality professionals and practitioners from an array of industries and countries attended the conference in the pursuit of advancing the quality of customer service experience. All the past division chairs, as well as our current chair, Leia Patzernuk (in the center of the picture), were recognized for their tireless dedication. A sincere thank you to all ASQ Service Quality Division leaders who planned and executed the conference, as well as the keynote speakers and presenters who brought significant value to the event. Another big thank you to the conference exhibitors and sponsors who graciously and generously supported our event.

Speaker John Goodman on “Implementing Quality in Sales and Marketing” (left)

Speaker Sherri Stettin on “How a Utility Company Shifted Its Paradigm to Deliver” (right)
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For additional information visit the ASQ website, www.asq.org.

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Vision of Competitive Advantage: To be the highest value newsletter in the world on issues pertaining to service quality.
Division website: asq.org/service

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Editor: Ali Nigh, ali.nigh@valeocon.com

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The ASQ Service Quality Division will be the leading worldwide provider of knowledge resulting in the improvement of service quality operational performance excellence.

MISSION
The ASQ Service Quality Division addresses service quality globally by providing a body of knowledge to individuals, organizations, and communities through the creation, gathering, and exchange of information.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
• We exist to serve our customers, and value their geographic and occupational diversity.
• We strive for operational excellence and continuous improvement in our endeavors.
• We support ASQ and follow the ASQ Code of Ethics.

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SQD is looking for volunteers to record webinars on topics interesting to division members. If you have written a paper, delivered a presentation, or know about some innovative, “best-in-class” service industry practice, this is an opportunity to share your knowledge with your fellow quality professionals. Please contact Maria Stoletova at m_stoletova@hotmail.com to discuss webinar opportunities.