

Utilize Customer-Focused Job Descriptions

By Drew Tonsmeire

Customer satisfaction was recently named as a top priority for 200 companies surveyed by Insight Express. As a small business owner, have you ever considered using your employee job descriptions as a way to maximize customer service and enhance your company's goals?

What's in a Name?

There's an old story about a South Georgia farmer that received a visit from the Social Security Administration. There had been a complaint that he wasn't paying proper wages to his help and the agent was sent to investigate.

Speaking to the farmer, the agent said, "Give me a list of your employees, their job titles, and how much you pay them."

The farmer replied, "I have a hired man that I pay \$400 a week, plus room and board. I also have a cook that I pay \$300 a week, plus room and board."

"Anyone else?" asked the agent. "Yes," the farmer replied. "There's a half-wit here, works about 18 hours a day. I pay him \$10 a week and give him chewing tobacco."

"Aha!" roared the agent. "I want to talk to that half-wit."

The farmer laconically replied, "You're talking to him."

The Value of Job Titles

One of the main reasons we work for ourselves is to make up the rules as we go along. A key element controlled by small business owners involves the creation of job titles. These titles serve several uses in a business. Firstly, they define an individual's duties within the company. Secondly, they indicate levels of job responsibility and authority within an

organization. Thirdly, titles often guide the process of personnel development and promotion.

Most importantly, however, job titles impact the relationships of individuals, both inside personnel and your customers, outside of the company. Small businesses need not be constrained by the stringent culture found in corporate America.

Breaking Ranks

Many small businesses can break away from traditional job titles. For instance, replace the title of "Receptionist" with *Director of First Impressions*. With such a descriptive title, the job-holder better appreciates how every contact impacts the perceptions held by a caller or visitor.

Another small business calls their network specialist *Computer Geek Extraordinaire*. Think about it, whom would you rather call to fix your computer, the "Network Systems Technician" or the company "Computer Geek?"

Think intentionally about the traditional titles designating ownership of the company. A husband and wife team utilized the traditional titles of CEO and President for the husband. His wife, however, chose ICEE as her title. What does it mean? "In Charge of Everything Else." Though this is a humorous job title, it has become useful as a conversation starter. She and her company will be remembered, which is a key reason for distributing business cards.

The very best example of a creative, yet descriptive job title is the one given to the lead customer service person for Barnsley Gardens Resort, a luxury resort in northwest Georgia. She holds the title of "Fairy Godmother." Although this job title may not be found in the Department of Labor's database, her unique role clearly communicates to the resort guests that she can fulfill their every wish.

Choosing Job Titles Wisely

An unusual job title can help your employees stand out from the crowd. Letting employees develop their own job titles can provide a low-cost employee perk. Take care, however, that the end result dovetails with your company's goals and provides a

customer benefit. Becoming the *Senior Vice President of Strategic Operations* may not change the Office Manager's responsibilities, but if your customers respond better to "*Power Behind the Throne*," then there may be value in the name.

As branding becomes the buzz word of the day, business owners can extend this concept to their personnel operations. Distinctive, identifiable job titles can help define a company's unique selling proposition. Job titles serve as another way for a company to provide enhanced customer satisfaction. So, what's in a name? Go ask your *Fairy Godmother*.



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