



A Customer-Centric Approach to Human Resource Management

Customer-centric organizations need employees and agents who 1) are deeply committed to delivering customer experience that generates value for customers, the organization, and themselves; and 2) are capable of delivering that kind of experience. Creating, sustaining, and expanding relationships with those who possess this ability and level of engagement is a fundamental challenge for all customer-centric organizations.

The key to addressing the challenge is to recognize that your employees and agents are internal customers themselves. They want to be offered a value proposition that is attractive relative to the competition and stays

attractive over time. Like external customers, your employees and agents want a positive experience with your organization. Without it, they'll find it difficult to deliver a positive experience to your end customer.

Here's an approach to human resource management that can help you nurture employee and agent relationships in a more customer-centric way.

ACQUISITION Create Valuable Relationships

For an employee or agent relationship to be valuable, it must benefit your organization and the person you're recruiting. Consider these 4 steps to make it happen.

1. IDENTIFY WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IN AN EMPLOYEE OR AGENT.

Define who your ideal candidate would be, then determine the minimum requirements they'd need to meet in order to do the job you need them to do. Consider the five core qualities of a customer-centric employee or agent, but also consider your organization's current priorities and the specific gaps that need to be filled.

2. OFFER THE LABOR MARKET AN APPROPRIATELY ATTRACTIVE VALUE PROPOSITION.

When you market the position, be creative about offering a package of resources that you think will appeal to the kind of person you'd like to recruit. Many different types of resources can be combined to craft an attractive value proposition; it's not just a question of salary and health care benefits. Whatever you offer must be attractive relative to the competition.

3. SOURCE THE BEST AVAILABLE CANDIDATES.

Target your recruitment efforts where you think you have a good chance of finding the profile you're looking for (e.g., ask employees and agents who already demonstrate engagement and ability to recommend others, or look to their background for clues about where you might find others with similar profiles). Next, screen candidates to identify the ones who bring the most attractive combination of skills, values, attitudes, knowledge, and energy – those that come closest to your ideal candidate.

4. AGREE WITH EACH POTENTIAL CANDIDATE ON A PLAN TO DEVELOP THEIR COMPETENCES TO MINIMUM ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS BEFORE "COMMITMENT."

It's unlikely that any new employee or agent will meet your ideal profile, but they should meet minimum requirements. If not, assess how willing they are to make the effort to do so, and negotiate a plan for strengthening critical areas before an offer of full employee or agent status is made.



RETENTION

Sustain Valuable Relationships

Once you recruit employees and agents who are engaged and able to deliver customer experience that generates value, you'll want to retain them. Not only would they be expensive to replace, but losing good people affects the morale and confidence of those who remain. Consider the following **5 steps** for sustaining relationships with employees and agents who generate value.

1. CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS UP FRONT. Once an employee or agent decides to work with you, be sure they understand the resources you're making available and the performance you expect in return. Use the onboarding process to welcome them and communicate the importance of the contributions they'll make to delivering positive customer experience.

2. DELIVER WHAT YOU PROMISE. If you promise a certain package of resources (e.g., information, skill development, access to rewards, etc.), you need to provide those resources or make sure people understand what it was about their performance that resulted in those benefits not being earned. Be transparent about what's promised and delivered so everyone feels they're treated fairly and with respect.

3. MONITOR AND ADJUST TO ENSURE DELIVERY OF VALUABLE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. Nurture a culture of open communication and put systems in place that facilitate dialogue, feedback, and accountability. If performance isn't meeting standards or targets, work with employees and agents to figure out why. Timely feedback can drive performance improvements. To facilitate improvement, consider

making changes to resources promised (e.g., provide access to additional information, a new tool, or coaching).

4. PROVIDE RECOURSE MECHANISMS THAT PROTECT THE RELATIONSHIP WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG. No matter how hard everyone tries, there can be misunderstandings and you, your organization, and your employees and agents can make mistakes. If a system is in place for coping with errors in the short term, it can prevent a relationship from unraveling in the long term.

5. OFFER AN APPROPRIATELY ATTRACTIVE VALUE PROPOSITION FOR THE FUTURE. As employees and agents continue to work with you, the resources they offer will evolve – as will their hopes and dreams. The external environment will also evolve, with customers demanding a different kind of experience and the competition offering a potentially more attractive value proposition. To sustain your employee and agent relationships, offer benefits that meet future needs – not just their needs today.

EXPANSION

Develop Ever More Valuable Relationships

Just as the needs of your employees and agents evolve over time, so too do the needs of your organization. This presents a challenge as well as an opportunity: The challenge is to ensure that everyone continues to benefit from the relationship so it remains healthy and productive. The opportunity is to support the empowerment of your employees and agents so they become 1) more deeply committed to delivering customer experience; and 2) capable of generating greater value for your organization, your customers, and themselves. Consider the following **4 steps** for motivating and enabling your employees and agents.

1. NURTURE A CULTURE AND STRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS LEARNING AND GROWTH. Many individuals have an intrinsic drive to do well and learn what's necessary to achieve their goals. If you make it easy for employees and agents to access resources that facilitate professional development, a lot of learning and growth will happen without you even having to ask.

2. ASSESS ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE BENEFITS YOU SEEK AND THE VALUE YOUR EMPLOYEES AND AGENTS ACTUALLY PROVIDE. As your organization's needs evolve, it's important to periodically check whether employees and agents are prepared to take you where you want to go. They may be performing well relative to your goals for this period but require a different set of resources to succeed in the next phase.

3. ASSESS ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE BENEFITS YOUR EMPLOYEES AND AGENTS SEEK AND THE VALUE YOU ACTUALLY PROVIDE. The value proposition you offered when they joined your

organization may not be sufficient to keep their interest moving forward. Find out what matters to them now and think creatively about how your organization can help them achieve their personal goals for the future (not just the organization's goals).

4. NEGOTIATE HOW RESOURCES MIGHT BE ADDED OR LEVERAGED IN NEW WAYS TO GENERATE MORE VALUE. Once you identify a gap between the benefits you or your employees and agents seek and those currently provided, discuss what might close that gap and how the missing resources may be acquired. Not all missing resources will come from you or your organization. Consider how each individual's knowledge, skills, values, networks, tools, time, and energy may be leveraged in a joint effort to expand the potential of your relationship.