Quality - Delivering Customer Requirements, Expectations, and Delight

By Enrique Bekerman

Continuous Improvement methods, such as Lean, Six Sigma and ISO standards, require that we look at Quality from our Customer's perspective. These methodologies recognize that delivering Quality products and services is the key to long term customer loyalty. It is obvious that you must first deliver on your customer's requirements and expectations, but in today's global economy this is necessary, but not sufficient. Today, you need to go the extra mile to gain your customer's loyalty by finding new ways of delivering superior products and delightful service.

- Customer requirements: Usually, it is easy to tell what the customer requires. What have customers told you they want? Are the specifications reasonable? Is your process in-control (stable)? Are your processes capable of delivering product within the specifications without rejections, or, rework? Do you have the capacity and ability to deliver the product or service on time? The answer to these questions is crucial to making the project profitable.

- Customer expectations: What else might the customer want, but have not told us about? You must be aware that a customer doesn't always tell you everything he wants. Sometimes, he may assume that the vendor knows what is needed without clearly specifying what that is. For instance, packaging may not be specified in the purchase order, contract or other documents, but the customer still expects the product to arrive without damage. Another example is that a customer may consider early deliveries as troublesome as late deliveries. Early deliveries may inflate inventories and may cause extra handling and storage expenses.

- Customer delight: What can you do to exceed customer requirements and expectations? Your competition is also aware of your customer's expectations, so how do you gain a competitive edge? If you are only satisfying your customer, what prevents you from losing the customer to your competition?

Delighting the customer means going beyond requirements and expectations and finding ways to offer superb products and services that makes the customer feel special. Warm chocolate chip cookies in mid-afternoon, apples on the front desk counter, mints on your pillow, frequent-stay awards are just a few ways in which hotel companies try to go beyond our requirements and expectations to delight us and gain our loyalties. However, trying to delight customers while their more basic expectations are not met is counterproductive. For instance, an airline serving you warm cookies would not make up for losing your luggage or arriving too late to catch your connecting flight.

The key to long term loyalty is continuously satisfying your customer's needs, but then going beyond expectations by making each transaction a delightful experience.
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He has developed and presented workshops on SPC, Team Problem Solving, Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma Belt Training and has authored articles on Quality Improvement for the small enterprise. He is past Chair for the American Society for Quality (ASQ) Section 1515, Greater Palm Beach. Enrique is an Associate member of the Broward Alliance and the Florida District Export Council of the US Commercial Service.

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