

# McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

## How Does Your Company Really Treat Customers?

When was the last time you did business with you? Have you ever tried to place an order with your own company? Called about a problem with a shipment? Requested information on new products? It's not often that we get to see our business from the same side of the desk (or phone) as our customers. Because of that, we may be out of touch with how our customers really are being treated. Here are some suggestions on how to learn more about your company's customer service.

**Customer surveys.** If you want to know how your customers feel they're being treated, why not ask them? Many companies enclose brief surveys with invoices or statements. Others mail them out once a year. While more costly, a survey conducted by an outside group may provide more telling results because customers are more likely to open up to an independent researcher. Whatever you decide, if you ask your customers questions, be sure the organization is ready to respond. Asking – and then failing to take appropriate and swift action – may be more damaging than not asking at all.

**Mystery shoppers.** This has been a practice in retail businesses for years. Secret shoppers are hired to visit stores as customers. They go through the motions of shopping and buying and then report back on their experiences. However, this method doesn't apply only to retail. You can hire a mystery shopper for industrial products or professional services, too. A secret shopper may not be able to evaluate every area of customer service for these types of companies, but they can give you feedback on how their requests for information were handled and how the company was presented in a sales or marketing call.

**Focus Groups.** Here's another excellent way to find out what your customers or clients really think. Invite some of them to a focus group session facilitated by an independent moderator. Focus groups provide a valuable means to evaluate services or test new ideas. Focus groups are usually interviews conducted with 6-10 people at the same time within the same group. Companies can glean a great deal of information during a focus group session. Many organizations depend upon this type of service/product evaluation in order to keep up with and exceed customer expectations.

**MBWA.** Tom Peters, widely known management expert, coined the phrase "Management by Walking Around." Depending on your type of company, you may be able to observe how your customers are treated just by walking through your facility or offices. Listen. Observe. Learn.

Don't assume your customers are being treated as you would like them to be. Find out conclusively, then take appropriate action to help your team provide the kind of service to customers everyone can be proud of. Taking time to view the business "from the other side" not only benefits the customer – it benefits the business.

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McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations' life cycle. MKS&H's organizational consulting division, Tandem Partners, specializes in people strategies that drive business results. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please contact Margaret Wilson at 410-296-6200 or via email: [margaret@mksh.com](mailto:margaret@mksh.com).

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