

Solutions Article 3

Manage Excellence to Achieve Stability in a Volatile Marketplace

In today's fast paced and competitive business environment, keeping pace with technology, innovation, competition and fulfilling customers' desires can leave a small business breathless. However, there is one thing that will never change, and that is a customer's desire for an excellent product and excellent service.

Striving for Excellence

Achieving and managing excellence throughout your entire organization will give you a leg up in the race for customers. This can be the challenge of a lifetime when you are juggling the relationships with vendors, distributors, employees and suppliers.

Small businesses typically have limited resources and can often get swept right off their feet and out of the marketplace because of rapid changes in technology and customer tastes.

A commitment to excellence is the great equalizer between small and big companies. In fact, smaller companies are often better at achieving excellence because there is less bureaucracy, better teamwork and more personal contact with customers throughout the organization's hierarchy.

Consider your business for a moment. Do you have an explicit commitment to quality and customer satisfaction? Is it written anywhere and expressed to your entire organization? Do you have clear processes and systems for handling customer complaints?

Similarly, is there a way for customers to give you feedback? Do you encourage customer suggestion? Does your entire team share an enthusiastic and genuine commitment to delivering an excellent product and superior customer service? Does your team consider it the number one priority?

Working through those questions will put you ahead of the pack in the race for customers. But don't expect it to happen overnight. Achieving and managing excellence throughout your business can take years. You and your team have to embrace the idea and make it a part of your business and your personal value system.

Commitment Required

Here are some tips to get you started in your pursuit of excellence:

- Let your team know that a commitment to excellent work and customer service is a requirement for working here.
- Post signs around the workplace that reinforce this message. Ask your team for their input on how to serve customers better.
- Make excellent customer service a part of everybody's performance standards and employment reviews.

Likewise, improving customer service and quality must be a commitment shared by all. Never stop talking about your commitment to excellence. In every piece of communication, whether it is an ad or a memo to your team, and in every company activity, you should reinforce this commitment as the number one priority of every person in the business.

Prepare to Change

Significant changes may have to be made to reach your goals. Most people are uneasy about change and as the leader of the business, you must set the example and embrace the changes that are going to make your business better.

Small Steps Towards Excellence

Think small. Often it is the little things a business does that sets it apart from all the rest. Think about all areas of your business: distributors, suppliers, billing methods and customer interfaces. Your team probably has scores of ideas on how to improve customer service in these areas.

Taking their ideas into consideration is a great way to motivate them and often produces low-cost enhancements to your business.

Solutions at a glance...

- Striving for excellence
- Commitment required
- Prepare to change
- Small steps towards excellence