

THE CUSTOMER SERVICE POCKETBOOK

By Tony Newby & Sean McManus

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

Comments on the 1st edition

"Down to earth practical guide ... what I would expect from your work with us on Customer Service. It removes a lot of the mystique and concentrates on the real issues."

Mr. L.J.G. Purdie, Chief Pensions Manager, Scottish Widows.

Comments on the 2nd edition

"We will certainly continue to use the pocketbook with all our new starters. It really helps to make people realise that everyone has customers, and that internal customers are also important."

Carolyn Whitesmith, Training Controller, Avon Insurance plc.

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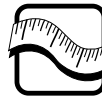
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**EMPOWERING
GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE**

EMPOWERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

EVERYONE PLAYS A ROLE



You can empower the organisation to deliver great customer service:

- Team members throughout the company are linked in a chain that ultimately serves the customer
- Team members at all levels have information that will help colleagues perform their jobs or satisfy customers better
- A good customer service reputation is the result of lots of small improvements in how everyone does their job and not one sudden transformation
- By delivering great service you set a good example for other team members



EMPOWERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

EVERYONE PLAYS A ROLE



Team managers should:

- Clearly communicate the organisation's and the team's strategy and priorities
- Empower team members to be flexible in helping customers, such as by offering discounts to compensate mistakes or by agreeing unusually quick (but realistic) turnarounds for important customers on a deadline
- Ensure the lessons from customer complaints are communicated throughout the team so that products, processes and customer service can be improved
- Recognise and reward great customer service within the team
- Offer feedback and training when customer service levels fall short
- Ensure that administrative procedures don't sabotage the team's efforts to be responsive to customers

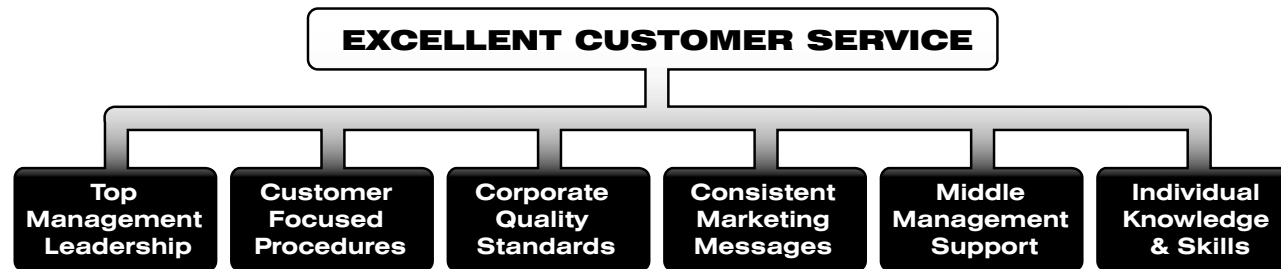
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CORPORATE CULTURE



Good customer service reflects the whole corporate culture.

Good customer service is based upon not just the knowledge and skills of the individual but also upon the way that the organisation as a whole, from top management downwards, pulls in the same direction and presents a clear, positive message to customers.



EMPOWERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE



INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

INTERNAL NETWORK MAPPING

Whether or not you deal with the organisation's external customers, your colleagues are your internal customers. They depend on your responsiveness and quality to deliver great service to their colleagues or the external paying customer.

It's helpful to think of your customer service network as consisting of a series of inputs and outputs, with yourself at the centre. Various things get passed to you (such as information, work tasks and queries) and you in turn pass your work or communications to others in the chain, or straight to the external customer.

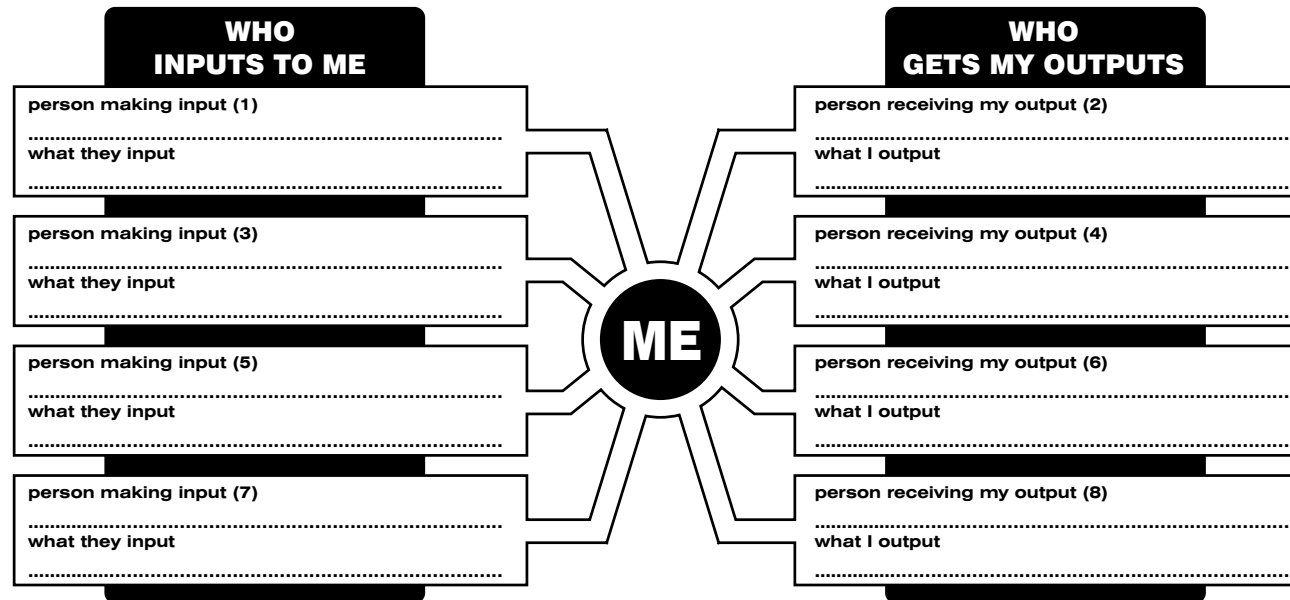
Use the chart over the page to list who is in your internal customer network – and what it is that gets passed along the service chain. Try to write in the names of the people you deal with. Only use a job title or general description if you don't know their names or if there are a lot of people in the same category (like *sales assistants*). Note that there is space for up to four inputs and four outputs. You can adjust these numbers to match your own particular situation.

EMPOWERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE



INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

INTERNAL NETWORK MAPPING



EMPOWERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE



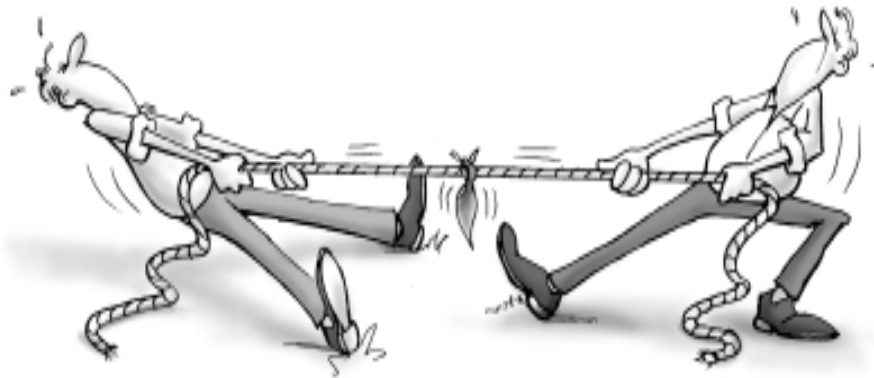
INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

WHEN THE CHAIN WEAKENS

The internal customer chain works when everyone pulls in the same direction and there are no weak links. But it's bad news when *us and them* barriers start to develop, such as:

- Between the sections in a process chain (where different people handle different stages of a document, for instance)
- Between head office and branches
- Between sales and marketing
- Between marketing and manufacturing

This section of the book explores how you can play a positive role in giving your colleagues good internal customer service – and also how you can encourage them to do the same for you.



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INTERNAL CUSTOMERS



EXERCISE

Even though you might want to change things, you and your colleagues don't start with a clean sheet. There are bound to have been (perhaps unavoidable) problems in the past which might have left a feeling of unease or distrust.

Take ten minutes to complete the *niggles* exercise that follows to get any accumulated irritations off your chest.

1. Use the *Niggles Sheet* (see page 76) to make brief notes about any incidents that you personally have experienced where colleagues have failed to give you the kind of service that you should get as their internal customer – incidents that have made it harder for you to do your job properly:
 - Things you would prefer them not to do
 - Things they don't do, but you wish they would
 - Things that you would like them to do differently

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INTERNAL CUSTOMERS



EXERCISE (Cont'd)

2. If possible, find someone else to complete the exercise so you can compare lists. Ideally this should be someone who doesn't work in your team because you want to get a fresh perspective on your niggles.
 - Are you suffering from similar problems?
 - How much are the problems a matter of where you happen to be standing at the time?
 - Do the problems come from a difference of opinion over the right way to do things?
 - Are the problems being magnified because you don't know the individuals you are dealing with (especially over the telephone) so you tend to assume the worst of them?
 - Are there misunderstandings because you don't really know what other departments do (or are allowed to do)?
 - Which items on your lists can (at least in theory) be improved?
 - What would be the benefits to the organisation and yourself if these improvements are made?
 - What would it take to achieve each of those improvements?

YOUR PERSONAL NIGGLES SHEET



Who failed to treat you as their internal customer?

What did they do, do unsatisfactorily or not do at all?

Is it improvable?

What could be the benefits from any improvement?

What would it take to achieve these improvements?

Who failed to treat you as their internal customer?	What did they do, do unsatisfactorily or not do at all?	Is it improvable?	What could be the benefits from any improvement?	What would it take to achieve these improvements?

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INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

STRENGTHENING THE CHAIN

Now you've thought about how the chain weakens, let's think about how it can be strengthened. Look at your table of internal customers and consider how you can improve your outputs.

It's not the blockbuster projects, but close attention to small details that adds up to quality of service. For instance:

- Responding to people without being chased by them (as easy as putting a date in your diary and placing a phone call; takes maybe five minutes)
- Keeping colleagues informed about what's happening on a project (as simple as copying them on an e-mail, yet so effective)
- Arriving on time for meetings (so others don't waste time waiting for you)

Think about the improvements you could ask your colleagues to give you in their service. Point out how the organisation benefits and how getting it right first time means they have less work to do in the long run, not more! Sometimes there are good reasons why work can't be delivered to your ideal specification, but talking to your colleagues to find out why will at least stop you blaming them for inefficiency and improve your working relationship.

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INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

PASSING ON WORK

This has probably already surfaced as a source of problems in your internal network. Even if it hasn't, it is such a central element of the internal customer chain that it is worth listing some guidelines for giving (and receiving) a five-star service when you pass work on to your colleagues.

You can offer better service by:

- Negotiating deadlines and the handover of work, and not just *dumping it on someone's desk*
- Delegating full responsibility for solving a problem so that your colleague can decide the best way to handle it (don't just dictate a series of tasks you've identified as the solution)
- Being prompt in forwarding the work so that your colleague has as much time as possible to process it
- Indicating clearly and truthfully how urgent or important the work is so that your colleague can prioritise his or her workload

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INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

PASSING ON WORK (Cont'd)

You can offer better service by:

- Making sure all the necessary information is sent and can be easily understood, so that people don't have to keep coming back to you for clarification
- Making sure everything is correct before you send it on (if you inherit errors from someone else, make sure they're fixed before the work goes further)
- Making sure work is sent to someone who can help, so it isn't delayed while it is repeatedly forwarded around the company (this happens especially with e-mail enquiries)
- Making realistic promises to others about response times, so that the recipient of the work isn't put under unreasonable pressure
- Offering to help with any further information or clarification your colleague needs

About the Authors

The late Tony Newby BA MA

Tony wrote the first edition of this popular guide to customer service in 1991, drawing on his extensive experience consulting and training in multi-national and growing companies, as well as within local and central government. These assignments involved creating and delivering bespoke training courses, covering topics as diverse as culture change, assertiveness, creativity, effective listening, computer skills and customer service quality. His books on management training topics have been published in the UK and the USA. The book was reprinted in 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000.



Sean McManus BSc

In 2002 the book was revised and updated by Sean McManus, who holds a BSc in International Business and German and whose magazine contributions have appeared in Marketing Week, Customer Loyalty Today and Business 2.0 among others. He wrote Small Business Websites That Work (www.sbwtw.com) and co-wrote Quick Answers to Web Marketing Questions. He can be contacted through his website at www.sean.co.uk.

