

## **Chapter 4**

### Lucky #2 - Client Focus and Service

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A simple yet vanishing core competency, the art form of focusing on clients and client service, is essential for success and growth as a leader. Any business with severe aspirations of success must instill a sincere belief that serving clients is the most important outcome of any strategy, project, or action.

The importance of developing systems and products while listening to clients and

responding directly to their wants and needs cannot be stressed enough. Mechanisms must be designed to collect client/customer feedback, listen to their concerns, and provide solutions and options to ensure client satisfaction. If a customer wants a red tie, but you only make and sell blue ties, you must decide if you will deal in blue ties or adapt and make red ties. With a thinking-without-restrictions mindset, I would find ways to create ties in every shade of red possible if the market was calling for them.

Again, these are relatively simple concepts, but they are

concepts and attitudes which must be vigilantly maintained throughout the organization. In the most basic terms, client/customer service presents the essential mindset for any successful business strategy.

Failure to focus on clients inevitably leads to a loss of purpose.

My Grandfather deeply embedded this philosophy into my psyche at a very young age. He was the superintendent of the large New York apartment building we lived in, with more than 60 other families - 64 to be precise. His job required around-the-clock attention to the maintenance needs of every

tenant, and every tenant relied on him, as did the physical building itself.

As with most other vocations, there are building superintendents who care deeply about their tenants (or clients) and those who do not. My Grandpa dedicated himself to customer service when it came to the families in our building, and he went above and beyond the standards of most superintendents to improve their lives.

If a tenant needed a repair and he couldn't get to it immediately, he would keep them informed of the timing, usually by sending me to provide

updates. He made it a point to let the tenants know that he hadn't forgotten his commitment to their needs, even if by simple notification.

And he went beyond that. He developed a routine of beginning work at 5:00 a.m. to have most of the pressing work completed by mid-day. Then he'd spend the afternoons in front of our apartment building, visible to the other tenants so he could stay in touch with their needs by making himself available. No e-mail or texts back then. He had to be visible! The families living in that building knew they could count on my Grandpa to care for their needs.

That level of commitment to tenants' customer service needs is a perfect example of the "focus on the client" mindset necessary to implement a successful business strategy. Always focus on client needs to the best of your abilities, and you never lose purpose. Customer service should always be the driving force for any business.

When businesses neglect their clients, the people who work for your organization lose purpose. Furthermore, it often seriously and permanently damages morale, thus harming the confidence of the entire organization.

Employees must remember why they come to work every day when

client focus deteriorates. My Grandpa and Dad provided great examples of putting clients first. Grandpa went out of his way to get to every apartment needing his services on the day he promised, and he developed strong relationships with tenants, regardless of their backgrounds or personal differences. His diligence in this respect never ceased to impress me, and it explained why he performed the same job for so long while remaining perfectly content with his chosen profession.

Through my professional experiences, I constantly witnessed others focused so

entirely on their roles and tasks that they often lost connection with "why" and "what" our team intended to accomplish. They lost themselves in the work while losing the purpose of the work and, vitally, an appreciation for the client's needs.

A leader's job requires that they - and this is supremely important - always connect and reconnect every interaction to the business strategy and customer. Every task, every role, every obstacle, and every new or improved idea must connect the team to the greater mission. When you can accomplish this in a leadership role, your



team will become professionally and personally vested in the mission.

A priceless advantage of maintaining focus on customer/client fulfillment is that it provides an uncomplicated means of measuring performance and adjusting strategy, another leadership core competency.

This seems simple - remedial, in fact, but it is becoming a lost art form.

You all know who the best companies are and how you feel when served at a high level. Not just at Louis Vuitton because the merchandise is expensive, but at a convenience

store, an ice cream shop, etc. You build brand loyalty with EVERY interaction. Hiring, training, and the constant injection of purpose and mission are intentional steps that result in success.

Another great story and example: When I worked at JPMorgan Chase, I was responsible for numerous systems that supported mortgage originations and their entire operation. We had a vendor in the mix that needed help. Partly to the fault of JPNC and partly due to that lack of "give a shit" from the provider.

I had dinner with the CEO of the tech provider one evening,

and he asked, "What can I do better to get on the right side of this problem." I said, "Your problem isn't technical; it's your people." He looked stunned! I explained that there was a huge technology provider in another area of the bank with mediocre tech - outstanding attitude and service - and they were killing it with the bank. The systems worked and met the bank's and client's needs, but their support was stellar. Responsive. Their customer JPMC was important.

I told the CEO - here is the difference between your teams and those from the company that

was highly successful at the bank.

At your company, your team wakes up in the morning and sighs loudly - FUCK... I gotta go to work today and deal with those pains in the ass at JPNC. They'll tell me my software is broken (which it was) and lean into me for a resolution. They are going to be ultra-demanding, and my day is going to suck. Ugh, I don't even want to go in today.

I then explained that a typical morning at the successful company provider likely looked more like this.

Wow - today is going to be a great day. I have an excellent job for a great company blessed with a client like JPMC. Sure, they're demanding - but they care about their customers. They pay tens of millions of dollars a year for our software, and because of that, I have a great job, I am putting my kids through college, I can take vacations, and oh yeah... I have food!

I pointed out that the difference was purely mindset and a connection to the end customer. Not JPMC being the customer, but JPMC's customers being the ultimate customer.

How did broken software impact their experience at the bank?

He looked a bit stunned during the diatribe but ultimately got the joke.

To close, you'll find camaraderie in the collective efforts to exceed expectations. People will respond. Why? Because they are a part of something - something with purpose - something connected - something positive.