

THE FORGOTTEN CUSTOMER
Executive Summary

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In 1996 The Marin County Municipal and Superior Courts combined under the leadership of one Presiding Judge and one appointed Court Administrator. All court related functions were combined to create this new organization. The combining of court personnel and staff revealed vast differences in procedures, styles of administration, overall management objectives and levels of service provided to the public. The idea for this paper/project was born of a desire to eliminate some of the inconsistencies of customer service provided by the court personnel, thereby increasing public trust and confidence in the court system.

Customer service is more than a smile and a thank you. Customer service touches all levels of an organization and begins in the treatment and training of court personnel. Court personnel are a group of customers, which come and go with little or no attention, yet they shape the image of the justice system one person at a time. These 'customers' often go unnoticed or are forgotten entirely. They are the heart of the organization, and they are the internal customers of the court.

Evaluating the performance of service as it applies to the needs of court personnel within the organization is rarely viewed as being of value to the organization and therefore often not accomplished. Yet not meeting the needs of court personnel can and will undermine the efforts of implementation and measures of Trial Court Performance Standards (TCPS) and any other program that seeks to instill service values and measure customer satisfaction.

Court managers, administrators and judicial officers are strongly linked to the service given by court personnel and therefore should not focus on the needs of constituents and measures like TCPS to the exclusion of court personnel. To provide quality customer service to the external customer, the internal customers must know and understand their roles in the division of the court they serve and have a general understanding of the court as a whole. Court personnel need to be given the tools to provide quality service to the external customer. Yet they are often trained on specific tasks without the benefit of the larger picture and the overall organizational purpose.

Initial and ongoing employee-training programs can influence service on both internal and external

customers, and thereby impact public trust and confidence. The differences between internal customers with regard to learning styles, personality types, cultural diversity, and generational diversity will be addressed in this paper. A training program that meets the needs of court personnel by providing training and information as to styles, diversity and similarities, and then encourages them use these skills and knowledge, allows staff to adjust their presentation of information customer by customer.

The subtle messages provided by environment, presentation of information and treatment of court personnel and staff is an ongoing reinforcement of the relationship of internal customer to internal customer, management to staff.

There are many variables that effect the actions and reactions of court personnel. To understanding some of these variables, one needs to begin by learning more about learning/personality styles, cultural diversity and generational diversity.

Understanding the elements of learning, teaching and diversity provide a basis from which to draw in developing and implementing new training programs of all types, including customer service programs. Without this basic understanding of the needs of those in your employ the inconsistencies of service will be perpetuated.

Learning/Personality Styles

There are at least thirty-two commercially published instruments used by researchers and educators to access the different dimensions of learning style. Learning dimensions are divided into two main theories, affective and physiological. Affective dimensions of learning style include emotional and personality characteristics related to such areas as motivation, attention, interests, willingness to take risks, persistence, responsibility, and sociability (Cornett, 1983; Keefe, 1979). Physiological dimensions of learning style include sensory perceptions such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, taste, and smell, as well as the environmental characteristics of sound, light, temperature, and room arrangement. Also included in this dimension are the desire for food during study time, times of day for optimum learning, personal nutrition and health. (Cornett, 1983; Dunn & Dunn, 1979). Though the different instruments have many similarities and evaluate learning style preferences, the terminology used to label the learning styles varies widely.

Two of the most widely adopted instruments used by Human Resource Departments the Learning Style Inventory (Kolb, 1976), and The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) are described below. All instruments evaluate the method by which a person processes information.

The Learning Style Inventory (LSI) divides learning style preferences into four groups: Diverger, Assimilator, Converger, and Accommodator. Diverger learning style is typified as one in which the learner is concerned with divergent/atypical ideas and is usually considered an imaginative learner. The assimilator is described as one in which the learner responds to abstract ideas and/or concepts. These people are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into a concise and logical form. The converger is best characterized as the theory-into-practice style in which the learner starts to relate theory to practical application. The accommodator places an emphasis on active experimentation (doing) and concrete experience (feeling). These are the hands on learners.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an instrument, which divides personality into eight different preference types, which creates sixteen combinations of preferred actions and reactions. By using specific combinations of these types, the developers were able to determine four 'temperaments' types. The four personality dichotomies are: Extraversion vs. Introversion; Sensing vs. iNtuition;

Thinking vs. Feeling; Judging vs. Perceiving. Extraversion and Introversion are described as the methods by which a person interacts with the world around them, how they prefer to receive and process stimulation and receive energy. Sensing and iNtuition refer to the ways in which a person prefers to gather information. Decision-making is the area affected by the preference of Thinking and Feeling. Finally, Judging and Perceiving describe how a person prefers to orient their lives as to structure and organization. "This preference determines what you most naturally share when you first open your mouth." (O'Kroeger and J. Thuesen 1988).

One can begin to see where these personality types might come into conflict in the workplace with challenging or possibly devastating results. What appears on the surface to be simple, that of providing and receiving information in a work environment, takes on complexity when viewed with the above information. A balance of these styles in an organization is essential for the health and well being of the whole. Each offsets the weaknesses of the others allowing the organization to use multiple approaches to problem solving in the organization as well as the service provided to others.

Cultural Diversity:

Culture is defined as a combination of the ideas, customs, skills, and art of a given people in a given period. As the workforce in the United States becomes more diverse, cultural differences become more prevalent. These cultural diversities range from simple to complex. Within these cultures there are differences that include responses to and status of male to female, and youth to adult. It would be difficult for any person not raised or familiar with a specific culture to gain a complete understanding of the subtle complexities of that culture and the effects they have in the workplace. Although many courts and organizations require employees to attend a course on valuing diversity in the workplace, it is only a beginning.

The external customer is often under emotional and stressful circumstances. The more the court personnel know and understand of cultural diversity and the challenges they bring about, the better equipped they are to avert a situation all together. Awareness, respect, and acceptance of diversity allow all involved parties to better avoid friction and move into a position of assistance.

Knowing and understanding some of the differences and similarities among the internal customer, court personnel are better able to understand the importance and impact the information and service they provide to the external customer.

Generational Diversity:

Generational differences are becoming more evident in the workforce each year. For many years those labeled as 'baby boomers' and 'pre-boomers' dominated the workforce. The children growing up today in the information explosion of cannot help but view the world in a different light than those who have passed before.

Generations are broken down into five groups, spanning the years 1935 to 1981+. Pre-boomer or 'veteran' were born between 1935-1945. Boomers between 1946 and 1959. Between the years 1960 and 1965 are Cuspers. The Busters/ Generation X, between 1965 and 1975. The most recent group to enter the workforce are the Post TV generation, also called Generation Y, born from 1976 to 1981+.

Loyalty to and longevity in a company is becoming a thing of the past. Bureaucracies created by pre-boomers, and boomers, are losing ground. Young adults are more interested in the short-term rewards and goal. This does not mean they do not work hard, it is that they see the world through a different window. Generation Xers put stock in themselves; new experience, new skills and understanding. Personal growth does not mean upward growth and often Xers do not want the upper

management positions. Those born during the years defined as Generation Xers and Post TV were born into the information explosion - almost as if they were born with computers in their hands. Boomers and Pre-Boomers knew life before the information explosion. There was time to adjust to new information and ideas. Those born in the information explosion do not have this reference point. They have learned to sift through information at a fast rate, discarding what is not needed and gleaning what will get them ahead. One style is not better than the other; they are just different.

The workforce of the future will at some point consist of largely Generation Xers and Post TV employees. Although, the ratios still favor the boomer and pre-boomer for now, as the pre-boomers and boomers choose to retire this ratio will shift. Court management and administration must think outside the traditional box of long-term employment and long-term training.

Conclusion:

What does all this mean? Internal customers (court personnel) are dependent on the training provided when first hired, and throughout their careers with the court. The amount of time, energy and the level of commitment to this training set the tone for the employee and all staff. And there may be no connectivity to the mission or objectives, if they even know of their existence.

Court operations are a complex environment governed by law, procedure and local rules. Court personnel are expected to know and understand all aspects as it pertains to their specific function of the court or division. Initial and ongoing training of employees, as well as the conscious and subconscious re-enforcement of this training, will have a significant effect on the level of service provided to those whom with they come in contact.

Court managers and administrators need to begin looking at how are court personnel being trained, who is doing the training and how is the training organized and presented. Too often in the workplace we focus training on the individual task. Little if any training is completed beyond the initial training and rarely is there ongoing training for staff.

When developing a full training program or an individual session for court employees, the choice of setting is the first step in gaining a level of trust and demonstrating the organization's commitment to the employee. Conversely, the working environment can also subconsciously effect the value an employee places on the work they perform.

As no one training program can begin to reach all court employees, there needs to be a variety of methods that provide information and training throughout an individual's career with the court. All levels of court staff should be provided the opportunity to engage in a personality and/or learning styles course, and encouraged to use the information in the workplace. Courses in cultural diversity, and generational diversity, not only heightened sensitivity to differences they allow staff to better meet and understand the varying needs of the external customer.

Beyond the traditional classroom type training programs there are other devices that can be implemented as ongoing and supportive training for staff. Newsletters are a simple method to reach those who learn best from the printed word. A library of reference material which includes information and training materials of the courses offered, and topics of interest to courts. Lastly the physical environment of the court reinforces daily the goals and objectives of an organization.

Providing many opportunities and methods for staff to learn about themselves, the court system, the roles they fill and the level of service they are expected to provide encourages court staff to become part of the team committed to the justice system. An employee committed to and part of the organization provides quality service to all they reach both internal and external customers.

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