

Unspoken Customer Issues

InfoQuest®
Business Process Review
Case Study #2

Frank Best, General Manager of the New England Division of Ulbrich Stainless Steel and Special Metals, Inc., received an unpleasant surprise; upon completion, his **InfoQuest®** Survey revealed that a major customer was dissatisfied with many aspects of his company's performance. It was a customer who Frank himself spoke to at least once a quarter, and on whom the head of his sales department paid a personal visit at least monthly. A customer who, at every point of contact, was asked if there were any problems... "if there was anything he needed." The answer was always no. As a result, both men assumed that everything was fine. The survey clearly indicated that was far from being the case. **InfoQuest®** uses a closed loop approach to customer communication. By offering - up front - to share the results of the survey with each customer, you have a standing invitation to come back later and make good on your promise, armed with traceable responses that give you precise insight into the needs and opinions of each customer. Frank learned first hand the value of those combined aspects when he visited the same customer a few weeks later.

After stating that the purpose of the visit was to, as promised, share the results of the survey, the customer hesitated, looked at Frank with a twinge of discomfort, then asked "what survey?" claiming he didn't know, or remember, what Frank was talking about. Certain that the survey had not been forgotten already, sensing that the customer feared he was about to be confronted with his own replies, Frank gave him some breathing room by speculating that, "I know we sent you a survey. Maybe you responded to it, maybe not.

Either way, I'd like to tell you what we found out, then get your thoughts on our plans for addressing issues the survey identified." The customer relaxed a bit and invited Frank to proceed. Frank presented everything from a third person perspective - i.e. "our customers told us that..." What the customer did not know was that Frank, with full knowledge of the areas he was dissatisfied with, knew exactly how to direct the conversation.

WRITTEN CUSTOMER COMMENTS
Acme Widget Corp.
Supplemental Information Form

The enclosed survey is being conducted for Acme Widget Corp.'s national assessment of customer satisfaction. We would appreciate your taking a few minutes to complete and return it.

When this survey has been fully tabulated, we intend to take appropriate actions based upon findings generated through your responses and analysis. Our goal is to improve our business relationship with you and to accomplish that objective, we plan to share with you the results of this survey and our plans for addressing any issues or conclusions it brings to our attention.

With advance thanks for your time and effort, we look forward to your response.

InfoQuest
President Bob Taylor

1. What would you consider to be the most significant objection we could take to enhance our value as a service provider to you?

The sales rep needs to make his presence known. He has thus far assumed our business to be a given because in past years we were a strong customer. However, Genes Forms Ltd. is quickly stepping in because of their aggressive sales techniques and your lackadaisical attitude. Promptly packaged and labeled shipments that arrive late aren't doing much to enhance our relationship either.

Want to impress me? Make an effort to understand my requirements and provide solutions that address them.

If we would like to discuss your comments or responses, may we contact you? Yes

Name Stephen Genes Title President
Company Genes Distribution
Address 183 Main Street City New York State NY Zip 10001

From there, the meeting lasted an hour and a half, during which the customer who had initially disavowed even remembering the survey, laid a number of distinct and separate issues on the table.

"It's not like this customer magically opened up and spilled his guts for me," Frank said later. "I had to extract the information I did get. Some of it involved real issues, and we were able to address them right there on the spot. Others were matters of perception that had been dealt with at earlier points in time, but something had been lost in the translation. Others yet we couldn't fix right then, but at least we got them out into the open. The point is, our history with this customer indicates that if we hadn't done the survey and used the results the way we did, we might have never found out these issues existed. That was the point at which I realized just how valuable the survey was."