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Using Feedback to Build Stronger Customer Relationships



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Petty and Associates

Why do people cringe when someone says, “I’d like to give you some feedback?” The likely answer is they associate “feedback” with criticism or someone telling them what they are doing wrong. When situations call for giving constructive feedback, often people don’t know how to do it well. The result is the person on the receiving end associates “feedback” with a negative activity often becoming defensive or upset.

Actually, quite the contrary is true. Feedback in organizations and

business is a positive, integral part of effective communication for both customers and employees. It also plays a critical role in performance management used to help individuals and teams grow and develop to a higher-performing level. Ken Blanchard, author of *“The One Minute Manager,”* calls feedback “the breakfast of champions.” Early in my career, I learned feedback is a “gift” we can give each other by sharing personally relevant information to help us understand, improve and learn what is needed to improve relationships or enhance performance.

When it comes to customer feedback, the emphasis is typically on what companies do to encourage clients to give candid feedback, and how they can receive this information in a meaningful way. Finding proactive ways to gather, analyze and use customer input is necessary to insure exceptionally satisfied clients. Equally important is

the frequency, quality and type of feedback companies give their clients to enhance communication effectiveness and strengthen customer relationships.

Effective feedback is about ongoing, open communication between two or more parties—this helps us understand why two-way customer feedback is so important. Based on customer service research, clients expect a company they do business with to make it easy for them to give feedback whether it is to praise you, make a complaint or talk about improvement opportunities. Clients also want companies to give them feedback about what they are doing well, and where they can improve as it impacts your ability to meet their needs and expectations. (See page 11 for opportunities to give and receive feedback.)

While it is more common to ask for and receive customer feedback on “what” we did, it is also important to seek feedback on “how” something was done to understand the impact we have on others. For example, a client feedback survey can tell us “what” we did to deliver a project on time—our performance was excellent, fair or poor. However we can gain more insight by asking “how” the client thinks we went about completing the project on time. Did the GC engage subs in a conversation about what they needed from us to help them succeed, or did the owner hear us tell the subs “you better meet the completion date or else.” Which approach do you think created a better impression on the client about your company



Specific Feedback Opportunities

Giving Feedback to Your Clients

1. Inform about changes to a project schedule along with implications for the project team
2. Inform about a problem on the jobsite with possible remedies
3. Inform about anticipated problems your project team avoided
4. Explain a change in company direction
5. Inform about personnel changes
6. Praise when they respond quickly to your request for information, approval, etc.
7. Explain when projects go off track from what is expected
8. Help clients learn what you need from them to insure project success
9. Discuss opportunities for the client to improve if they are holding things up
10. Thank clients for their positive contributions to the project's success


Receiving Client Feedback

1. Ask for client needs/expectations during project startup to understand what is most important to them
2. Ask about "how" and "what" we are doing at regular intervals during project delivery and "how" and "what" at project completion
3. Assess client satisfaction level at project completion
4. Probe deeper when receiving a compliment
5. Probe deeper when receiving a complaint
6. Learn client preferences for communicating and their desired level of involvement in a project
7. Get input on new website design to make sure it's client-friendly
8. Debrief after presenting qualifications and proposals
9. Debrief after interviewing for a project
10. Ask about the "customer's experience" as much or more than you do about the project itself

and how you approach other members on the project team? The quality of feedback received helps to drive the continuous improvement efforts we make to better our companies.

When it comes to your clients, the absence of an organized, structured and regular two-way feedback system is a huge missed opportunity to build stronger customer relationships and reinforce the value of what you offer. Making the most of customer feedback and what you do with it once it is received can help your company stand out. In addition, the feedback you share with clients helps you connect with and engage them at a much higher emotional level which is needed to insure an exceptional customer experience. ■

As owner of Petty and Associates, Trudy Petty helps successful companies in the commercial construction industry increase market share, enhance customer loyalty, and compete more effectively to win work. Recognized as an expert in customer service and marketing, she assists clients in developing or advancing their customer feedback process. Contact Trudy at 214.341.1713 or trudy@pettyandassociates.com.



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