



In This Issue

[The Big Picture View of Business \(Pt. III\)](#)
[Seeing Things from a Customer Perspective](#)

[What Should We Cover?](#)

["Quotes"](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"Intentionally, we over-react to customers. That's why we've been so successful. If a customer tells us something, we not only react to it, but over-react to it."
~Jay Allen

"We'll wait and hear the feedback. Either we'll refine (the course) again or people will unanimously like it logistically and from a customer satisfaction point."
~John Conley

"Virtually every company will be going out and empowering their workers with a certain set of tools, and the big difference in how much value is received from that will be how much the company steps back and really thinks through their business processes thinking through how their business can change, how their project management, their customer feedback, their planning cycles can be quite different than they ever were before."
~Bill Gates

"We provide the things people want and need.... We strive to provide quality customer service, a knowledgeable staff, and good programming."
~Beth Hansen

"Our priority will always be customer-focused innovation that provides real value for our students and ultimately increases value for our shareholders. By understanding our

Dear Friend,

Write 'Em, Hon!

In more than 20 years of marriage, you get to know things about your mate. He's the neat freak; I'm...well, I have my moments. I love to cook; he loves to eat *most* of what I cook. He's "Mister Light Up the Room"; I'm "Miss Watch What's Happening in the Room". As I said, you learn things about your spouse over the years.

One thing my husband learned about me early on is that, if I see something in need of comment (I mean REALLY in need of comment) good or bad, I'll pull out my pad and pen (now, my computer) and write a letter. In fact, I've written to employers, to service providers, to teachers, and the list goes on. It's gotten so that my now well-known epistles have their own name -- "June Letters". It's nothing to hear my hubby say, sometimes aloud and sometimes under his breath, "That service was horrible. Write 'em, hon. Send them a 'June Letter'!"

You see, what he's come to know is that my "June Letters" provide feedback about an experience. They seek to deliver an open and honest message, right to the source rather than only to friends or colleagues, so that credit can be given or change can be made. Sometimes responses follow and express gratitude for the input, which is good. However, even better are the times when the responder shares that such feedback is valued and is being used to assist with ongoing improvement. That's it! That's it!

So, how often do you seek customer feedback? Even if you don't seek it, do you consider it when you receive it and as you plan for the future of your organization? This month's **EA Insights** completes our series on gaining the big picture view of an organization by looking at the priceless impressions of a critical group -- your customers. Whether you are in a for-profit, nonprofit, or government organization, your customers are talking (or even writing), I hope you're listening!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

The Big Picture View of Business (Pt. III) Seeing Things from a Customer Perspective

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

It's check-in time! To know how your business is faring, you've got to do some digging. Clearly it's important to view things from a management perspective, as we discussed in [The Big Picture View of Business \(Part I\)](#). It also is critical to consider the impressions of staff members, as they are the people carrying out a significant part of the work on a daily basis, and we paused on that topic in [The Big Picture View of Business \(Part II\)](#). However, don't neglect the feedback that's received from the end user of your product or service -- your customer (or stakeholder).



Too often, I find in working with organizations that people miss the opportunities that are wrapped up in customer feedback. These comments are gifts! When they are positive, they provide reports that allow you to focus in on what is going well -- the aspects of the product, service, or performance that strike a positive chord, that draw people to you, and that you want to reinforce going forward. Even when they are negative (and, with hope, productive), customer observations highlight areas in need of improvement -- the aspects of the product, service, or performance that leave a sting, that may prompt people to look elsewhere for assistance, and that you may want to fix going forward. If you think about it, seeking, appreciating, and analyzing the voice of the customer is essential to planning for ongoing success.

Much can be learned by stepping back and listening to customers. While there may be specific focus areas to consider by organization or by industry, there also is certain customer-supplied information that is useful generally.

Customer Profile. Periodically, it's a good practice to zero in on who your customers are. Naturally, this involves a look at their demographics -- in other words, get a glimpse at the ages, backgrounds, income levels,

etc. of the people or other organizations who comprise your customer base. And, customer feedback can help you to glean this data.

Exploring customer profile goes farther, though. Through feedback, customers reveal vital information about who they are on a deeper level. What do they want? What do they need? What are they willing to buy to satisfy those wants and/or needs? How are your products or services stacking up against those wants and needs and against your competitors' efforts? In other words, are you providing what folks are buying or what they're willing to buy? Are they choosing you, and why or why not? Understanding this is an essential part of any serious planning effort. And, it is not something you should guess about; it's best secured directly from customers.

Responsiveness. Call me strange, but I absolutely love process -- you know, policies and procedures, workflows, and the like. (I know; it is strange!) But, it gives me great joy to look at something that's not working well or that could be tighter and to tinker with ways to turn it around so that it runs like a well-oiled machine.

It's interesting, though. Many times organizations develop processes to make things work well...at least for the people *in* the organization. They often give little-to-no thought to how that process will affect partners much less customers. You can see (I hope) where that can come back to bite you.

And so, customer feedback can pay dividends in offering insight into how your functioning impacts others. Are things as user-friendly as you think they are? Do people get the run-around? Are they ever able to connect with a live person? Must you have an advanced degree from MIT to understand printed material? That's the type of information that helps you to know where you have strengths as well as where you have challenges from a process perspective as you plan for the future.

Personal Touch. No look at customer feedback is complete without considering the strength of the staff, as a whole, in its dealings with the public.

-- *Is the staff viewed as knowledgeable?* That is, do customers see staff members as well-informed about the organization, its goals, its products or services? Do they show that they know where to go for answers so that they are able not only to represent you well but also to serve effectively?

-- *Is the staff consistent?* That is, does your shop have such a revolving door that people don't know whom they'll see from visit to visit? Is there a consistent, and positive, spirit within the ranks so that what people experience in one part of the organization is not drastically dissimilar to what they experience elsewhere?

-- *Is the staff flexible?* That is, have people been empowered to problem-solve? Do they have the freedom to go outside of the box (within reason) in order to meet a need, make someone feel special, or right a wrong?

While some of this information can be derived through inquiries with staff, you won't truly know how your organization is viewed through the eyes of the customer unless you garner such input *from* the customer. Gaining customers' perspectives yields a unique opportunity to affirm impressions as well as clear up disconnects regarding what you offer, how it is offered, and through whom.

Want to know how *your* business is doing? Valuable feedback can be gleaned by considering management, staff, and customer/stakeholder perspectives. Gathering as full a picture as possible is critical to determining where you stand, areas that are functioning well, and places for adjustment.

©2013 **Executive Advantage, LLC**. All rights reserved.

diverse group of [customers] and their needs, we can successfully target our strategies and ensure that we maximize our investment in innovation and service."
~John Larson

"We are thrilled to be able to give our customers what they have been asking for. Customer service is very important to us and we survey each and every customer we have."
~Mark Leonard

"A lot of the [companies] have realized that you win the war for the heart and mind of the customer with the front-line staff. The retail consumer doesn't form a relationship with [the CEO]."
~Tony Plath

"Retailers need to understand who their customers are and how they act differently on the Web as opposed to in the store. They need to be able to recognize customers and the type of transactions they engage in, transactions that are based on which channel the customer is shopping in."
~Mark Rein

"More than 50[%] of innovation comes from the voice of the customer."
~Lou Rossi

"Revolve your world around the customer and more customers will revolve around you."
~Heather Williams

"The first step in exceeding your customer's expectations is to know those expectations."
~Roy H. Williams

What Should We Cover?



Do you have questions or topics that you'd like to have us cover in an upcoming issue of EA Insights?

[Click Here](#)

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

View our profile on [LinkedIn](#)