

Monthly Newswire

Welcome to our monthly newswire. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it useful.

September 2016

WHAT DOES YOUR STRATEGY SAY TO YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Your business's strategy says a lot about what you and your firm believe in and where you are going to invest your resources. But what does your strategy say about your firm from your customer's perspective?

Your customers want to know that you and your business care about them.

They want to feel important and that they are at the centre of your universe. Without your customers, your business wouldn't exist. As such, it is important to build your firm's strategy around your customers.

The very best businesses build every process and interaction around creating a great experience for their customers. Businesses such as Amazon and Netflix are well known for their customer centric business strategies, but you don't need to be a global enterprise in order to create a strategy that puts customers first.

The next time you and your management team sit down to review your strategy, start with your

customers. Think about who they are, the problems they face and what your business can do to help them. Maybe they are time poor so your strategy could be to save them time by offering the most efficient service in your market sector. Perhaps your customers want better value for money so maybe a strategy that focuses on delivering a low cost product or service would be more relevant to them.

Regardless of the strategy that you choose to implement, make sure that it sends the right message to your target audience. That message should be bold and it should tell your customers (and target customers) that they are at the centre of everything your business does.



OFFICE POLITICS CAN'T BE IGNORED

Keeping your head down and working hard is important but we all know that in business you have to "play the game" and develop effective personal relationships with the key stakeholders across your firm. As such, networking with internal contacts is as important as networking with external customers and target clients.

The number one word for managing office politics is diplomacy. Keep it professional at all times and find common ground with key stakeholders across the business.

It is important to make sure that you understand what is really going on. Pay attention. What do you see? Who talks to who? Who doesn't talk to who? What does the gossip say? Notice who gets their way and who doesn't. Talk in a way that ensures that you avoid being seen to take sides.

You should treat your stakeholders equally, do a good job for everyone and listen and respond to what they need. When you are chatting with someone and they are playing the political game, listen and talk to them about what they can do, how they feel, or what they want to do about it rather than agreeing or taking sides.

Office politics can sometimes create stressful situations and tension but it is important to keep your cool at all

times. If you've been maligned, candidly address the issue at the source. Then shake hands and move on. Nothing that happens at the office is worth a heart attack. In the grand scheme of things, will the issue matter in a week or a month's time? If you keep things in perspective, you will be less prone to turning incidents into catastrophes.

If you are building a team it's worth screening potential new hires carefully. Ask candidates how they feel about workplace politics and how they might react in difficult situations.

Finally, bear in mind that regardless of the type of business that you work in, you will not like everyone and not everyone will like you. Always be professional and make sure you communicate clearly and consistently

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with them. Be direct and do what you said you would do.

MANAGING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Very often the only thing that is more stressful than having a difficult conversation in the workplace is the anticipation of that conversation. Whether it's a performance appraisal or a sales meeting to close a deal, here are a few tips to help you to manage difficult conversations:

Be prepared

Spend some time considering what you want to achieve by having the conversation. Write down the key points you want to raise and list any further points in order of importance. What would your ideal outcome be for each point? If you would like the other person's input, or if you have a proposal for a solution of your own, write these down next to each point. Picture yourself confidently raising the issues on your list and explaining your ideas for possible solutions.

Put yourself in their shoes

How would you receive this information? Anticipating their response will help you to consider carefully how you communicate and your body language. This will enable you to be more prepared for their response, including the possibility of an emotional response.

Time and place

Choose a time and place when you will both feel comfortable, will not be pushed for time and should avoid being interrupted. If necessary, reassure the person you're talking to that the conversation is confidential.

Stay focused on solutions

It is better to ask "how can we do better next time?" than "why did it go wrong?" We cannot change the past but we can explore and identify the best way to learn from mistakes and move forward.

Don't skirt around the issue

Be polite but stick to the preparation you did in advance of the conversation. Stay in control. If you find your tonality changing, either speeding up and getting louder (getting frustrated) or slowing and getting quieter (losing confidence), adjust your posture. Whether you are sitting or standing, change your physiology to be more relaxed or more assertive and your tone of voice and choice of words will follow suit.

Have a time frame in mind before you start talking

If it becomes clear that the conversation is going to take longer, don't be tempted to rush things through or run over time. The last thing you both want is to feel exhausted by the conversation and to make a poor decision. Instead, agree to meet again to continue the conversation at a suitable time.

THE ART OF LISTENING

We all know that listening is an important business skill. However most of us are guilty of not listening to what our customers are telling us. Do you really want to understand what your customers want and why they buy certain products or services? Why not ask them for a customer feedback meeting and listen to what they have to say...

Before you start your feedback meeting with your customer(s), make sure that you have prepared for the session. It is helpful to run off a report that shows which products or services the customer has bought in the past. Write down what you want to achieve from the meeting. Do you want to understand why the customer bought from you? Maybe you want to understand more about their needs so that you can cross sell additional products or services to them (and to similar customers).

Read through your list of questions before the meeting and be prepared to listen and to take notes.

If you are going to engage in client feedback make sure you are actively listening to what your customers are telling you during a session. Active listening means, as its name suggests, actively listening. That is fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively hearing the message of the person you are in engaged in conversation with.

Active listening includes things like making good eye contact, nodding / body language and saying things like, "I understand" or "yes, tell me more about that". This type of feedback shows that you are engaged in the conversation and you want to hear more of what the other person has to say.

If you want to spend time listening to what your customers have to say about your firm's products or services, do so in the right environment. It can be difficult to listen to another person when your phone is buzzing, there are lots of other people around or there is lots of traffic noise, etc. When you remove all of these distractions and find a quiet place to sit down and listen, it makes the whole process much easier and shows care and consideration towards your customer.

When asking customers to provide some feedback, it can be difficult to avoid interrupting. A little bit of self-control goes a long way. Avoid being defensive and try to take negative feedback as constructive criticism rather than a personal attack.

Remember, no business is perfect and you can't improve if you don't listen to the negative things that your customers might have to say about your firm. The aim of the exercise is to shine the spotlight on them, not you.

Please contact a member of our team if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised.

Call: 01909 472310 Email: john@johnharrison.co.uk