

The Boss Question

If you were the vice president of marketing for a bank, (or any organization for that matter), you would probably want to poll your customers from time to time to determine why they chose to do business with your bank.

We can always assume why our customers do business with us but this can be risky because we may be wrong. What we think we are providing may be opposite to what customers perceive they are receiving. A good question then to ask our customers would be, "How do you know when we are doing a good job for you?"

The answers we receive will probably be all over the lot. Maybe customers think we are doing a good job for them when we provide products and services at the lowest price, or that we are conveniently located, or that we have a friendly staff, or combinations of these and lots of other reasons.

Some years ago, a consulting firm conducted some of this research in the legal field. They questioned attorneys about why clients came to them. At the top of the list, in the attorneys' views, were issues of competence and skill. "Clients seek me out because I am good at what I do." At the bottom of the list were soft skills, people skills, and bedside manner issues.

When the consultants polled the attorneys' clients, they were surprised to discover that clients chose to go to their attorneys for the opposite reasons. Good bedside manners, people skills, communication skills, compassion and concern were among the top reasons why clients selected their attorneys and issues dealing with the attorney's competence and skill were at the bottom of the list.

If you know why your customers and clients are seeking you out, you can emphasize more of those reasons in your marketing efforts to attract more clients. Give 'em what they want, not what you think they need!

Each of us is the president and sole stockholder of a major corporation, "Me, Inc." And, in the context of this discussion, your major customer is your boss. Your boss has a lot of control over your future raises and promotions. Why not ask the "Boss Question," similar to what we would ask our customers and clients, "Boss, how do you know when I am doing a good job for you?"

It is easy and risky for us to assume what the answers might be. For example, you may assume your boss thinks you are doing a good job when you are innovative and creative, coming up with new ideas. The boss, however, may be threatened by all that and feel more comfortable when you do not rock the boat. You may assume that the boss is comfortable with your performance when there are no complaints (no news is good news). But the boss may measure your performance on the number of unsolicited compliments he receives from others about how well you are doing your job.

Some feel uncomfortable raising the Boss Question. The problem is, it is a question that will have to be addressed sooner or later. For many, it is addressed "later," at an annual review when you discover that you did not get the raise or advancement you thought you were entitled to because for the last year you had been going down a path opposite to the boss' desires. Productivity and success are stolen again from you, not because you were not working hard enough but because of a miscommunication that kept you from delivering what your customer really wanted.

I think it's a good idea to ask the Boss Question several

times throughout the year as the boss' expectations can change and we need to always be moving forward together on the same wave length.