

The Business Card Mirror defines your company purpose

Category: Performance

If asked, most of us would say that our business was focused on what our customers need. The reality, however, is often a little different as many businesses tend to spend more attention on their own issues than they do on their customers' needs.

To determine whether your organization is looking inward or outward, whether it looks more at its own processes and bureaucracy than at what the customer wants, take this simple business card test.

Look at all employees that have any customer contact whatsoever, whether in person or by telephone, and identify the number that have business cards. Obviously the results will be different for companies in different industries, but as a rule of thumb if less than 70% of surveyed employees have business cards, then it speaks volumes about the importance (or lack thereof) that the company places on the customer interface, meaning that its culture is almost certainly inwardly focused.

Inward focus is most prevalent in established businesses. When you start out, customers are the lifeblood. As you grow, an attitude among employees can start to creep in and you hear them saying that nobody can provide the same service that our company can. This is very dangerous complacency and the next step is that customers start to be taken for granted and even seen as a nuisance (which they can be!)

The point is that business cards are probably the least expensive investment that you can make in an employee. It never ceases to amaze me how excited and connected people feel when they are given business cards....for \$50 you can make them feel that they are on the team and it can be a serious boost to morale.

Even if your employees only hand their cards out to proud family members it is word of mouth marketing that you can't measure but which can bring you exposure and, potentially, revenue. Not giving business cards to your employees is one of the most short-sighted things that you can do and you pass up a huge opportunity to connect people with the organization.

This lesson was forcibly driven home for me when I was President of a small Public Company on Long Island. The company was public, but not very and was 60% owned by the founder, who was the CEO. In reality, though Public it was simply a large "Mom and Pop" organization. One of the quirks of the business was that there was a patent that effectively locked customers in if they wanted that product; as a result the company was arrogant towards its customers and the customers hated them.

I did a rebranding exercise and needed new business cards. My philosophy was that anybody who could ever be in a position to promote the company should have 500 business cards. My assistant at the time was an ebullient and outgoing type who represented us very well and for all the reasons set out above I got her business cards.

When the CEO found out, he stormed into my office and asked me why I got her business cards. I explained my thinking and the words he said next still ring in my ears: "I'm not

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spending my money on that". I wish I'd been quicker and reached in my pocket for the \$50 of his money that I had so recklessly spent. It was probably best that I just watched as he curtly strode out of my office.

That was when I did the Business Card calculation and came up with the Mirror concept. The ratio at that company was 35%. No wonder our customers hated us and the software we rode in on!