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by centering your business
on customers

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Listen to Your Customers

by Lynn Hunsaker

Listen to your customers' experiences at the highest levels in your company to set customer-centricity standards. There's no substitute for fresh unvarnished customer stories in aligning your culture to customers' values and concerns. I recommend prioritizing the listening effort by the cumulative lifetime profit of various customer segments. Consider listening to current, lost and potential customers. Avoid the temptation to talk ... this is a listening session.

Here's how IBM launched its executive listening program, as told by Louis Gerstner in his book "Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?":

"In April 1993 there were troublesome areas, including loss of customer trust, supported by some disturbing customer ratings on quality. I announced Operation Bear Hug. Each of the 50 members of the senior management team was to visit a minimum of 5 of our biggest customers during the next 3 months. The executives were to listen, to show the customer that we cared, and to implement holding action as appropriate. Each of their direct reports (>200 executives) was to do the same.

"For each Bear Hug visit, I asked that a 1-2 page report be sent to me and anyone else who could solve that customer's problems. I wanted these meetings to be a major step in reducing the customer perception that dealing with us was difficult. I also made it clear that there was no reason to stop at 5 customers. This was clearly an exam in which extra credit would be awarded.

"Bear Hug became a first step in IBM's cultural change. It was an important way for me to emphasize that we were going to build a company from the outside-in and that the customer was going to drive everything we did in the company. It created quite a stir, and when people realized that I really did read every one of the reports, there was quick improvement in action and responsiveness."

Note: ClearAction has proven templates and business process procedures to help you launch or upgrade your customer listening sessions.

Let's discuss how to customize this to your situation; contact us at OptimizeCX@ClearActionCX.com