



STAFF MOTIVATION AND CUSTOMER SERVICE – PART 1

Tony Harris writes about knowing your customers.

Secretary At Work: Reviewed February 2012

Whatever type of facility we are managing it is important to know who our Customers are, what they want from us, what we want from them and how best we can make sure that the gap is closed between their requirements and what we actually provide.

Obviously, we can ask the Customers what they want via a questionnaire and this is of course a very useful tool. However, as we should have some good idea of what they want, we can involve the staff, and the Pro, in discussions before anything is mentioned to the Customers.

This requires a series of discussion and training seminars which can be titled anything from Customer Service to Quality Improvement to How Can We Improve?

You must decide what you want to cover, and to achieve, from the seminars and these subjects will probably include Customer Service, Quality, Sales, Purchasing, Administration, and Course management.

You then need to consider the format for the meetings:

- ☞ What Time are the seminars to start?
- ☞ Who is to attend?
- ☞ Ideally all staff from every department Course, Administration, Bar and Catering and Pro Shop
- ☞ Will there be coffee breaks?
- ☞ Will there be group work and if so who makes up the groups?

Regarding dates there always seem to be reasons why we can't do something rather than why we should do something. This subject is vital to the future performance of the Club and so it may be that the winter months are the best time to hold the meetings so that you can get availability of Green staff. Also the bar may not be very busy especially in the mornings.

A typical programme might therefore read as follows:

- 8.15am Coffee
- 8.30am Seminar Commences
- 10.00am Coffee
- 11.45am Finish

Working groups should ideally consist of people from each department. In other words someone from Bar and catering, someone from administration, someone from the course and someone from the Pro Shop. In some cases this will mean more than one person from a department in the group and maybe it won't be possible to have every group covered but at least make the effort.

It is also important to split up the groups from the angle of not having the Head Greenkeeper and his Deputy in the same group and break up the younger members of staff putting them with more experienced people. Also, as you may already have regular meetings of senior staff, consider not putting the Bar and Catering Manager with the Head Greenkeeper but maybe with the 1st Assistant or Trainee.

You may also have some staff that don't get on with each other. Try putting them together as it might just break the ice between them and create a better understanding of each other's situation.

If you have formed groups it is helpful to keep them together for the whole series of meetings and for any work that needs doing between times. You will have to accept that they will take some time between meetings not doing the job they are paid to do but the results will be rewarding for all.

There will however sometimes be a need for each department to go away and think about and report on projects specific to their own areas.

Having agreed some dates for the seminars it is important that as the presenter and facilitator you set some ground rules for the attendees and it is worth repeating these at the start of each seminar.

At the start of each session, therefore, remind participants of the ground rules and to recap on what was discussed at previous meetings before you go straight into the group presentations.

Between the main meetings each group will have been working on a number of projects and you have no real idea of what they will be saying during their following presentations. As Secretary/Manager you must have some thoughts on what you want the Club to achieve and what the Committee wants the Club to achieve. It may well be necessary therefore to guide the group in the directions that will be acceptable to the Club. You also have to accept that you may not totally agree with every suggestion. It is probably best to go along with them however if you are to keep the staff on side and the suggestions do no harm or take the Club backwards.

Tell the staff that you expect them to attend all the meetings and that they will start on time - you will hopefully have given plenty of notice of all dates. Advise them that there will be breaks and group work and that there will be ample time to ask questions and to discuss any matter that they might wish. Ask the participants to relax and listen generously so that they can enjoy the sessions.

Make sure that they understand that the discussions at the seminars are Confidential. Ask them to be honest, and say that you will be, and say that only the conclusions will be discussed with Committee and Members, other than the fact that the Committee should be told in general outline what you are doing.

Some of the comments your staff make, especially during the first meeting when the ice is being broken, may well be critical of things and/or people. That's OK as long as everyone learns from what is said and is prepared to talk about things in the large group or as part of the smaller groups which will be formed.

Tell them that you will be asking groups of them to meet and discuss a number of matters before the next meeting so that they can report their views to everyone else. They will be aware therefore that this will take a little bit more commitment than just turning up to do the day job.

Importantly, ask the team to think outside the box, to extend their thoughts beyond where they are at the moment and to view things from new angles.

You then need to tell the team what you believe the meetings will cover and the benefits which might be gained from the discussions held. The seminars will provide an opportunity for everyone, including you, to be reminded of some of the basics of their jobs and roles within the Club and also the discussions may give just an idea of the sort of things that are required from the whole team if people are to keep happy and all staff are to enjoy their jobs.

It is probably best to tell the team that, although you have put in some time to plan the programme, you actually have no real idea of the outcome of the meetings, as that will depend on input from all staff. However benefits will include:

- Better communication between departments
- Open discussion
- Improved measurement of success
- Planning of improvements
- More knowledge of each department's difficulties
- Provision to Committee of suggestions for change in the way the Club operates

If, over recent months or years, things in the Club have changed, maybe because you are new or there is a new Head Greenkeeper or there is a new Club structure, it is a good idea to remind everyone of this fact. It is also worthwhile saying that, whatever anyone thinks about any changes, one thing is certain. You cannot turn the clock back but you may just be able to enhance what you are doing in a more modern and innovative way.

STAFF MOTIVATION AND CUSTOMER SERVICE – PART 2

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MOTIVATION

Most Golf Club staff, including Managers say, probably daily, that our jobs would be great if it wasn't for the Members. However, there's another certainty - they aren't going away so we have to live with them if we want to work in this environment.

So it is worth getting things into the open early on.

What do we enjoy about our jobs, about working at the Club? Now is a good time to start some group work, maybe for 10 minutes or so. Divide the team into your pre-arranged groups and ask them to sit at separate tables, or in other rooms if you have them, so that they can consider the question. When they come back ask the groups to nominate a spokesman and present their findings.

These may well include:

- ☒ Pride
- ☒ Happiness
- ☒ Money
- ☒ Responsibility
- ☒ Job Satisfaction
- ☒ The Team Communication with others
- ☒ The setting.

Where appropriate ask for clarification.

The next piece of group work will take longer so allow about 20 minutes on the subject.

What don't we enjoy about our jobs and working here? If they don't come up with any thoughts you can swiftly move on but the groups may come back with some of these points which will show that you have got something to work at.

- ☒ Disrespect from Members
- ☒ Lack of respect from the Committee
- ☒ Members' lack of respect for the Committee
- ☒ Non acceptance of answers given
- ☒ Security and staff being alone in Clubhouse
- ☒ Staff shortages
- ☒ Job descriptions - lack of them or not representative of the job
- ☒ Interruptions by Members, other staff and telephone

- ❧ Male/Female scenario.
- ❧ Bad weather - either green staff or bar staff being in an empty Clubhouse
- ❧ Lack of proper clothing or old workware
- ❧ Staff bitchiness, tense atmosphere
- ❧ Members and staff not using proper communication channels
- ❧ Disregard for routing of play on course
- ❧ Attitude to staff on the course
- ❧ Stress
- ❧ Shotgun starts
- ❧ No respect for tee times
- ❧ Lack of staff room
- ❧ Poor education of Members regarding type of course e.g. heathland, parkland etc. Dogs on the course
- ❧ Members never happy with the hours worked
- ❧ Shift patterns, long days, few breaks
- ❧ Members are set in their ways re food/menus
- ❧ Poor communication between all departments.

These dislikes can be categorised as:

Staff issues - conditions etc. staff room, long days, shortages, security, clothing, communication, stress, tension, bitchiness (these can be linked and could be down to office space, conditions, etc).

Members - respect, Committee, etc., attitude on the course, tee times, knowledge.

Having persuaded the participants to get these matters into the open the next task is to see if they have ideas on how to overcome their problems and concerns. This is a very useful subject for group work before the next seminar and it can be a good idea to provide the group with information which could help them decide what sort of effect the negatives have on our performance.

Have a look at some real figures and the Club's performance over recent months. Suggested items can include bar and catering takings and profits/losses, green fees and society income, membership numbers and subscription receipts.

If, like many Clubs, your Club is under some subscription pressure, a reduction in numbers and maybe the elimination of a waiting list consider the effect of performance against financial budgets and try to find out why people are leaving the Club. Again, group work could help provide a range of answers including:

- ❧ Less people belong to Clubs
- ❧ Course too easy or too hard

- ☹ Temporary greens and/or tees used in winter
- ☹ Course closed in winter
- ☹ Trolley bans
- ☹ Entry fee
- ☹ Club is clicky
- ☹ Family commitments
- ☹ Disapproval of policies/Committee
- ☹ Too expensive
- ☹ Not value for money

Our performance could have an effect on all these points.

The following are possible results of group work regarding the overcoming of our dislikes.

A. Staff Issues

Two people locking up at night and the use of panic buttons; Two people to go on the bank run; improvement/drafting of Job Descriptions and staff contracts including grievance procedure; staff think-tank; revised clothing/uniforms; employee of the month and incentive schemes; better rota system; use of pre-prepared food to reduce staff numbers; use of blast freezer; edited meeting minutes for staff; make better use of space by sorting rubbish, investigating more office space and staff room; better Health and Safety and First Aid refreshers; staff training should be encouraged and must include training for consistency.

B. Communication

Suggestions may include the use of email which would necessitate the setting up of addresses for each department; better course information messages; new telephone system.

C. Members

Newsletters; meetings with committee

Agree to action all the requirements, at least by discussion within the groups between meetings. Then set dates by when new systems should be put into place - and who is responsible.

THE CUSTOMER

Having discussed fully the likes and dislikes of the staff it is right now to focus some time on Customers and what we mean by the word.

Ask the group: Who are our customers?

The answers will, or should, be: Members, Visitors, each other, other Clubs, suppliers, societies, courtesies, etc.

Now get the small groups to consider what our Customers expect from us as staff. What do Customers expect from us?

- ☒ Quality of service, cheap
- ☒ Courteous staff
- ☒ Immediate response
- ☒ Fully informed staff
- ☒ Perfect course
- ☒ No Greenstaff on the course!
- ☒ Staff to be available
- ☒ Smartness
- ☒ Choice
- ☒ Provide product when they want it
- ☒ Consistency

In general it will probably be suggested that Members expect more and want the impossible. What right do they have to expect these things?

The view may be probably not much more than 50%. Having discussed these points the small groups should now be asked to consider what we expect from each other and the answers may include some of the following:

- ☒ Support: Loyalty: Respect
- ☒ Consistency: Politeness: Communication: Information
- ☒ Help and advice: Confidentiality: Understanding
- ☒ Team Spirit: Sense of Humour: Quality/Efficiency
- ☒ Hard Work: Thanks/Praise.

Again, what right do we have to expect these things? The answer may well be 100%.

Therefore we must get Members to reach our standards - to close the gap.

STAFF MOTIVATION AND CUSTOMER SERVICE – PART 3

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IMPROVEMENT PLANS

For any Club it is necessary to be viable as a business and a useful point for discussion is what we mean by viable. This will include things such as financial viability; policies which are achievable; the Club being respected by staff, Members and visitors, enjoyed with pride and supported.

How can we make the Club more viable financially is a subject that can be covered by group work and consideration being given to what we waste.

This will include:

- ☛ Time, money, food, energy, paper, diesel, space, stocks etc.

Consideration should also be given to the Club's investment in:

- ☛ Promotion for Members and visitors, PR is free, good and bad.
- ☛ Course - greens etc
- ☛ Facilities - locker room, offices, security,
- ☛ Bar facilities and comfort
- ☛ Car park
- ☛ Kitchen equipment
- ☛ Training
- ☛ Maintenance
- ☛ Time

Training promotes a feel good factor so consider in detail the Club's investment in training and use the groups to provide ideas of what is required and where it can be obtained.

- ☛ Cellar courses
- ☛ Health and Safety
- ☛ Brewery trips
- ☛ In-house training
- ☛ Agronomy

Look at what is on offer from BIGGA, GCMA, PGA, Hotel and Catering Industry, Other Clubs.

Each department can also be asked to evaluate specific requirements and these could be used as an evaluation of the knowledge and skills that are required for each job to be accomplished. The departments will draw up, via consensus, a profile of key knowledge and skills areas, marking each on a scale of 1 - 9. Each member of staff would then separately mark himself against that profile, hopefully identifying a gap between the ideal level and the individual level.

The task for you and the department heads after the seminars is to agree a programme of development so that the gaps can be closed.

As a major group work exercise between meetings ask the team to consider.

What can they do as individuals and as a team to improve Customer Service and the way people view the staff?

It is also an additional challenge if you ask staff to provide, at the next meeting, at least one thing that they will each do individually to try and improve. Don't forget to provide one yourself.

The resulting presentation will also allow for discussion on what the staff require to achieve their goals and those of the team as a whole.

As a group the following may be provided as answers:

- ☛ Be positive
- ☛ Know the menu
- ☛ Sell our products
- ☛ Smarter appearance, clean shoes
- ☛ Wear name badges
- ☛ Cleaner areas
- ☛ Be more confident
- ☛ Smile
- ☛ Say good morning
- ☛ Be more approachable, tolerant, helpful and courteous
- ☛ Become more knowledgeable, especially of golf.

Individual answers may include:

- ☛ Improve assertiveness and leadership skills
- ☛ Don't do other people's jobs
- ☛ Make more effort in food preparation
- ☛ Take more responsibility
- ☛ Continue learning
- ☛ Be more punctual

- ☛ Be more aware, talk and listen
- ☛ Delegate more
- ☛ Have confidence in others
- ☛ Take lunch breaks
- ☛ Improve self-confidence
- ☛ Treat everyone the same.

Agree the actions with the team and introduce the concept of staff appraisals.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully now you have been able to turn the sessions around from generally negative thoughts in the first meeting to more positive views now.

At the end of the final session it is very important to recap on all the items discussed and actions agreed. Remind everyone that the whole series of seminars has been about trying to identify areas where improvement is desirable or changes are needed.

Don't forget that you will have been using the team's words during most of the sessions. They have said what they are going to do to get better. Not everything will have been wrong in the past and not everything is right.

Make sure that all your staff know that the momentum will not be allowed to slacken off and it is as well to propose a follow up meeting after about a month and then to hold further meetings to review progress beyond that. This will have the effect of putting a bit of pressure on everyone, including yourself, to make sure things, which were agreed, actually happen. Make sure the team know that you will not be doing it all. There are Managers to manage, Deputies to deputise and Assistants to assist and we are all one or the other.

Point out that there is give and take in everything and that whilst the staff may want things from the Club, the Club expects things from all staff.

Hopefully the results will be the better motivated and performing staff spoken about earlier and there may just be happier Members.

As a team and as individuals staff at all golf clubs need to make decisive moves to ensure that they are better at their jobs, that they are more knowledgeable, more pleasant to work with and more professional. If they achieve that then the Club has a much better chance of maintaining its Members and continuing to attract visitors.

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