

# Critical Business Relationships

by JoAnna Brandi

In my seminars on Customer Caring I talk about something I call the Work-Relationship Tripod (sm). As many of our businesses are consciously moving from being "transaction - based" to being "relationship - based," it's important to understand the interactions of relationship in business. Imagine, if you will, that your business sits on a tripod (or even a three-legged stool.) Each leg of the tripod represents a different set of relationships: External, Internal, and Inner. All of the legs need to stay in balance, in order for the business on top to be in balance.

The external relationship "leg" represents those relationships external to your company - those relationships you have with customers, suppliers, competitors, investors, communities and even the families of those that work with you. The internal relationship "leg" represents those relationships among the people inside your company - fellow staff members and managers. The third "leg" representing the relationship we all have inside, with ourselves, that's where our sense of self-worth and pride and attitudes exist.

These relationships form what I refer to as an "eco-system". In an eco-system, the whole system changes in response to changes or feedback in one of its parts. For example, as our customer's lives change, as their days became longer and busier, we changed our hours to accommodate their needs, or when our competitor became a player on the Internet, we reacted by evaluating our own digital strategies. We respond to changes anywhere in the system.

We have a good deal of control over the "climate" in our eco-system. If we create an organization where people participate, enthusiastically come to work they enjoy, care for and about the customer and each other, we will have an entirely different environment then if it's an "every person for him/herself" attitude, where the good energy of people is wasted in political nonsense or in CYA (Cover Your you-know-what) behavior.

As you get serious about becoming more customer-focused, lots of changes will have to happen. And the changes of course, begin with you. Organizations don't change, people do. In most organizations today there is a lot of changing that needs to be done to meet the challenges of the future. The first step: intend to change things. Intend to change yourself. Intend to shake things up and think "outside the box". Begin with looking at the tripod.

## EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Customers want to be treated with respect and caring and the highest level of interpersonal skill. They want you to understand the world from their point of view, they want courtesy, convenience, expertise, professionalism, and creative solutions to their problems - they want you to say YES. They want unique solutions to their unique problems. They want you to be involved with and support their community.

Another external relationship is that with suppliers. Let your suppliers know what you need so you can take better care of your customers. Get them involved. Work towards a win/win.

## INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

How we work together as a team. Does everyone in an organization serve customers? You bet. Some people in an organization serve the external customers; some people serve the people that serve the

customers. Together internal suppliers and internal customers form a chain of value that reaches out to the external customer. Importantly, we need all deal with each other with trust and respect and strive to communicate clearly and honestly with each other because we all have the same goals. Each supporting the other to provide an exquisite level of customer care. Together you hold a vision.

Ask yourself: What links your team to each other and to the customers? Do people know what they can expect from each other? Do we trust each other? Do we tell the truth, do we really pay attention to each other, and do we listen with empathy and concern? Do we have common goals? **Do we celebrate?** Are we **as a team** dedicated to providing a quality of experience for the customer and ourselves? Are we committed to learning from each other's ideas and creating new possibilities together?

## INNER RELATIONSHIP

This is the relationship we have with ourselves. Ask yourself: How do I feel when I get up to go to work in the morning? Do I want to be there? Do I like what I do? Do I feel important? How is my sense of self-worth? Do I feel like I make a difference? How is my sense of self-esteem, does the place I work help me to build self-worth and self-esteem? Does what I do count? Is this a place I can learn something? Is this a place I can feel important?

In today's world it is critical that our employees feel good about where they work - and that begins with us as managers. Customer-focused environments are those that value people and their contributions. The hundreds of companies I have spoken to in the last few years that have created a culture that customers love, have also created a culture that workers love. Happy employees are more likely to create happy customers. Let's create environments where people bring their **Passion** to work!

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