

The Challenges Faced in a Sales and Service Culture

By: Michael Neill

I read a consultant's blog that noted, "A Sales and Service Culture is like the Loch Ness Monster. Many have claimed it exists but no one has actually seen it!" Pretty funny, but an overstatement. While there are far more financial institutions that continue to attempt to differentiate on convenience, new products, technology, etc., there are not many excellent examples of fully effective sales and service cultures.

Why do we see so few top notch sales and service cultures?

1. The efforts to develop a culture that will create a true retail focus throughout the institution are still in its infancy. Yes, we have been talking about it since the 80's, but most financial institutions see/saw it as the next thing to do or found it to be important only when the small business customers weren't borrowing.
2. We can convince ourselves we have a sales and service culture much more easily than we can build it. For example, I hear someone tell me every week, "You know we already have a sales culture." They then begin to explain that their institution has a service culture because they have done sales training and have incentives. This claim is akin to me claiming that I am a qualified contractor because I have a hammer and a building loan.
3. It takes time to change the entire culture of an organization that has been operating in a "processing obsessed culture" for years. We sometimes suffer from "Organizational Attention Deficit Disorder" i.e. Difficulty in maintaining focus on long term strategic initiatives. "Let's just do some sales training and give the employees a cool sticker to wear. That should do it, right?"
4. Changes are not limited to the change in employees adopting service behaviors and moving from order taking behaviors. It is much more challenging to teach ourselves how to move from managing to coaching and leading.

I hope I can address each of the above four challenges in the coming issues in more detail. However, I can provide a solid idea of some of the pieces it takes to create a "real sales and service culture." How is your institution doing?

1. We have a plan in place that provides a guide to implement all of the correct tactics in the proper sequence and in the correct spatial relationship. We wouldn't covert our core processing system without a plan in place, would we?
2. The institution has a statement of intent that provides an understanding of what we are here to do for our customers/members. E.g. Our Mission is to enable customers to fulfill their financial goals.
3. We hire employees and promote employees based on their attributes to fit into our culture of high quality service.
4. We exert as much energy developing, measuring and coaching internal service as we do on external service.

5. We work to develop a culture of “catching our employees doing things right.”
6. We have defined service with Service Promises that we broadcast to the customers/members and each other. E.g. “I will treat you as an honored guest.” We use these Service Promises as the foundation to develop surveys for internal and external customers/members that are used to measure cultural success.
7. We consider product knowledge so important our employees are required to pass a certification exam every year.
8. Our evaluations weight sales and service performance equal with balancing and accuracy.
9. We track service and sales delivery and results as often, and with as much voracity, as any process in the institution.
10. We consider sales and service coaching to be something we do everyday rather than “another weekly meeting to conduct.” It is who we are, not a weekly “checkmark” to complete.
11. We recognize those willing and able employees who perform at a high level.
12. We hold accountable those employees who are unwilling and unable. It violates our commitment to excellence to submit our customers/members to the indifferent service delivered by these people.

You may never see the Loch Ness Monster. But, I have seen our client’s real sales and service cultures, and it is beautiful to behold! Interestingly enough they seem to be outperforming their peers in all financial measures. Go figure! Hey did you see that? I can’t believe what I just saw.



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