



People. Process. Progress.™

A newsletter of ideas, comment, and dialogue.

TSI Info Source

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Welcome...

...to *TSI Info Source*. Yes, we have another new name for our newsletter. And, as you hopefully recognize from the heading, we have a new corporate logo/identity. We truly feel that “People. Process. Progress” speaks to the heart of what we’re about and the impact that we can make for our clients.

Organizations succeed when they make it easy for their customers (whether internal or external) to get what they want/need. To this end, the effectiveness of your customer support is just as important as the quality of your products and services. How well do your current support services reflect the value you have for your customers? Are solutions being delivered or are you just trying to keep things moving along? This issue offers some questions for you to consider in reflecting on how things are done today and provides some concrete steps for enhancing your focus.

As always, we welcome your feedback and promise to consider your needs as we continue to evolve this newsletter and our services. If you would like to share your thoughts or have any questions, feel free to send us an e-mail at info@transforming.com.

- The Editors

Turning the Corner: Transforming a Support Group into a Service Center

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Wouldn't your customers be more satisfied if their problems were being addressed more quickly and consistently? If your staff were able to get answers more directly, wouldn't they be more likely to complete their work on time and within budget? Things don't have to function perfectly all of the time (they probably never will), but people need a way to quickly get back on track. Adopting a “solution focus” can help your organization to turn that corner more adeptly.

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Can You Change the Paradigm?

Let's take a closer look at what this means using IT support as an example. Have you ever heard these types of comments/complaints before?



“I submit suggestions for improving support but I never seem to hear anything back.”

“Tom's out sick today, isn't there anyone else who knows what's going on?”

“Why does it take so long for someone to get me an answer to my question?”

“Why do I have to explain my problem 2 or 3 times to different people?”

“How come we rarely get updates from IT on what's changing?”

Sure you have. There never seem to be enough knowledgeable people around when you need them. This situation is, oftentimes, a symptom of the level of attention that an organization places on supporting its users. It's great to have the people who delivered a system assigned as front-line support, but if these individuals are also responsible for maintenance or other development then you're in trouble.

An even worse scenario is if the system has migrated to your help desk area but no one has really spent the time to effectively educate your support staff. Anything but the most basic problems need to be referred elsewhere, probably back to the people who are now working on other tasks. Technical support is a perfect example of an area that needs to evolve. Businesses need to change the “old school” view of IT as a backroom, overhead expense area and move it forward to a “solution-focused” service center.

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What's "Solution Focus"?

Simply stated, "solution focus" means everything that you do in your organization is aimed at providing your customers with the solutions they need to function effectively and efficiently. Whether you're dealing with IT or some other support area, you can take a critical look at your "solution focus" by asking questions like:

- Does your "customer" know who to contact when they need assistance?
- How well is your current support staff being utilized? Do you need to provide additional resources or can existing staff be used more effectively?
- Does your staff make it a priority to aggressively resolve open items rather than letting them pile up?
- Does your organization unconsciously employ a "silo" mentality that can increase hand-offs and turnaround time and ultimately diminish the quality of service?
- How clearly do you understand what your "customer" wants/needs from you?
- How effective and consistent is the support that's provided today?
- How are you measuring the quality of the current support? Is this a periodic effort to know where you stand or a continuous process striving for improvement?
- In what ways, are you being proactive in servicing the needs of your "customer"?

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HOT LINKS (or, more places we like to surf)

TSI Newsletter Archives - <http://www.transforming.com/archives.html> - check this page out for copies of past articles and other information.

Harvey Mackay's info site - <http://www.mackay.com/main.html> - some of the best from Harvey Mackay, entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker.

CEO Express - <http://www.ceo-express.com> - a great source for links to many news sources, business periodicals, and various other online resources.

Chicagoland Expressway Congestion Map - <http://www.ai.eecs.uic.edu/GCM/CongestionMap.html> - Probably a moot point since traffic is always a challenge.

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Making the Turn...

As you can see from the questions above, a “solution focus” is achieved by understanding what is needed, setting priorities, and providing value. But how do you get started? One approach that we have used with our clients is to complete a stakeholder analysis (see Sample 1 below). The objective of this analysis is to develop specific and targeted information that you can translate into an action plan for delivering service improvements.

Sample 1 – Stakeholder Analysis for IT User Support

	Basic Support	Intermediate Support	Advanced Support
Stakeholder A			
Access to user help information quickly and directly	Consistent steps followed when receiving calls; user information provided once and carried through the process;	Every call gets logged with key support attributes so that proper group is involved immediately;	Web access to support information with real-time chat support integrated as follow-up;
Stakeholder B			
Timely notification on what's being updated and when	Receipt of each change request is acknowledged and response is provided within a week's turnaround;	Targeted, customized training updates delivered as part of a change roll-out;	
Stakeholder C			
...			

Here's where you begin:

- 1) **Identify your stakeholders.** What's a stakeholder? Stakeholders may include external customers, internal users, management, shareholders, suppliers, and others. You should include all parties that rely or depend on your organization for some level of service or information.
- 2) **Define the stakeholders' unique/distinct values.** Ask yourself what is important to each stakeholder. If you aren't sure, ask them. It's critical that you know these values but not surprising if you don't. These values help you spell out the competitive advantage that your organization can establish by satisfying these needs.

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- 3) **Categorize your service offerings.** Add three columns with the general headings of basic, intermediate, and advanced support. Basic support items will include steps that can be taken right away while intermediate and advanced support items may be more involved or require additional resources.
- 4) **Think critically and start filling in the boxes.** This analysis should focus on the competitive advantages that you want to achieve. How can your service offering be improved to better satisfy the values/needs of the stakeholder? What is it that you want to deliver that makes a difference to your customers, users, business partners, etc?
- 5) **Start moving forward, right away.** Now that you've completed your analysis, develop an action plan for improving your level of service. Establish a 30 day target for delivering on a number of the basic support needs. Begin project planning of the staff and other resources needed to meet the intermediate and advanced support needs.

When it comes right down to it, we're talking about focusing on the "customer" and exceeding their expectations. You owe that to them and you owe it to yourself as well.

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