

Best Practice

Service Regina

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

The practice being nominated is the development and execution of the **City of Regina Customer Service Strategy**. The strategy was developed in response to some significant customer service issues in the City of Regina.

THE PROCESS

Developing the Strategy

The City of Regina began the development of a Customer Service Strategy as early as 2006. The process included research into best practices, a review of customer service research nationally, consultation with employees and customers of the City of Regina, and a review of current customer processes and practices to identify gaps or incongruities. The strategy that emerged from this research was published and launched in 2008. A project team of 10 people, all employees of the City of Regina, led the research, consultation, and strategy development process.

Corporate Re-organization

Beginning in 2007 and carrying into 2008, the City of Regina undertook an analysis of its lines of business and corporate structure and began an organizational design project to align like businesses with like – from the customer's perspective. The City used external consulting support to do that analysis and craft the subsequent design. To ensure the project's effectiveness, we also developed internal organizational design expertise and support to assist in the transition.

Improving the System to Track Requests for Service

The City of Regina utilizes Customer Relationship Management software (Hansen) to track Customer contact. Our Customer Service Centre within Service Regina creates a service request for each and every Customer contact they have. This allows us to determine if customers are calling multiple times about a specific situation. Where a number of callers repeatedly call regarding a particular situation, the operational area responsible is required to provide Service Regina with briefing materials so that call centre staff are better able to respond to customer inquiries.

The City of Regina has used the Customer Relationship Management software to introduce a new rigour in monitoring. All customer inquiries and concerns are logged into the customer service records retention system and

tracked electronically. The responding department can only indicate a concern is resolved when a request is fully handled. The system has the capacity to track whether issues are appropriately responded to and the response time for handling them. While these systems are, in themselves, not unique, we are now emphasizing the collection and distribution of data on how we're doing so that we can feed it back to employees to support continuous improvement.

Ensuring Service Regina Staff Can Respond to Customer Concerns

As part of running an effective call centre, it is essential that centre staff are informed in advance of any pending issues and are provided with information to ensure they can effectively handle calls. Service Regina and City of Regina Communications Branch work closely together to identify and anticipate issues. Service Regina staff are routinely briefed in advance of any budget or program announcements. They are also advised in advance of any service disruptions. They are well-briefed on service policies such as the Winter Road Maintenance Policy to help callers understand concerns. Conversely, Service Regina staff ensure that City of Regina Communications Branch and responsible operational areas are advised of significant issues that emerge through the call centre. This allows the City of Regina to develop and implement broader communications plans where necessary to ensure all citizens who may potentially be affected by an issue are made aware. It also ensures that the operational areas can provide Service Regina staff with briefing materials regarding the particular issue.

Improving the Responsiveness of City Employees to Requests For Service

A maximum time of ten days has now been established to respond to a customer request for service. If that deadline can't be met, at minimum the service provider has to contact the customer to discuss the reason for the delay. This standard is now reinforced as a management expectation and reports about responsiveness are forwarded to management, including the City Manager on a regular basis.

Establishing Service Standards

Service standards were established across the City of Regina for all employees not only for response time to requests for service from customers, but for a number of other customer contact modes. The City of Regina has established minimum standards for:

- Response times for emails
- Response times for telephone calls and protocol for answering as well as response times for telephone messages
- Response times for in person service
- Out-of office messages on email and telephone including alternative contacts

Building a Plan for Customer Service in the business plan of every line of business

The City of Regina has a team to support business planning, in accordance with a City template and format, at the Division, Department and Branch levels. This process requires that each business unit discuss and plan how it will respond to and deliver on the customer service strategy. A key element of this process is that each business unit must determine who its customers are whether they be internal or external. This was a key element in shifting the public service focus to understand that those to whom we provide service are, indeed, customers.

Employee Training

In 2009, the City of Regina undertook an extensive project to train the majority of employees in the basics of customer service. The program delivered training to 2,155 staff, approximately 85% of City of Regina permanent employees covering the range from senior management to front line staff. This was another key element in successfully shifting public servants so that they understood their programs and services as "customer service".

The customer service training is also now a mandatory part of new or returning hires.

Improving On-line Service to Customers

As part of the strategy, the City of Regina also developed improvements in the on-line interface with customers. Information about programs and services was improved and the capacity to pay and register for programs was added. Customers are also able to create a service request on-line thereby making access time convenient for the Customer.

Improving Customer Access to In-Person Service

A number of services where customers require in-person access to service providers have been moved to the main floor of City Hall to ensure convenience. All payments can be made on the main floor. As well, any purchases such as licenses can be handled on the main floor of City Hall. Indeed, during the heaviest week of property tax payment, a booth is set up on the street and drive through service is provided to customers.

THE RESULTS

The results of this strategy have been impressive. As of September, 2009:

- The number of unresolved requests for service has been reduced from **15,000 to 1,200**.
- The number of requests for service that have had no response reported on them has been reduced from **10,000 to 20**.
- We have seen a significant reduction in the number of calls that are being escalated to Council. Indeed, Council members report that they are now getting frequent calls that are compliments about service rather than complaints.
- Since 2006, we have been tracking overall perceptions about customer service at the City of Regina as part of our annual citizens' survey, but the new practice is too preliminary to have shown significant results on a population basis. The numbers below, which are similar to numbers in each of the previous four years, provide baselines against which future progress can be tracked. These measures clearly speak to the objectives of the service program.

| Question | 2009 (Average ratings out of 5) |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| City staff are courteous | 3.96 |
| City staff are knowledgeable in their areas | 3.67 |
| City staff are helpful | 3.57 |
| City staff respond quickly to requests or Questions | 3.33 |
| Once I find the right person to contact at the City, it is easy to get hold of him or her | 3.33 |
| It is easy to find the right person to contact regarding a City matter | 3.17 |
| Average | 3.51 |

LESSONS LEARNED

A few key lessons have been learned through the implementation of this project.

- Customer perceptions take a long time to change. Citizens have few direct contacts with City employees and generally only when a concern arises. It may be several years between one contact and another. Furthermore, if previous contacts were negative, a single positive contact will not change overall

perceptions. Indeed, a single positive contact may be seen as the “anomaly” as opposed to the pattern. To undo a history of poor, unresponsive service will take many years.

- Employees who have not thought of citizens as customers take time to make the adjustment and to make customer needs a priority in their work. At the City of Regina, this means making choices about what gets considered a priority each day. For example, if an employee’s “boss” wants something and a customer wants something, the boss’s request, historically, has likely been the priority. The transition to making customers a priority requires that both “bosses” and employees agree that customer needs are the priority and that other work may be delayed.
- The City of Regina has found that there are still advances that can be made about what services are supplied on an in-person basis on the main floor of City Hall. We are in the midst of designing a project that will see the transfer of services regarding land development and building permits to the main floor along with all cash handling. Additionally, meeting rooms to support meetings with the public (including job interviews) will be added to the main floor to make finding people and places easier.