

**DEVELOPING A CUSTOMER SERVICE PLAN FOR SOUTH OGDEN FIRE
DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

By: David K. Powers
South Ogden Fire Department
South Ogden City, Utah

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy
As part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

August 2001

ABSTRACT

The problem was that South Ogden Fire Department did not have a customer service plan that would help ensure customer satisfaction.

The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a comprehensive customer service plan that would provide the direction needed to the members of the South Ogden Fire Department to help ensure customer satisfaction.

This applied research project used an action research method to answer the following questions:

1. What is a customer service plan and what are the key elements of such a plan?
2. What are the key elements of a customer service plan as they specifically relate to South Ogden Fire Department?
3. What efforts might best engage the members of the South Ogden Fire Department to be committed to such a customer service plan?

The procedures used in this project were: a literature review of books and journals, search of information on the Internet, interviews of fire professionals, and internal department surveys.

Literature review revealed that a customer service plan is very similar to a strategic plan. Key components of a plan include: involvement, recognition, trust, employee satisfaction, training, and communication, focusing on strengths and overcoming weaknesses. Leaders also need to listen, provide the right tools, and be flexible with Department employees. In short, quality leadership will promote commitment.

Strengths, weaknesses, and commitment were all determined by internal customer surveys. Using this information, a customer service plan was developed for South Ogden Fire Department.

It is recommended that this customer service plan be implemented immediately. Efforts should be made to meet the goals in the established timelines. Furthermore, customer service should be a continuous topic of conversation at South Ogden Fire Department. Most importantly, Fire Department leadership needs to do a better job of recognizing employees who provide outstanding customer service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE.....	6
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
PROCEDURES.....	14
RESULTS.....	17
DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS.....	23
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	25
REFERENCES.....	26
APPENDIX A Customer Service Survey.....	27
APPENDIX B Customer Service Activities List.....	30
APPENDIX C Strengths and Weaknesses.....	31
APPENDIX D Customer Service.....	32
APPENDIX E Results of Customer service Survey.....	34
APPENDIX F Customer Service Plan.....	36

INTRODUCTION

While the South Ogden Fire Department (SOFD) is involved in customer service activities and places a high value on customer service, there is no current plan in place to measure the effectiveness of these activities or whether the current activities have had their intended effect. The problem is that SOFD does not have a “Customer Service Plan” (CSP) that will help ensure customer satisfaction.

The purpose of this applied research project is to develop a comprehensive CSP that will provide the direction needed to the members of SOFD to help ensure customer satisfaction.

Using an action research method the following questions will be utilized to help develop a CSP:

1. What is a CSP and what are the key elements of such a plan?
2. What are the key elements of a CSP as they specifically relate to SOFD?
3. What efforts might best engage the members of the SOFD to be committed to such a CSP?

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

South Ogden Fire Department is a municipal fire department that serves a population of approximately 15,000, with two stations, and a combination force of 40 firefighters (7 full-time, 33 part-time).

Prior to 1994, SOFD was an unmanned department that relied on pager callback of fire personnel. In 1994, the City made the decision to staff one of the two stations with three personnel around the clock. This resulted in three full-time fire captain positions and six full time equivalent positions part time.

In 1997 concerns over the leadership and lack of direction of the Fire Department led the City in to hire a consulting firm to evaluate and recommend future strategies for the Fire Department.

Emergency Services Consulting Group (ESCG) (1997) emphasized the need to move toward a full time fire chief position, “Creation of such a position would improve management, communications, department discipline, and consistency in the day-to-day supervisions and direction” (p. 9).

Following the recommendations of ESCG the City passed a franchise tax (Often referred to as the “Fire Department Tax”) to hire a full-time chief and staff the second station.

When this researcher was hired as the fire chief in September of 1998, elected official’s expectations were to move from a boy’s club mentality to a professional fire department (Garwood, G., Goodell G., personal communication, September 28, 1998).

There was not only the need to move toward a professional fire department, but to regain some of the customer support that was lost by imposing the controversial franchise

tax. In addition, there was strong evidence that many members of the Fire Department had little regard for customer service.

As a result, three customer service goals were developed to make customer service a priority for SOFD. First, training for Department officers in customer service and developing general customer service philosophies and expectations; second, implementing customer service programs that have been successful in other fire departments; and finally, increase performance expectations for positions by requiring certifications, as well as increasing the minimum requirements for employment.

It is the belief of this researcher that intent of these goals and activities were met. However, there are no real indicators as to whether these programs have had their desired effects or whether there might be better ways for SOFD to accomplish their customer service goals. In addition, the buy-in to the current customer service philosophy may be based on meeting the expectations of the new chief rather than each individual's own expectations being met. Without true buy-in, it is the belief of this researcher that feelings of disenfranchisement may develop, which could hurt future growth and stability of the Department. This in turn may affect how SOFD personnel deliver customer service.

This research is significant to SOFD for two reasons. First, it will help develop a customer service plan that will match our goals and capabilities to meet the demands of the public. Second, by implementing and following the plan, SOFD will hope to gain better public and internal support for the activities for which SOFD engages in.

The importance of this became apparent to the researcher during the Executive Development course taught at the National Fire Academy. The "Terminal Objective" of

the “Service Quality/ Marketing” unit states: “[Fire department leaders need to] be able to evaluate services provided by their organizations and develop strategies to improve organizational quality and service standards” (ED, NFA SM10-2).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to answer research questions and provide information to develop a customer service plan, implement a customer service plan, and evaluate a customer service plan.

Developing A Customer Service Plan

“Creating your customer service plan involves getting a clear picture of your companies strengths and weaknesses” (*Create a Customer Service Plan: Step-By-Step*, 2001). In order to identify these strengths and weaknesses, the same article suggests using the survey found in Appendix A to measure an organization’s customer service attributes.

In a related article “Create a Customer Service Plan: Key Points” (2001), four elements are listed as key to a customer service plan:

- 1) **Practices and Processes** – This is the ability to know what is really important to your customers by collecting information and showing appreciation.
- 2) **Staff Skills, Attitudes, and Satisfaction** – The ability to deliver great service to your customers closely relates to staff satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfied workers create satisfied customers.

- 3) **Workplace Environment** – Office technology and a comfortable physical environment must be designed to allow for maximum service delivery.
- 4) **Leadership Practices** – Quality customer service cannot occur without effective leadership. Effective leaders know the importance of communicating service standards to their teams and showing the same respect to the team members as they show to the customer.

Similar to developing a strategic plan, a customer service plan should be well thought out and take into consideration many aspects of your organization. Developing a plan not only consists of identifying your strengths and weaknesses, but “. . . taking into account your organization’s mission or objectives, environmental constraints and opportunities, leadership’s values, and the development of alternative strategies.”

(Denhardt, 1991 pp. 237-238).

Kouzes and Posner (1987) state:

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. It is leaders who get us started. . . . When planning there are a few things to keep in mind. First, your planning should be driven by your values and vision, not by technique. Second, involve in the planning process as many as you can of the people who will have to implement the plan. Remember both empowerment and commitment are increased through choice, and involvement in planning increases people’s discretion over what they do. Third, break the project into manageable chunks. Specifying events and milestones is one of the greatest benefits of planning. Fourth, use the planning process as a means of getting people to mentally walk through the entire journey (pp. 233-234).

Smith (1997) maintains, “Every department should have a customer relations/customer service program. . . . The program should include provisions for getting all members involved and enthusiastic, objectives to be met, and plans for training” (p. 78).

In 1999, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVF&R) was awarded the “**Fire Service Award for Excellence**” by the International Association of Fire Chiefs based on its Community Assistance Program. The Chief of (TVF&R) Jeff Johnson (personal communication, August 5, 2001), states the key elements to a successful customer service plan that allow for buy-in are:

1. Telling people who work here that customer service is a priority and an expectation.
2. Publically recognizing employees who provide excellent service.
3. Provide employees with the tools that allow them to serve people who need help.
4. Reserve judgment and criticism about how and what they choose to do for people.
5. Keep talking about it!
6. Explain why it's important and what's in it for the employees.
7. Make sure that when they serve people in extraordinary ways. . . the employee's who are doing the service become and remain the hero's.
8. Really cool coffee mugs provided by the Chief to anyone caught providing excellent customer service.

9. Three-hour mandatory class on customer service for all recruits provided by the Fire Chief.
10. All promotional tests and entry level are questioned about the "Chief's Bullseye". . .the second ring of it is about customer service.
11. On-going monthly reading of "letters" to the Chief from citizens who reported excellent service. These letters are read on TV and broadcast to all employees.

Implementing A Customer Service Plan

“Plans remain sterile without implementation, so there has always been a close connections between planning and execution” (Dehhardt, 1991, p. 249). Denhardt further states specific action plans need to be developed to “take in the near future – the next six months, or the next year or two years – who does what, when, and to what effect” (p. 248). Furthermore, “Financial and human resources must be allocated and mobilized, organizational structures and systems must be devised, and internal policies and procedures must be developed” (p. 248).

Internal policies and procedures may include what Alan Brunacini (1996) calls the eight essentials for customer service.

1. Our essential mission and number one priority is to deliver the best possible service to our customers.
2. Always be nice – treat everyone with respect, kindness, patience, and consideration.
3. Always attempt to execute a standard problem-solving outcome: quick/effective/skillful/safe/caring/managed.

4. Regard everyone as a customer.
5. Consider how you and what you are doing looks to others.
6. Don't disqualify the customer with your qualifications.
7. Basic organizational behavior must become customer-centered.
8. We must continually improve our customer service performance (p. iii, iv).

In regard to the mobilization of human resources, Smith (1997) states:

The program should include. . .plans for training. When preparing for the training process, a few items should be remembered:

- Once the customer service plan has been completed, go over it carefully to ensure that specific areas of training meet the needs.
- Don't try to cover everything in one session.
- Ensure that all employees receive the same amount of training and that it is standard in its delivery.
- Introduce training to employees as an opportunity, not as a reprimand or criticism of their performance or lack of skill (p. 78).

Finally, Brunacini (1996) emphasizes the importance of communication, "Our organizational ability to manage official communication in most cases is still fairly unrefined. We must create and then operate a practical, on-line system to effectively assemble, package, and transmit timely, accurate information throughout the organization in the form of a deliberate organizational plan" (p. 114).

Evaluation Of A Customer Service Plan

In his research paper for NFA Barstow (1999) states that a customer survey is a key component in evaluating an organization's customer service. Quoting Strieb he states: "Citizen surveys can be an important component of a stage in strategic decision making . . . where an effort is made to identify key factors and trends that take on critical importance in the future" (p. 11)

"Survey your customers frequently, systematically, directly and personally. Review the surveys and then share them with the people in your organization who need to know what those customers have to say" (Heibeler, Kelly, Kettleman, 1998, p. 39).

Heibeler et al. further state: "We need to do more than survey our customers, we need to partner with them to find innovative ways to redesign our products as well services . . ." (p. 39).

Smith (1997) states that a vital element in evaluation is "Feedback from all personnel." He further states: "The program should be flexible enough to be adapted to minor changes but not too flexible so that it loses focus on its purpose" (pp. 101-102).

Summary Statements

Ronny Coleman (1999) states: "One of the best ways to ensure you won't succeed is to try and be all things to all people" (p.40). This supports the previous observation to focus on strengths and overcome weaknesses: then develop a plan specific for your own organizational needs.

The literature review provided vital information on the methodology for developing, implementing, and evaluating a customer service plan. While many of the

authors had different variation on the important elements of a plan, several key areas were consistent with all authors. The most notable is to involve your employees in as many aspects of the plan that you can. This information changed the intent of this RFP significantly. The original intent of this research was to identify key elements of a CSP, then apply customer service activities that matched those key elements. With the information gathered, members of SOFD will identify organizational strengths and weaknesses. Through their input, solutions will be developed to overcome weaknesses and capitalize on strengths. Department personnel will also have significant input to the CSP.

PROCEDURES

The researcher began by reviewing customer service and planning information available in journals, articles, and books. The Internet was searched for actual organization's customer service plans. During this search, the researcher came across an article "How to Develop a Customer Service Plan". A survey from that article was administered to Department personnel.

Prior to this research being conducted, the researcher attended a class "Putting Service Back into the Fire Service" instructed by Jeff Johnson, fire chief of Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue. The researcher contacted Chief Johnson by email on July 25, 2001 to ask the following questions to answer research questions:

1. What do you consider to be the key elements of a customer service plan?
2. How did you get buy-in from your personnel?
3. What type of new employee orientation do you provide for customer service?

4. Do you have any other suggestions on ensuring a successful customer service plan?

Department personnel were also given the opportunity to provide input into this research project. A series of activities and surveys were developed to allow a wide range of participation. Participation took place primarily during training meetings. Both full-time and part-time personnel contributed to the information collected.

Customer Service Activities

The first activity was to gather information on customer service activities or ideas from Department members that they believed would be successful. During a Department training meeting, twenty-six of the 40-member Department were split into three teams based on platoon assignments. Each team was given the assignment to develop a list of customer service ideas or activities that they believed to be important to the survival of SOFD and the fire service. With these groups formed, each team was given 30 minutes to develop their list of customer service activities. At the conclusion of the 30 minutes, each group leader was asked to display their list to the entire group and explain why they believed the activity was important. At the conclusion of the meeting, all items on each “Customer Service Activities” list were recorded for further use (Appendix B).

Customer Service Survey

A “Customer Service” survey was then developed to allow members of the Department to rate the importance of each item on the “Customer Service Activities” list, as well as a make written comment. The survey was broken down into seven categories: Public Education, Patient Care, Skill Development/Training, Internal Customer, Quality

Assurance, Orientation of New Hires, and Increase Delivery/Service Capabilities. Any duplication of ideas from the list were consolidated.

The survey was then given to each member of the Department at the next training meeting (Appendix D). Twenty-seven of the forty-member department completed the survey. Results were tabulated and ranked according to the total average score.

Self Assessment Survey

Finally, each Department member was given the “Self Assessment” survey found on the Internet (Appendix A). Questions were ranked as: Great, Very Good, Average, Below Average, or Poor. For the purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses, questions where the majority scored above average or higher were considered strengths: questions where the majority scored average or below were considered weaknesses. Using the results of this survey, strengths and weaknesses of SOFD were identified by Department members (see Appendix C). This information was then compared with the “Customer Service” survey and the “Customer Service Activities” list to help develop the CSP. Wherever practical, customer service activities that scored the highest were implemented.

Finally, a written CSP was developed and distributed to Department personnel for review and comment. The final draft is submitted as part of this research.

Limitations and Assumptions

Because of time constraints and the successive nature of research activities, only those Department personnel in attendance at each activity provided input. However, it is assumed that each member of the Department was able to participate in at least one of the three activities.

Customer service at SOFD over that past two years has been heavily emphasized. It is assumed that individuals answered honestly, rather than what they believed to be politically correct.

Input from the public for this customer service plan was considered during the developmental stage, however under the circumstances, the researcher believes that input from the public will be better reserved for evaluating the CSP after it has been developed and tested. Customer surveys will be used after the public is better educated about SOFD's CSP by marketing the plan.

Definition of Terms

Customer Service Activities – these are typically programs that are carried out to the public with a specific purpose (i.e. customer surveys, blood pressure checks, volunteer work, etc.).

Customer Service Plan – a comprehensive instrument to coordinate activities to meet customer service goals and missions – A strategic plan for customer service.

RESULTS

What is a Customer Service Plan and what are the key elements of such a plan?

A customer service plan is a written strategy to help obtain customer satisfaction. Similar to a strategic plan, a CSP should: Identify your strengths and weaknesses; organization's mission or objectives; environmental constraints and opportunities; leadership's values; and future trends. The gathering of this knowledge is key to the development of a CSP, because it allows an organization to focus on those activities that

will help ensure success, as well as eliminate activities that could actually be harmful to the organization.

Key elements of a customer service plan include:

1. **Leadership** - The ability to obtain goals, provide for the internal and external customer satisfaction, and the ability to create a customer centered organization through constant communication with employees about customer service goals.
2. **Employee Satisfaction** - The ability to deliver great customer service to your customers is closely related to employee satisfaction and loyalty. Provide employees with the tools that allow them to serve people who need help. Reserve judgment and criticism about how and what they choose to do for people.
3. **Communication** – Effective organizations know the importance of communication. A message of what's important to our organization's success, as well as an understanding of internal and external customer expectations is crucial. Informing employees that customer service is a priority and an expectation. Keep talking about it and explain why it's important and what's in it for the employees.
4. **Mission, Goals, and Objectives** –This is the need for an organization to take an introspective look at itself and determine if it's really what it says it is. Developing missions, goals, and objectives without follow through can be damaging. However, when applied appropriately mission, goals and objectives will identify an organizations true intent, provide a roadmap of

where an organization is going, and identifying what's expected along the way. Setting these goals are also important in letting personnel know the importance of customer service to your organization.

5. **Training** – This is critical to help ensure that performance meets expectations. This is the mental and physical exercise of personnel to perform desired results. This should take place with new hires, as well as incumbents. A foundation for excellent service needs to be applied at the beginning.

What are the key elements of a CSP as they specifically relate to South Ogden Fire Department?

Two surveys were conducted to determine the key elements of a CSP for SOFD. Members of the Department used the first, "Customer Service Survey" to determine the level of buy-in for each activity on the survey. Members of the Department used the second survey to identify the current perceived weaknesses of SOFD.

Customer Service Survey Results

On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being "Very Important", the results of this survey indicate that Department members believe the majority of items on the list are either "Important" or "Very important". There was only one category that fell below a three average and that was "Phone Etiquette" with an average of 2.96 out of a possible 5 (see Table 1). The highest was "Internal Customer: Safety" with an average score of 4.71.

The overall customer service activities for "Public Education" scored well (see Table 1). However, some comments and scores indicate there are strong opinions on the subject of "Reading in the Schools". One respondent stated: "Reading in the schools is

good, but way over done. Time spent educating elementary students in safety, etc. . . would be much more appropriate.” Another stated: “But not every day. . . overload.”

Not surprising were the results of the Skill Development/Training section (see Table 1). In any Department survey previously conducted either formally or informally, training has always been listed as a top priority with members of SOFD. Surprising however, was that two members recognized the need to train in how to deliver customer service. One stated: “Increased training in how to deliver patient care.” The other stated “P.R.” (Public relations) needs to be addressed in training.

Table 1
Customer Service Survey Results

Public Education - Overall	3.95	Internal Customer - Overall	4.47
Reading in the Schools	4.00	Involvement	4.29
Injury Prevention	4.19	Feedback	4.29
Fire Prevention	4.46	Safety	4.71
First Aid/CPR	4.00	Respect	4.61
Disaster Preparedness	3.59	Quality Assurance - Overall	4.43
Marketing Department	4.00	Department	4.43
Extinguisher Classes	3.41	Individuals (Performance Evaluations)	4.42
Patient Care - Overall	4.69	Orientation for New Hires - Overall	3.89
Treat as though your own family member	4.69	Corporate Culture/Group Expectations in attitude	4.04
Skill Development Training – Overall	4.03	Phone etiquette	2.96
Firefighter 1 & 2 Proficiency	4.39	Cleanliness of stations and Equipment	4.21
Officer Development	4.19	Minimum Standards and Skills	4.38
Evolution Proficiency	4.33	Increase Delivery/Service Capabilities	4.05
Phone etiquette	3.30	Ambulance Service	4.29
Written and Verbal Skills	3.96	Do we respond on everything (i.e. cat in tree)	3.67
		Pre Incident Planning	4.21

The results of the “Internal Customer” scored the second highest overall with a 4.47 (see Table 1). This supports what previous authors have stated about the importance

of the internal customer. One respondent stated: “The internal customer should be the first priority.”

It’s interesting to note that the results of “Quality Assurance” with a 4.43 scored just less than “Internal Customer” with a 4.47 (see Table1). These results may indicate that Department members have the same expectations for themselves as they do for the Department and its leadership.

Self Assessment Survey Results

The results of this survey indicate that generally SOFD employees believe SOFD is doing an “Average” or above average job in the customer service activities surveyed (see Appendix C).

As mentioned before, in an effort to distinguish organizational strengths and weaknesses, questions where the majority scored above average or higher were considered strengths: questions where the majority scored average or below were considered weaknesses. Strengths include:

- Providing prompt, reliable service
- Having the necessary tools and resources to deliver great service
- Having the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs
- Receiving training to do their jobs
- Technology supports customer needs
- Comfort of physical office layout and environment
- Standing behind what we sell
- Guaranteeing our service

- Trusting our employees
- Promoting teamwork

Conversely weaknesses include:

- Resolving customer problems quickly and positively
- Communicating our service standards
- Visibly appreciating our customers
- (Staff) feeling recognized and appreciated
- Competitive pay and benefits
- Rewarding service excellence (see Appendix C for entire list)

What efforts might best engage the members of the SOFD to be committed to such a CSP?

There are seven key areas that will help commit SOFD personnel to a CSP

1. Involvement of personnel in the development of a CSP. It encourages ownership and buy-in to the program.
2. Recognizing publicly employees who provide excellent service. The firefighters are the heroes not the fire chief or the city. Always keep it that way.
3. Reserve judgment and criticism about how and what your employees choose to do for people. Empower the employees to take action.
4. Provide employees with the tools that allow them to serve people who need help.

5. Listen to the ideas of employees. Explain why it's important and what's in it for the employees. Two-way communication is of utmost importance
6. Flexibility of the program to adapt to unforeseen changes an/or oversights.
7. Do whatever is required to develop relationships of trust.

The resulting product of this research is a CSP that was developed with input from members of SOFD. The CSP is specific to the needs of SOFD and takes into account all key aspects of a CSP, as well as timelines for implementation. The completed CSP is found in Appendix F.

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

By far one of the most important components of a CSP is the employee. Repeatedly in every article, interview, and survey “taking care of the employee’s needs” is listed as a key aspect or received one of the highest scores or rankings.

Great customer service is the result employee satisfaction and loyalty, as employee satisfaction reflects the satisfaction of customers (Create a Customer Service Plan: Key Points, 2001).

Involvement of the employee during the planning process leads to commitment. There is also a strong link between choice [empowerment] and commitment (Kouzes and Posner, 1987).

Customer service training can provide a way to get employees involved and enthusiastic. Training can also provide the tools necessary to provide effective customer service through proper feedback (Smith, 1997).

Chief of (TVF&R) Jeff Johnson maintains TVF&R's customer service success is based on: "Recognizing employees who provide excellent service; providing employees with the tools that allow them to serve people who need help; and reserving judgment and criticism about how and what they choose to do for people."

The bottom line is "Treat everyone as a customer" (Brunacini, 1996).

The results of the "Customer Service Survey" indicate "Safety of Personnel" as the number one priority. Involvement, feedback, and respect were all listed by those surveyed as "Important" or "Very Important".

This is significant to SOFD, because if customer service is such a high priority for the Department, a potentially **fatal** mistake was made by not allowing employee involvement and input into the planning of SOFD's initial customer service activities. This appeared to be evident based on the results of the "Self Assessment Survey" where: "Rewarding service excellence"; "Feeling recognized and appreciated"; "Receiving on the job coaching and feedback"; "Competitiveness of pay and benefits"; and "Hiring for customer service attitude" were all listed as weaknesses of SOFD (see Appendix C).

The success of this CSP is dependent upon the employees. Their continued input and support is vital. What works for Phoenix Fire Department may not work for SOFD. Efforts to adapt other organization's plans and ideas may help, but to rely on them completely will likely result in failure of the program or plan. Customer service plans need to take on the characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, and desires of each specific organization.

It is also important to note the significance of a CSP. In the opinion of the researcher, a CSP should in fact be an integral part of an organization's "Strategic Plan".

Several of the authors referred to the strategic planning process as a tactical way to develop a CSP. In the firefighting profession where customer service is the foundation to what we do, a CSP becomes an even more significant element of a strategic plan. Some consolation is that when SOFD develops a strategic plan, there will already be a major portion of it completed. In addition, having done the CSP independently demonstrates that customer service is a high priority to SOFD.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the CSP be implemented in SOFD with the timelines and assignments delineated. At the end of the first year, the surveys should be redone, as well as provide a method to include input from external customers. Customer service should continue to be routinely discussed by all members of the Department in hope of maintaining the customer service philosophy as part of SOFD's "corporate culture". With help from the City leaders, methods need to be explored, that will address employee concerns for being under appreciated and underpaid. Finally, SOFD leadership needs to strongly pursue the development of a strategic plan that will integrate the CSP that has been developed.

REFERENCES

Author. *Create a Customer Service Plan: Step-by-Step*. Retrieved June 12, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.news.onvia.com/x1431.xml>.

Author. *Create a Customer Service Plan: Key Points*. Retrieved June 12, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.news.onvia.com/x1430.xml>.

Brunacini, A.V., (1996). *Essentials of Fire Department Customer Service*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: Author

Denhardt, R.B., (1991). *Public Administration: An Action Orientation*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, Inc.

Hiebeler, R., Kelly T.B., Kettelman, C. (1998). *Best Practices: Building Your Business with Customer-Focused Solutions*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Kouzes, J.M., & Posner, B.Z., (1987). *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.

Emergency Services Consulting Group. (1998, July) *Department Evaluation: South Ogden City, Utah Fire Department*. West Linn, Oregon: Author.

Barstow, T., (1999). *Developing a customer service feedback system for the North Myrtle Beach Fire-Rescue Department*. (Call No. 30109) Emmitsburg, MD: National Fire Academy, Applied Research Project.

National Fire Academy. (1998). *Executive Development* (ED, NFA SM10-2). Emmitsburg, MD: Author.

Colman, R.J. (2000, August). Do you have time to be all things to all people? *Fire Chief*, 44, 40.

Smith, J.S., (1997, August). Implementing a customer service program. *Fire Engineering*, 150, 77-78.

Appendix A – Customer Service Example Survey with Results

How would <i>our customers</i> rate us on the following?	Great	Very Good	Average	Below Average	Poor
Knowing what's really important to our customers	1 5%	9 47%	9 47%		
Welcoming customer complaints		9 45%	10 50%		1 5%
Resolving customer problems quickly and positively	2 10%	12 60%	6 30%		
Making it easy for customers to get in touch with us	4 20%	8 40%	5 25%	3 15%	
Offering good service guarantees to our customers	2 10%	9 45%	9 45%		
Providing prompt, reliable service	7 35%	11 55%	2 10%		
Communicating our service standards	2 10%	4 20%	13 65%	1 5%	
Visibly appreciating our customers	3 15%	5 25%	10 50%	1 5%	1 5%
How would <i>our staff</i> rate us on the following?	Great	Very Good	Average	Below Average	Poor
Having the necessary tools and resources to deliver great service	7 35%	11 55%	2 10%		
Clearly understanding their roles and responsibilities	3	8	8		

	16%	42%	42%		
Having the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs	2 10%	12 60%	5 25%		
Understand how their performance is measured		10 50%	7 35%	2 10%	1 5%
Welcoming atmosphere for suggestions for improvement	2 10%	10 50%	4 20%	4 20%	
Feeling recognized and appreciated	1 5%	5 25%	11 55%	2 10%	1 5%
Receiving on the job coaching and feedback	1 5%	8 40%	9 45%	2 10%	
Availability of opportunities to improve their learning and skills	1 5%	12 60%	4 20%	3 15%	
Receiving training to do their jobs	4 20%	12 60%	4 20%		
Feeling personally accountable for service performance	4 20%	8 40%	7 35%	1 5%	
How would I rate my company's <i>workplace environment</i>?	Great	Very Good	Average	Below Average	Poor
Technology supports customer needs	6 30%	12 60%	2 10%		
Comfort of physical office layout and environment	2 10%	13 65%	4 20%	1 5%	

Competitiveness of pay and benefits		2 10%	3 15%	11 55%	4 20%
Ability to attract top-notch employees	2 10%	8 40%	10 50%		
How would I rate <i>my/our leadership?</i>	Great	Very Good	Average	Below Average	Poor
Standing behind what we sell	4 20%	11 55%	5 25%		
Guaranteeing out service	4 20%	11 55%	5 25%		
Trusting our employees	5 25%	13 65%		1 5%	
Communicating to our staff	5 25%	8 40%	5 25%	2 10%	
Treating our own people like customers	3 15%	8 40%	9 45%		
Promoting teamwork	4 20%	12 60%	3 15%	1 5%	
Rewarding service excellence	1 5%	5 25%	10 50%	3 15%	1 5%
Hiring for customer service attitude	3 15%	5 25%	10 50%	1 5%	1 5%
Encouraging continuous improvement	5 25%	9 45%	5 25%	1 5%	

Appendix B - Customer Service Activities List

South Ogden City Fire Department

Headquarters – Fire Station #81
525 E. 39th Street
South Ogden, UT 84403
Ph. (801) 394-4966
Fax 394-2435

Fire Chief
David K. Powers
Assistant Chief
Tracy E. Bolt

INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Fire Chief Powers
FROM: Asst. Chief Bolt
RE: Platoon Thoughts
DATE: May 7, 2001

Chief,
Here is a copy of the Platoon members' input on improvements that could be made to Service Delivery.

A Platoon

- ❖ Make patients / family members more comfortable
- ❖ Increase public education both on incidents and in public forums
- ❖ Improve scene demeanor
- ❖ Continue to improve and increase skills capabilities

B Platoon

- Expand and improve public education delivery
- Increase public education forums / use of media
- Improve patient / victim care
- Improve department morale
- Increase education to City Officials
- Quality Assurance with lights and siren runs
- Educate owners of businesses with educational inspections
- Plant the Mission Statement and SOFD operations seed with all new hires
- Make 'care' money available for everyday public needs
- Expand service delivery capabilities
- Provide more public education classes
- Send out critique cards to customers
- Advertise the positive aspects of department functions / actions

C Platoon

- ⇒ Increase fund-raisers
- ⇒ Quality Assurance for department-wide functions
- ⇒ Improve employee education and satisfaction
- ⇒ Improve use of media to 'sell' department
- ⇒ Provide for continuous public / employee feedback
- ⇒ Increase public school interactions

Prevent Fires... Save Lives

Appendix C – Modified Customer Service Survey to Show Strengths and Weaknesses

<u>How would our Customers rate us on the following?</u>	Great, Very Good %	Average, Below Ave., Poor %
Knowing what's really important to our customers	52	47
Resolving customer problems quickly and positively	45	55
Making it easy for customers to get in touch with us	70	30
Offering good service guarantees to our customers	55	45
Providing prompt, reliable service	90	10
Communicating our service standards	30	70
Visibly appreciating our customers	40	60
<u>How would our staff rate us on the following?</u>		
Having the necessary tools and resources to deliver great service	90	10
Clearly understanding their roles and responsibilities	58	42
Having the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs	75	25
Understand how their performance is measured	50	50
Welcoming atmosphere for suggestions for improvement	60	40
Feeling recognized and appreciated	30	70
Receiving on the job coaching and feedback	45	55
Availability of opportunities to improve their learning and skills	65	35
Receiving training to do their jobs	80	20
Feeling personally accountable for service performance	60	40
<u>How would I rate my company's workplace environment?</u>		
Technology supports customer needs	90	10
Comfort of physical office layout and environment	75	25
Competitiveness of pay and benefits	20	80
Ability to attract top-notch employees	60	50
<u>How would I rate my/our leadership?</u>		
Standing behind what we sell	75	25
Guaranteeing our service	75	25
Trusting our employees	90	10
Communicating to our staff	65	35
Treating our own people like customers	55	45
Promoting teamwork	80	20
Rewarding service excellence	30	70
Hiring for customer service attitude	40	60
Encouraging continuous improvement	70	30

Appendix D – Customer Service

Customer Service

Instructions: The success of a customer service program is dependent on proper planning, as well as the overall support of those providing it. Below are categories of customer service activities based on your input during our platoon exercise. Please take the time to rank each item on the list. Your ranking will indicate your support for the program, as well what its relative importance will be for the Department.

	<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>
Public Education		
Reading in the Schools.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Injury Prevention.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Fire Prevention.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
First Aid/ CPR.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Disaster Preparedness.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Marketing Department.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Extinguisher Classes.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
Others_____		

Patient Care	
Treat as though our own family member.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Others_____	

Skill Development/Training	
Firefighter 1&2 Proficiency.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Officer Development.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Evolution proficiency.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Phone etiquette.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Written and Verbal Skills.....	1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Others_____	

Internal Customer

Involvement.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Feedback.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Safety.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Respect.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Others_____

Quality Assurance

Department1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Individuals (Performance Evaluations)1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Others_____

Orientation for New Hires

Corporate Culture/Group Expectations in attitude...1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Phone etiquette.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Cleanliness of Stations and Equipment.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Minimum Standards in skills.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Others_____

Increase Delivery/Service Capabilities

Ambulance Service.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Do we respond on everything? (i.e. cat in a tree) ...1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Pre Incident Planning.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Others_____

Appendix E – Results of Customer Service Survey (Raw Data)

Respondants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	Total	Ave
Public Education																													
Reading in the Schools	3	5	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	5	4	5	4	2	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	2	2	5	108	4.00
Injury Prevention	4	5	3	5	2	5	4	5	5	5	2	5	5	3	4	5	4	5	4	5	3	5	4	3	5	4	4	113	4.19
Fire Prevention	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	x	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	3	3	4	5	5	4	116	4.46
First Aid/CPR	4	4	4	5	3	3	4	5	4	3	3	5	x	4	5	5	5	4	3	3	4	4	3	4	5	3	5	104	4.00
Disaster Preparedness	4	4	2	4	3	2	5	4	4	3	2	4	1	5	3	5	5	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	5	4	4	97	3.59
Marketing Department	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	2	3	3	2	4	5	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	3	5	3	5	108	4.00
Extinguisher Classes	4	5	3	4	1	3	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	3	5	4	5	2	4	3	3	3	3	5	5	4	92	3.41
Patient Care																													
Treat as though our own Family Member	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	127	4.69
Skill Development Training																													
Firefighter 1 & 2 Proficiency	5	3	3	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	119	4.39
Officer Development	4	3	3	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	4	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	113	4.19
Evolution Proficiency	4	4	4	4	4	5	3	3	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	117	4.33
Phone etiquette	3	3	2	4	1	3	3	2	5	5	1	2	4	4	5	5	5	5	1	4	3	5	4	3	1	3	3	89	3.3
Written and Verbal Skills	4	3	3	4	2	3	3	5	5	5	2	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	5	5	4	3	4	3	4	107	3.96
Internal Customer																													
Involvement	4	3	4	4	4	4	x	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	x	5	x	5	4	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	5	103	4.29
Feedback	4	3	3	5	4	4	x	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	x	5	x	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	103	4.29
Safety	5	3	4	5	5	5	x	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	x	5	x	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	113	4.71
Respect	5	2	4	4	5	5	x	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	x	5	x	5	5	x	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	106	4.61
Quality Assurance																													
Department	4	x	4	5	4	5	x	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	x	5	x	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	102	4.43
Individuals (Performance Evaluations)	4	3	4	5	4	5	x	4	5	5	4	3	5	5	x	5	x	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	106	4.42
Orientation for New Hires																													
Corporate Culture/Group Expectations in attitude	4	2	4	3	5	3	x	5	4	5	3	3	5	4	x	5	x	5	4	4	5	5	4	3	3	5	4	97	4.04

Appendix F.

South Ogden Fire Department

Customer Service Plan

September 1, 2001

The product that we provide at South Ogden Fire Department is service. It is the very foundation of our existence. Without the ability to provide services, we are non-existent. Therefore, it makes sense that the service we provide takes into consideration the satisfaction the customer.

Emergency services are different from any other business, in that the customer has little or no choice in the services he/she receives. The customer has to pay for the service regardless of whether they use it or not; The customer can't use the normal selection criteria such as quality, responsiveness, value, etc. for determining who they choose; The customer can't return the service or get their money back if they are unsatisfied; and the customer has little knowledge about the product or services prior to receiving it.

Given these facts, it is the responsibility of South Ogden Fire Department to perform in a manner that exceeds customer expectations. This can be accomplished in two ways. First, by developing customer service expectations, missions and philosophies that provide our employees with the necessary knowledge to do what is expected. Second, by planning and setting customer service goals and objectives that will help ensure customer service success.

Each member should be dedicated to three essential elements:

Desire...the desire to serve

Ability...the ability to perform

Courage...the courage to act

These elements are reflected in our Mission Statement.

MISSION STATEMENT:

We will make a concerted effort to provide Unparalleled Emergency Services to all those living in and passing through our City in an Expedient and Highly Professional manner. Our personal and collective Commitment to ongoing and advanced education and selfless service will be the cornerstone of our very existence. Our program will be amongst the most Cost Effective and Highly Rated

for like communities anywhere. We will treat your family and property with the highest degree of Respect, as though our own. Call us, we'll be there.

CUSTOMER SERVICE PLANNING

In an effort to meet these goals, missions, practices, and standards the following planning guide has been developed to help ensure customer service success for South Ogden Fire Department.

What needs to be done	Who	Start	Evaluate	Reason
Birthday recognition for each month's Birthdays	Chief, Minster	Sep-01	Reevaluate Internal Survey. July 2002	Weakness - Feeling recognized and appreciated
Meet with Club Heights, H. Guy Child, Marlon Hills and Uintah Elementary Schools to work on transition from reading to providing injury prevention curriculum.	Assistant Chief Bolt, Lt. West	Oct-01	Survey teachers end of school year 2002.	Injury prevention ranked a 4.19 on customer service survey
Quarterly training and recognition of Customer Service performance.	Chief, Capt. Hansen	2nd Thursday of quarter	Reevaluate Internal Survey. July 2002	Weakness - Rewarding service excellence. Identification of training needs in Customer service
Develop method to measure external customer opinion (survey).	Chief, Asst. Chief Bolt	Jul-02	Jul-03	Customer service survey results: How would our customers rate us on the following?
Address resolving complaints in quarterly training. Empowerment	All personnel	Oct-01	Jul-02	Weakness - Resolving customer complaints
Attend "Putting Service back into the Fire Service"	Department Officers	Upon availability	Post class discussion	Identification of training needs in Customer service
Comment cards left at scene. Read at meetings	Chief, Asst. Chief Bolt	Jul-02	Jul-03	Weakness - Welcoming customer complaints
Continued change in fire department members philosophy on the purpose of our job (empowerment card)	All personnel	Ongoing	Jul-02	Weakness - Visibly appreciating our customers
Performance evaluations are explained in greater detail. Provide ongoing evaluation throughout the year	All Officers	Ongoing	Jul-02	Weakness- Staff understanding how their performance is measured
Study alternatives to pay. Find pay solutions. Work to educate City Manager and Council. Help find possible funding.	Chief, Asst. Chief Bolt	Sep-01	Jul-02	Weakness - Competitiveness of pay and benefits

Customer service provider of quarter and year. Develop committee to decide.	Chief, Minster	Oct-01	Jul-02	Weakness - Rewarding service excellence.
Orientation for new hires on customer service expectations.	Assistant Chief Bolt	Jan-02	Jul-02	Weakness - Hiring for customer service attitude
Develop a marketing strategy for the fire department based on customer survey.	All personnel	Sep-02	Sep-03	Weakness - Communicating our service standards
Continued training, evaluation of response times, equipment and personnel preparedness	All personnel	Ongoing	Jul-02	Strength - Providing prompt, reliable service
Increased delegation of responsibly	All Officers	Ongoing	Jul-02	Strength - Trusting our employees
Continue with NFPA 1500 compliance. Develop fitness standard	All personnel	Ongoing	Jul-02	Internal customer: Safety
Develop a quality assurance committee for EMS. Meet quarterly to evaluate.	Assistant Chief Bolt	Oct-01	Oct-03	Quality Assurance: Department
Keeping state of the art equipment clean and in a ready to response mode. Replacement programs for all equipment.	All personnel, Chief	Ongoing	Jul - 02	Strength - Having the necessary tools to do the job. Cleanliness of Equipment.
Begin pre incident planning with all inspections.	Engineer Young	Oct -01	Oct - 02	Pre incident planning

INTERNAL CUSTOMER

Just like the external customer, choice is also very important to the internal customer. The information listed above is based on feedback from individuals on the Department in order to provide choice. However, in order to promote success, members of the Department should continually engage themselves in customer service activities, thought, input, and training. Employees should know that they are encouraged to provide feedback at any time about this plan and are expected to do so.

South Ogden Fire Department leadership should promote, support, and encourage the internal customer in the following ways:

1. Employee input, involvement, training, and each individual's well being is of vital importance to the survival of our organization.
2. Respect, trust, and be committed to employee satisfaction.
3. Empower each employee to make choices under the general guidance of our "Employee Empowerment" statement.
4. Recognize each employee as our most coveted resource and make all efforts to prove it.

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

We will provide the tools to our employees by empowering them within the following constraints:

1. Is it the right thing to do for the customer?

2. Is it the right thing to do for the Department?
3. Is it legal, ethical, and nice?
4. Is it safe?
5. Is it on your organizational level?
6. Is it something you are willing to be accountable for?
7. Is it consistent with our Departments Mission Statement?

****If the answer is yes to all of these questions, don't ask for permission, JUST DO IT!!!**

RESPONSIBILITY

It is each Fire Department member's responsibility to continually promote internal and external customer service through communication, trust, example, quality leadership, training, input, recognition and the desire and ability to help others.