



STRATEGY GUIDE

The Five “What” Questions – Satisfying customer demand and being paid for it

Executive Wisdom Consulting Group works with organisations on strategic listening, and explains that every employee must know “how” to hear the customer’s voice. Organisations need to move beyond obsequious statements about customer desires. A good technique is the “Five What Questions.” Just as you should sometimes ask “Why?” five times to discover the root cause of an operational problem, you should ask “What?” five times to thoroughly understand customer needs. For example, if someone says a customer wants “total quality,” it is appropriate to say: “What do you mean by that?” If the response is, “Rapid response to my problems,” it’s appropriate to respond with, “What do you mean by ‘rapid response’?” If the questioning process is continued five times, you and your customer can define the exact nature of the attribute.

Executive Wisdom surveyed 147 businesses ranging from sole proprietors to national public companies using this technique regarding service expectations. This was done for a technology client of Executive Wisdom and specifically about *photocopier service standards*. Here is the resultant summary of the majority response:

- 1) What do you expect from your photocopier service provider with regards to "service" specifically?

“We expect outstanding service.”

- 2) What does that mean to you?

“Responsiveness”

- 3) What do you mean exactly by that?

“Quick fix of unanticipated problems for which we should not be inconvenienced.”

- 4) What does that mean to you?

“Minimum downtime of our office copier.”

- 5) What defines "minimum downtime" for you?

“Maximum of 3 hours for the copier to be fixed.”

Therefore:

The average time lapse between initial customer call and restored service should not exceed 3 hours. Our recommendation to the client was to offer this as a **paid-for premium service** to obtain priority attention. Without a single increase in the number of actual customers, our client increased revenues by a staggering **11%** and improved customer satisfaction. It also reduced the customer complaints; because those who did not subscribe to the premium service understood that they would have up to an eight-hour response time.

What internal measures do you have, or can you create that will help monitor how well you are meeting the needs of your *A-Class* clients? To improve your business using effective strategy, e-mail ric@executivewisdom.com