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"We engineer the quality of your success"

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"Walk A Mile In My Shoes"

During a team meeting at Simmons Juvenile Products, a furniture manufacturer in London, WI, members turned to the subject of justifying an additional truck driver for the 3rd shift. One team member responded, "I'd like to see the super try to drive on the 3rd shift for awhile. I bet we'd be getting another trucker the next day."

The idea of trading places fired up the team's imagination. It spend the remainder of the meeting coming up with a plan that incorporated a dream almost every factory worker has had at one time or another -- a chance for the boss to walk a mile in his or her shoes.

A program was mapped out. Every month, several managers and shop employees were randomly selected to trade places for one day. The first half of the day, the shop employees trained a manager to work on the shop floor. The second half of the day, a shop worker would be shown the other side of making the business work.

The team anticipated three benefits that would occur with the trading-places plan:

- Mutual understanding would increase on both sides of the labour pool.
- Managers would gain hands-on experience in day-to-day problems and see how shop policies work.
- Shop employees would understand the reasons behind management's decisions.

The Program Begins

The next month, the plan began. The vice president of operations inspected case goods before they were boxed, the vice president of manufacturing checked lumber for defects on the cutting line, and the plant manager was trained in paint spraying. Shop employees designed furniture with a computer, sat in on meetings and became more aware of how and why decisions were made.

Positive Results

Six months later, both office and shop employees had a positive and enjoyable experience from trading places. Both sides have said, "This job is harder than it looks."

Some of the benefits they experienced since implementing the trading-places program are as follows:

- Bonds between management and shop personnel have been created that could not have been formed otherwise
- Learning about another employee's responsibilities and working with that person, if only for one day, reminds employees that they are on the same team and that the work of all employees is necessary to serve the customer
- There is another truck driver on the 3rd shift now!

Articulate Vision & Goals

Speaking at a quality conference, Kevin J. Jenkins, president and CEO of Canadian Airlines Int. Ltd., shared his views on creating and articulating a vision and plan:

"Once an organization creates a vision," he said, "the work is only half done. A vision held only by its leadership is not enough to create any real change. To ensure success, management must continuously -- and creatively -- articulate the company's vision and goals.

"This is achieved through open communication systems that encourage employee feedback and facilitate a two-way flow of information. It is imperative that employees understand what is expected of them as well as their responsibility for achieving results.

An effective communications strategy does not merely rely on memos or E-Mail. Surveys show that our employees' preferred source of information is directly from their supervisor. This involves a commitment at every level of the organization to open two-way communication"

How To Provide Good Customer Service

Surveyed companies, known for their superior customer service, shared their strategies on how to be a top customer service provider. Following are their tips:

- **Build customer loyalty and confidence** by taking a progressive approach to meeting customers' needs and doing what is sensible to maintain customers' goodwill.
- **Empathize with customers.** Be sensitive to their feelings. Show genuine concern & respect. Recognize different personality types to respond appropriately.
- **Gather and analyze information** to negotiate solutions and arrive at appropriate resolutions.
- **Communicate effectively.** Be articulate and diplomatic. Ask appropriate questions. Make appropriate use of written communication.
- **Handle stress.** Stay organized, calm, and constructive. Demonstrate tolerance and patience. Control emotions.
- **Listen actively.** Don't just *hear* customers' words, know also how to interpret their meaning.
- **Demonstrate mental alertness** and process information quickly.
- **Maintain a professional image**, including appropriate dress and a calm, confident attitude.
- **Demonstrate reliability & loyalty.** Always perform well. Be loyal to the company in words and in action.

These competencies are highly visible to customers; they are the ones that the customer hears, sees, and experiences the instant a service interaction begins.