

# Explore Opportunities with Your Team

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Your team members and you provide services to customers. The recipients of your service may be external (paying customers) or internal (employees in a different department of your organization).

Time passes and circumstances change. Situations “out there” in the world affect your work, and they especially affect your customers. Who would have predicted three months ago, for example, the collapse of real estate, our financial infrastructure, and the stock market?

Every three or four months, gather your team together and creatively ask, “What could we do to shake things up in terms of how we serve our customers? That is, what could we do differently that would cause our customers to be absolutely delighted with our service?”

**Identify Opportunities.** To start, ask, “What are we struggling with right now?” Spend at least fifteen minutes just brainstorming. List as many ideas as you can.

The first several suggestions will be no-brainers, where people are already putting energy. Keep the momentum going because your truly creative ideas will occur as you stretch beyond what’s obvious.

A second approach is to build on your existing strengths. Ask, “What is it that we already do very well, but with a slight adjustment, our customers would become raving fans?”

Since most people tend to focus on problems, the ideas may not flow as quickly here. However, building on existing strengths will likely enhance your reputation with your customers in a big way.

**Consider Value.** When the energy for generating ideas has waned, move on to exploring the value of each possibility. Describe in detail the improvements each desired outcome will create for the customer. Ask, “If we could instantly implement this enhancement, how would the customer’s experience be enhanced?” Don’t settle for generalized answers here. You are creating a vision of emotionally delighted customers, so imagine vivid contentment.

Acknowledge that you’re very interested in maximizing your return on your investment. As the leader, insist that the potential incremental increase in customer satisfaction is fully explored for every suggestion. Our tendency sometimes is to jump to assuming that the cost for some ideas (in terms of time, energy, and money) is excessive.

Remind everyone that “value” is a ratio of perceived improvement divided by the cost. If you don’t explore the potential improvement fully, you’ll presume it’s minimal. Even a very small cost divided into “zero” improvement will yield “no value.”

Only after you’ve evaluated each idea’s potential gain for the customer, evaluate the associated probable cost. Rank the ideas in terms of relative value (benefits to the customer per unit cost).

**Evaluate Approaches.** There are many ways to accomplish any desired outcome. For those ideas that have the highest return on investment potential, consider three or four approaches you might pursue in generating the improvement. Keep the creativity flowing. You may identify some methodologies that require minimum increases in time, energy, and material. These low cost approaches increase the value delivered to the customer. You’ll likely be surprised at some options that suddenly become very attractive!

Maybe you’ve never gone through a process like this. That’s not unusual--most organizations only put their energies against minimizing the biggest complaints. If you just want to get by with “good enough,” keep doing what you’ve been doing. But if you genuinely want your customers to be raving fans, give these three steps a try.

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