

# SEVEN STEPS TO A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED COMPANY

BY BILL HOGG

There are a few common imperatives shared by all successful customer-focused companies. Scholars may debate the exact number or wording, but it is universally agreed that to create a well-integrated organization, these basic characteristics must be in place. If any of these essential ingredients are missing, no organization will achieve its full potential.

1. **A Customer-focused Vision:** Nothing is more important than a clear vision. In a customer-focused organization, the vision that is not just making money, but has the customer as a central element. Every person should understand what that vision is -- and how their role within the organization contributes directly to the implementation of that vision. A well-defined and widely shared and understood vision will allow the organization to work in alignment towards serving your customers well.
2. **Inculcate the Voice of the Customer:** Understand your customer intimately. Make sure your decision-making process includes their voice at the table. Evaluate all your processes and procedures to ensure they are designed with the customer in mind -- not the organization. You will revolutionize your own behaviour and create linkages to your customers your competition will never duplicate.
3. **Be a Student of the Best:** Be a life-long learner. Study the methods of other successful companies, and share your learning in return. Japanese companies learned how to be great after World War II. Some North American companies have made great comebacks after studying those from around the world -- while other have chosen not to learn and suffered greatly as a result (American Auto Industry comes to mind.)
4. **Empower Your Customer Champions:** Most employees want to serve customers well. When the organization demonstrates that providing exceptional service in an organizational priority, and that the employee are critical to success, then employees will rise to the challenge and amaze you with their commitment to exceed customer expectations.
5. **Break through the Barriers to Success:** Too many organizations have processes and procedures in place that inadvertently create artificial barriers to successfully serving customers. Procedures and processes are designed with the organization in mind versus the customer and resultant, the customer is unclear or frustrated. Are your sale processes clear to the customer, are your invoices easy to read and understand, do your policies make sense from the customers' perspective?
6. **Measure What Matters:** Most organizations have measures in place. Successful organizations have the right measures. Measures that are aligned to their overall vision and that inform them on how they are doing with their ultimate judge of success. Measures of satisfaction, loyalty and intent to repurchase are just as important as profit and how long to answer a call. Successful organization measure and track their performance against their past performance, the customer desires and benchmark against others who are the best at what they do.

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7. **Lead by Example:** Today, top corporate leaders personally put the customer first. They demonstrate their organizations' vision in the way they lead each day. They believe and invest in people, constantly seek new and better methods, build customer-focused teams and celebrate performance that serves the customer.

I'm not going to pretend that being customer-focused is easy -- because it's not. It requires an absolute dedication to the cause, starting from the top, right on down throughout the organization. But the imperatives are relatively simple.

*Bill's passion is improving business results by working with leadership teams to change employee behaviours. He does this by equipping leaders with the principles, processes and tools to cultivate and influence an engaged customer-focused culture that recognizes improved performance and productivity. For additional information please visit online at [www.billhogg.ca](http://www.billhogg.ca) or email [bill@billhogg.ca](mailto:bill@billhogg.ca)*

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