



The Seven Behaviors of Successful B2B Service Businesses

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Introduction

What does it take to be a successful Business-to-Business (B2B) service provider? What should a business look for when hiring a B2B service provider? Reputada decided to find out. A specific approach was used to identify good business behaviors and to determine which behaviors are observed from the best service providers. This document describes the seven essential behaviors that were discovered and also describes attributes for which most companies should aim.

These behaviors are not at the skill level, nor are they industry specific traits. You might think that on-time, Java certified, ISO 9000 or some other specific qualifier should be mentioned. However, this list is intended to address all types of B2B service businesses and, in general, all businesses regardless of industry, product or affiliation.

Methodology

The methodology can be broken down into three steps. First, industrial psychologists were engaged to survey a wide variety of businesses regarding their perception of good business behaviors. Next, a study was undertaken to examine the websites of the S&P 500 companies focusing attention on the content used to describe the company as well as the content used to describe what these companies look for in employees.

Results were reviewed and distilled into a list of keywords that were combined and refined down to the seven, described below.

The Behaviors

These seven essential behaviors are listed not in any particular order.

Quality

Although it's hard to name one of these behaviors as the most important, quality seems a likely candidate. Quality denotes a desire to reach for the highest ideals, to reach for perfection. A company that displays quality is one that desires to deliver flawless service. Without it, it is hard to compensate with other qualities. Who wants a low quality service or product just because it was delivered quickly? A consulting industry has arisen since at least World War II focusing on improving quality and building quality organizations. The United States even has a national quality award for businesses: the Malcom Baldrige Award.

Communication

Today's marketplace is fast-paced and dynamic. Design, preparation and delivery of service in an information vacuum is difficult, if not impossible. Information must flow between customer and service provider. The burden of this should not depend upon the customer alone. The service provider must actively manage a communication channel with the customer. Failure to communicate with the customer often results in mismatched expectations.

Competency

Why hire a service provider or consultant? A customer expects that the service provided will be expertly delivered, the people involved have experience in the area and are proficient in the tools and techniques needed. Competency is what indicates this capacity. Without competency, service providers are just learning on the job.

Competency also refers to broader characteristics of a business as well. Business competency is not detailed knowledge of some specialty, but a general knowledge and behavior in a manner consistent with basic business practices. Showing up on time and ready for work, for example, shows some basic business competency.

Innovation

Innovation may seem like it should be relegated only to business engagements that involve design or research work. It's certainly true that those areas require technical innovation. But innovation can be applied to almost any area of business. Do you need your janitorial service to be innovative? That may seem like a joke, but an innovative janitorial service might find a way to clean offices in less time or with less noise or with more flexibility for its managing its own staff. Businesses want to hire service providers that are smarter than they are, so that they know that worthwhile options will be explored that they might not have thought of on their own.

Commitment

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going” is the old adage. Commitment is a behavior that is needed when things are not going well. If a project is getting off track and a service business is not committed, it will not be brought back on track by the service provider. Commitment isn't just relevant for when things are going well. A business needs its service providers to be of a like mind and to share common goals. The provider must be ‘committed to the cause.’ If a business is not committed, it might be apathetic or worse, it might be doing work at cross purposes to the customer.

Initiative

Initiative can come in several forms. It can be the ability to do the work with a high priority, to start it quickly and to follow through. More than that, it can also be the capability to say ‘No’ when needed. Not a ‘No, we don't want to do that,’ but a ‘No, that really doesn't make sense for this project, what about _____ instead?’ Initiative is one of the behaviors that needs to be present within a specific range. Over initiative can be destructive to a project as much as lack of initiative can.

Team Work

This behavior can take several forms and can be a bit more subtle than some of the other behaviors. It might help to describe what team work is not. Secretive and defensive service providers do not display good team work. So do service providers who have a sense of superiority. Team work does not have to mean that the service provider is on site often, although that may help. Services that provide this attribute are aligned with the goals of the customer and work in a way that the customer feels they are all on the same team. Accessibility and responsiveness are attributes of this behavior.

Summary

The seven behaviors described above are essential to providing good service to other business. Demonstrating one or more of these behaviors is a must for good businesses and demonstrating all of them is required for excellent service providers. Not only do these behaviors describe what is good about a company, the lack of these behaviors is just as useful for describing what is not good about a company.

For more information about using the seven behaviors to evaluate your vendors or getting actionable micro-feedback from your customers about your business behaviors, try www.reputada.com.

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