

In a customer driven world, what's your job?

Dr Ian Brooks offers a powerful job description for business managers.



I really enjoy it when the penny drops and I see something clearly for the first time. It is like being reborn. Unfortunately it doesn't happen often enough but the other day I had such an 'ah ha' moment.

I have recently been running seminars for middle and senior managers for several retail brands to help them lead customer driven teams. To do this effectively, they need to change from being managers, who maintain the status quo, to being leaders, who drive change. In one group, we were talking about people management and the subject of job descriptions came up. Now, I bet you have written many job descriptions for other people in your career as a business owner or manager. But if you were doing one for your own job, what would you write?

I have been asking this question in these seminars and I have been interested to see a lot of blank faces as people think, "Golly, what could I say in one sentence that would capture the essence of my role?" This thought is usually followed by lots of short statements describing specific tasks – all of which are relevant to their role and important to do, but none of which really describes their core purpose. This is when I had the 'ah ha' experience: It is the job of senior managers to get the right people doing the right things even better.

There are three key parts to this deceptively simple job description:

1. Getting the right people.
2. Doing the right things.
3. Even better.

Starting with the last part first, the words "even better" convey the need to be a driver of change; a leader not just a manager. In a customer driven world this is essential because customers are always asking themselves, "What has this company done for me lately?" As you well know, what delighted customers yesterday, is taken for granted today and

will disappoint tomorrow. To make matters worse, you know your competitors have you under their microscope and will not hesitate to steal any good you put into practice. Your only defence is to keep one step ahead of them. To succeed in today's very crowded and competitive market you must find new and better ways of looking after your customers, and quickly.

The second part of your job description is to get people 'doing the right things'. And just what might the right things be? Clearly, in a customer driven world, the only people who can definitively answer that question are your customers. What are you doing so that every day you understand a little more about what you would have to do to create a great customer experience in the eyes of your customers? Every day you do not learn something from your customers is a day wasted because your customers will tell you everything you need to know to succeed. In fact, they are trying to tell you now. Are you listening? Can you capture what they tell you? Do you analyse this feedback to gain insights and do you make improvements based on those insights?

In the meantime, here are three steps you can take immediately. First remind your teams just for whom they are doing the right things. A customer is anyone who uses a product or service they produce and so for many their customers will be internal customers. In these cases, team members need to understand that frontline people cannot look after the paying customer if back office or operations people do not look after them.

Secondly, identify the right things people need to do by asking your own team members to think of a really great customer experience they had and then to tell you what made the experience so good. After all, your people spend a large part of their lives being customers and they will have a very clear idea of what

they like and do not like. Collect everybody's ideas and you will find they have come up with a pretty good list of 'the right things' to do.

Thirdly, knowing the right things to do is not the same as being able to do them. All too often company policies and systems do not allow your teams to do the things their customers want them to do, and which they want to do for their customers. It would be worth taking the time to review your company policies and processes to make sure they are not stopping your teams from behaving towards your customers the way you want them to. It would also be useful to ask your people what stops them from doing the right things.

Finally, the first part of your job description is 'getting the right people'. These are people who have the personal characteristics and training that make it easy for them to do the right things. Look at the list of behaviours you have identified and work out the attributes someone would need to be able to do these things with ease. Write these into a "person specification" and make sure everyone you hire has those qualities.

Perhaps you already knew your job is to get the right people doing the right things even better and I am just slow off the mark. But if you have not thought of your job this way before, and if it makes sense to you, type out this job description and use it to plan your day. I bet your customers will see a difference.

Dr Ian Brooks (www.ianbrooks.com) is a leading expert in customer care and chairman of the NZ Association of Customer Excellence. He would like to know what you think of this column. Please go to www.tellsimon.co.nz and give him your feedback.