

Internal Relationships



What do you do? If you are alone in your office, you can say it out loud, I won't tell anyone you are talking to a computer screen or a magazine...but what is your job function? What position do you hold in your company? Who are your direct reports? What departments do you feel that you have to have a good relationship with? Now the million-dollar question, who do you feel like you do NOT need to have a good relationship with? (I hope you said "I need to have good relationships with all departments")

I think that as a group of people, most of us can identify the core group of people who work for and with us are the most important relationships that we need to hold on to and nurture. We need to be compassionate and helpful and thoughtful in our relationships. No one needs to get dragged to HR for misunderstanding a food allergy just because they are angry at you for a negative internal relationship (I practically need counseling because of a situation just like that).

You as a person really only have so much to give of our time and energy. You are there 40+ hours a week, most of your life is spent at work. One of the roadblocks in keeping up your internal relationships is that there just is not enough time in the day. A fear might be that you will no longer have time to do what you need to do. Another one is weakness. I say this because no one wants to be taken advantage of. A real fear that no one will think for themselves or be able to make a good decision without holding you personally accountable. No one wants to be the only instrument in the band playing.

So now that we have that sorted out, I have another question for you, just one more: How many labor dollars do you lose by NOT having those relationships be not only functional but prosperous? (I will even insert a moment of silence for you to attempt to calculate the cost) This is not a number you can come up with, I don't care how diligent you are. Negative or broken internal relationships are a silent drain on your net profit. This is a cold calculating thief of your bonus dollars. So stop letting it happen.

Start immediately by figuring out your connection with every department in the company. Are you a CEO, well then you should probably realize that your relationship is with everyone on a cellular level, but if you are an operations manager, a call center guy or gal, maybe you drive a delivery truck, or just count endless rows of inventory. Purchasing, Accounting, Warehouse, Management, all these departments have internal customers. Some are going to be closer than others, but at the end of the day, we do not always consider these relationships as costing your company net profit.

Think about this, if you get a phone call from a customer and you "handle it", make sure that you refer them to customer service or inside/outside sales to seal the relationship. Not that you in your position can't handle the call, but you want the customer to see that they have a main person to talk to and you are overflow or technical etc. If you transfer a call to customer service or inside sales and the answer you have given is wrong or misguided, cheap, or expensive – you are going to get a bad name. Go to the agent that took the call and let them know how much you appreciate their hard work. Whew, at least you don't get 50 of those calls a day. If you answered the question correctly you saved money, you saved time, you may have even gotten the sale, you made the customer feel great, and took a load off

customer service making them look great as well. That is great upkeep of an internal relationship in your company that will save you money and add to the bottom line.

Customer Service/Inside Sales/Outside Sales: Have you ever needed 400 majillion (that is a number I am sure) washers, pieces of steel, or pipe fittings that are custom, special, or just weird? If you have treated purchasing kindly, used them appropriately (thus not wasting their time and company money with pipe dream fantasy orders) you will get 400 majillion, by tomorrow, with free shipping, a sample and a cookie. If your experience is not as happy as that, maybe you are difficult to talk to, short when you email, keep your office door closed, and only demand things and bark orders. Think about it do you get the cookie or 3. 3 pieces and a backorder. These people are good at what they do and they need your help doing their job well.

I could write for a month on the millions of different ways that internal customers are just as important or maybe even *more* important than the external relationships. I will tell you that your customers know if you have good internal customer relationships or not. They can see it in how your company delivers, how your teams treat them, and how willing they are to “bend” when they need it. You are a web, you are a team, you are a group and one can not work without the other. So no matter if you are changing the way you use the software, or adding/subtracting procedures, find out who and what departments are affected down the line. Make a type of flow chart that shows the issue going down stream. Most software packages even have a test environment so you can try out your ideas, hopes, and dreams. This will allow you the opportunity to consult other departments that use the software differently. Just remember the golden rule, and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you keep that in mind, you can resolve issue before they arise. This thought process creates a culture of understanding that will further your business, save labor dollars, and create an amazing customer experience inside and out.

About the Author: Danah Head is an Executive Advisor for The Distribution Team, a firm that specializes in helping distributors become more profitable through strategic planning and operating efficiencies. Danah has an MBA in Technology Management for Supply Chain and completed work for a Masters in Adult Education and Corporate Training. While pursuing education, she worked in different purchasing and supply chain roles within the manufacturing industry. With real world experience and technical training help her find the best solutions for warehouse and distribution companies. One way she does this is via a Business Reality 101 simulation game designed to dispel common business issues and one on one coaching and consulting (<https://youtu.be/G9QBGq4MLJc>). For more information, call 479.381.8495 or e-mail danah@distributionteam.com. Also be sure to visit The Distribution Team online www.thedistributionteam.com. Now: @Distribution_Tm on Twitter