"Customer Service" Was Topic For First Topical Meeting

Customer Service was the subject for the first topical meeting held during the latter part of September in the Rich Lounge. Facilitated by Craige Hall and Cherrie Nelson, the short course focused on how customers evaluate service quality. Department representatives attended the training and will share the information with fellow employees.

According to Craige, "How customers evaluate our service quality revolves around five general factors or areas."

† **Reliability** -- The ability to provide what was promised, dependably and accurately. When you provide a report on time, you show reliability.

† **Responsiveness** -- The willingness to help customers promptly. When you offer help and information to a lost student, you show responsiveness.

† **Assurance** -- The knowledge and courtesy you show to customers, and your ability to convey trust, competence, and confidence. When you smile and tell a faculty member, "I can help you with that" -- and you do -- you build assurance.

† **Empathy** -- The degree of caring and individual attention you show customers. When you are sensitive to a staff member's needs as you solve their problem, you show empathy.

† **Tangibles** -- The physical facilities and equipment, as well as your own (and others') appearance. When you take time to make your work area presentable, you are paying attention to the tangibles.

Part II of the Customer Service training will be held on 30 November at 9 a.m. in the Rich Lounge. Several rules for good customer service will be discussed.

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**Benchmarking**

**Purpose:** To markedly improve the way things are done.

**Description:** Benchmarking involves measuring products, services, or processes against those of recognized leaders and then adapting the learnings to improve performance.

**Procedure:**
1. Identify product, service, or process to be benchmarked.
2. Understand the process. Through the use of flowcharts or other techniques, document how the process works.
3. Select companies or organizations who use similar processes with superior results.
4. Establish partnerships with those organizations identified in Step 3 and share process information (generally through site visits).
5. Evaluate your product, service, or process based on what was learned. Set and prioritize improvement goals.

**Application:** Benchmarking can be applied to a broad range of activities such as identifying areas for improvement in a process or it can even help with the initial selection of a process.

**Examples:**
- Xerox dramatically improved its 1-800 service by benchmarking L. L. Bean.
- Babson College benchmarked its registration process against that of top hotels.
- Southwest Airlines improved its turnaround time (refueling, etc.) by benchmarking Indy 500 race cars.

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"Early in the century, some German generals undertook to follow an American circus around. In those days, the circus didn't perform in huge arenas; they had to do it under tents. Well, that's a huge thing to set up and take apart. And, of course, they move from city to city -- in some cases, in a few hours: they take it down, put it on a train, take it to the next town. It's very complicated. They had animals to move and people and food for them, their gear. In fact, they designed special railway cars to enable all this to happen, and they were very proficient at it.

"The general had the same problem. They had all kinds of people. They had horses, ammunition, food. And, they learned [about deployment] from seeing this thing which had no relation to any army."

-- from an interview with Dr. Joseph M. Juran, Management Review, January 1994, page 11
Team Makes Improvements to PAR Process and Form

Over 100 WSU employees heard about improvements to the Personnel/Payroll Action Request (PAR) process at several Opening of School meetings held in September.

These improvements came about as a result of a team set up to improve the PAR process and form. The team's recommendations were approved a year ago, and an Implementation Team has been working since January to carry out the recommendations. Members of the Implementation Team include Ben Read, Sue Schenck and Steve Eichmeier. David Schwab (former employee) wrote the program and Berk King provides continuing support.

Fifteen changes to the PAR process and form have been completed.

Too many versions of the PAR form in use, creating confusion for users.

- Departments have been encouraged to eliminate all pre-printed versions of the PAR form.
- Version 3.0 of the PC-based PAR is available and should be used.

Not all WSU users are familiar with the PC-based PAR program.

- The PAR program includes a help screen to assist users in completion of the PAR.

Users find 'action code' choices confusing/unclear.

- Action codes have been revised on the new version of the PC-based PAR to reduce confusion.

Not all separating employees go through the employment release process, resulting in potential overpayment and loss of property.

- The employment release form and clearance instructions are printed on the PC simultaneously with the separation PAR.

Users find some fields of information difficult to obtain.

- Some fields are now completed by Human Resources (HR) and/or Payroll instead of the department.
- Some fields have been removed from the PAR form because they are obtained from other documents by HR and/or Payroll.
- Some fields have been expanded.
- The phone numbers for Payroll/HR are included in the heading of the PAR form.

It is unclear what each signature on the PAR represents or if all signatures are necessary.

- The preparer's signature line has been eliminated and the PAR program has been modified to print preparer's name and extension.
- Signature requirements are identified on the PAR.
- Deans and department heads have been asked to assign a professional-level designee to approve PARs in their absence.

There are many employees who prepare PARs who are not totally familiar with the PC PAR system or the PAR process. In addition, there is no training program in place to educate new employees regarding these issues.

- Instructions (i.e., routing, attachments required, etc.) specific to the type of PAR printed are on each form.
- Two training programs have been prepared: PAR Orientation Training and PC-Based PAR Employee Training.
- The University Policy and Procedure Manual has been reviewed and updated to coincide with current practices and with these changes.

Congratulations to a tenacious team who made remarkable improvements to the PAR form and process!