

Process improvement 101: Pretend you're the customer



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In recent years there's been a whole lot written about "process improvement." As a manager, you may already be applying some of these principles. The ultimate goal of process improvement is to make things better for the customer. "Better" can mean lots of different things to different people. But it generally boils down to providing:

- Faster service
- Higher quality
- Lower cost
- An improved customer experience

Your customers don't often know all the things your team has to do behind the scenes. They just know what happens during and after your interactions with them. So it's up to you to evaluate your processes on a regular basis and see where improvements can be made.

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Pretend you're the customer. What are you looking to get from your organization? What are your expectations? When do you feel frustrated by a "pain point" in the process?

It's important to point out that improvements should never compromise the safety of your staff or customers. Be sure not to "cut corners" when it comes to those basics.

Identify solutions

But by thinking like your customers and then brainstorming possible solutions, your team can explore ways to:

- **Find and fix pain points.** You can lose business to a long line, quality issues, overpricing and more. What complaints do you hear most? What would have to happen to turn those pain points into delightful surprises?

- **Remove or reduce steps that don't add value.** Are you going out of your way to provide extras that your customers don't need or want? Try stopping. If they notice or complain, you can always add them back.
- **Add small steps that yield large amounts of value.** Little improvements can make all the difference. For instance, the cherry on top of an ice cream sundae is a small detail. But when you think of a sundae, what comes to mind first?
- **Make the customer experience stand out.** A consistent unique and positive customer experience keeps the people you serve happy. And it makes them excited to come back. They may even refer other customers to you.
- **Monitor the effects of changes.** When you make an improvement, start on a small scale and watch closely. Does it have the effect you expected? Can it be further improved?

By simply seeing your organization through your customers' eyes, you can find opportunities for improvement. Challenge your team to act on them so you can all keep getting better together.

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