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"We engineer the quality of your success"

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"Walk A Mile In My Shoes"

During a team meeting at Simmons Juvenile Products, a furniture manufacturer in London, WI, members turned to the subject of justifying an additional truck driver for the 3rd shift. One team member responded, "I'd like to see the super try to drive on the 3rd shift for awhile. I bet we'd be getting another trucker the next day."

The idea of trading places fired up the team's imagination. It spend the remainder of the meeting coming up with a plan that incorporated a dream almost every factory worker has had at one time or another -- a chance for the boss to walk a mile in his or her shoes.

A program was mapped out. Every month, several managers and shop employees were randomly selected to trade places for one day. The first half of the day, the shop employees trained a manager to work on the shop floor. The second half of the day, a shop worker would be shown the other side of making the business work.

The team anticipated three benefits that would occur with the trading-places plan:

- Mutual understanding would increase on both sides of the labour pool.
- Managers would gain hands-on experience in day-to-day problems and see how shop policies work.
- Shop employees would understand the reasons behind management's decisions.

The Program Begins

The next month, the plan began. The vice president of operations inspected case goods before they were boxed, the vice president of manufacturing checked lumber for defects on the cutting line, and the plant manager was trained in paint spraying. Shop employees designed furniture with a computer, sat in on meetings and became more aware of how and why decisions were made.

Positive Results

Six months later, both office and shop employees had a positive and enjoyable experience from trading places. Both sides have said, "This job is harder than it looks."

Some of the benefits they experienced since implementing the trading-places program are as follows:

- Bonds between management and shop personnel have been created that could not have been formed otherwise
- Learning about another employee's responsibilities and working with that person, if only for one day, reminds employees that they are on the same team and that the work of all employees is necessary to serve the customer
- There is another truck driver on the 3rd shift now!

Take Appropriate Action To Satisfy Customers

The entire management team, not just the sales force should talk to customers. Each executive, for example, could personally call or visit five customers a week and ask them:

- Why did you start doing business with us?
- What do you like most about the relationship?
- Specifically, what do you dislike about doing business with us?
- If we had the ideal working relationship, what would be different from the way it is now?
- If you were to stop doing business with us and turn to a competitor, what would be your main reason?

This information should then be compiled into a composite report and analyzed. The analysis should highlight:

- The company's strengths as compared to those of its competitors
- The company's areas for improvement as compared to those of its competitors
- Problems that must be corrected immediately
- Future action plans containing specific assignments that ensure the company exceeds customers' expectations
- Plans to perform more competitive benchmarking using specific customer satisfaction measurements based on information from professional associations, published surveys, third-party consultants, market research, and the company's own surveys
- Plans to emphasize total organization integration to ensure the company practices prevention-based and fact-based management, strives for continuous improvements, incorporates leadership in every facet of customer-relationship management, and anticipates future customers' needs and expectations

When addressing complaints, a company needs to note more than just their nature, frequency, and source. It should also document how long it takes to resolve complaints, whether they are resolved to the customers' complete satisfaction, and the cost of their resolution.

The culture of a company supports and nourishes the improvement efforts of every group and individual in the company. A company must seek to establish and maintain a spirit based on: being close to the customer, the importance of precision and data, internal teamwork and mutual respect, constant improvement, and pride of work (both processes and products).