

Burns' Business Builder - The Facilitated Customer Advisory Board

Last week I outlined the 4 ways to grow your business. In particular, I examined the first of the 4 ways: **increasing the number of customers of the type you want to have**. This week I will examine in more depth the use of a **Facilitated Customer Advisory Board**.

Just imagine one of your "A" customers sitting down at a luncheon with several other business owners. The subject of your business comes up. What will your "A" customer say about you and your business? Will it be positive? Will it be negative? Or worse yet, will it be nothing at all? Will your "A" customer instead be silent, listening carefully to what is being said or internally thinking about the comparisons between your business and the one that is being discussed?

Your business is being evaluated every time you deliver your product/service, answer the phone, return a call, or sign an invoice or other correspondence. How are you doing on all aspects of the customer experience in your *customers' eyes*? Do you really know or are you guessing?

A Facilitated Customer Advisory Board can help you determine just that. The top benefits to holding a Facilitated Customer Advisory Board are:

1. Adding value to your "A" customers by listening and responding to their needs and wants.
2. Gaining insights as to what motivated your "A" customers to buy from you in the first place.
3. Obtaining important feedback about the performance of your Team.
4. Allowing you to better allocate resources to change things that are top priorities in your "A" customers mind.
5. Ensuring that you learn what isn't broken so you don't inadvertently fix it.

Why a Facilitated Customer Advisory Board? My experience has been that an experienced, unbiased facilitator is the most valuable part of the process from the customer's viewpoint. They appreciate the opportunity to "tell it like it is" to a neutral party without the company rebutting their concerns or providing excuses. They also are convinced that you are very serious about their feedback and that you will act on their concerns. An experienced facilitator heightens the company's commitment to action.

The feedback received from a Facilitated Customer Advisory Board can have an incredible impact on future direction of your business. You see, for the first time, you and your Team will be held accountable to a whole new realm of customer expectations. This is a day like no other in your business. For many businesses it is truly a turning point in the beginning of great things. It is a giant step on the path towards growing **the number of customers of the type you want to have**.

Steve Burns, C.A., C.M.C., C.F.P. owns and operates Steve Burns Consulting, a full service consulting firm based in Kelowna, BC. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Commission of the Central Okanagan, the Okanagan High Technology Council and the Okanagan Centre for Manufacturing Excellence. Call him at 763-5021 or email him at steve@steveburnsconsulting.com if you have any questions or comments.