

Article from **Policy Perspectives**

(http://www.imakenews.com/cppa/e_article000781112.cfm?x=b6Gdd3k,b30DNQvw,w)

March 26, 2007

Improving Service Quality

by Ken Embley, CPPA

I truly believe most people have a positive service quality experience with government agencies. I know there are notable exceptions to damage the credibility of my statement; however, I believe it generally true. I also believe it generally true that government leaders value continuous improvement in service quality.

Now for the rub—my experience tells me that most leaders struggle with the concept of managing service and with strategies to improve service quality. As a result, what usually happens is a little publicity in the newsletter, creative postings on bulletin boards, some kind of free tickets or lunch bribe for everyone, and of course, the obligatory half-day training session for all frontline personnel.

Now do not get me wrong. I am all for paying attention to service quality, especially the bribe stuff. But then again, these types of service quality strategies just seem to be a little shallow with predictable and usually disappointing results. My thought is, if leaders are going to spend some time and energy in an effort to improve service quality, why not take a crack at making service quality a serious goal.

To make service quality a serious goal, leaders need to move away from shallow frontline strategies to meaningful management strategies. Although we frequently see service quality as a satisfactory outcome of an interaction with frontline personnel, the most powerful influence on the service quality interaction comes through those myriad of things we refer to under the umbrella heading—**management**.

Begin by asking, “Is service quality a serious goal?” Leaders will have their answer when they critically examine service quality processes and the methods to improve the processes. Leaders will have their answer when they identify the time and money resources spent on service quality. If service quality is a serious goal, leaders and their management team will have a common understanding of the process and resource requirements that result in achievement of clearly defined service quality goals.

If you are satisfied with the answers to these questions, stop reading—nice job! If not, consider taking action to develop management processes that support a continuous service quality journey.

- Ask your service group to agree on a meaningful service quality **purpose**. The service quality purpose must be important or the group will not take the service quality journey. Agreement enables a group in the development of service quality values that support the important purpose. Agreement enables the group to establish service quality expectation, a code of service quality conduct for members.
- Ask your service group to identify service quality **issues**. A service quality issue is anything that may influence achievement of the service purpose. Some service quality issues will be obvious to the group but the magic in service quality takes place when a group finds the little things that truly make the difference in service quality.
- Ask your service group to design and implement service quality **strategies**. Service



quality strategies are the actions the group can take to address and resolve service quality issues. Strategies lead to outcomes that enhance the service quality purpose.

- Now, repeat the process, and then again and then again. Make improving service quality into an ongoing management process.

The management of service is just that—**management**. There is a difference between traditional frontline service quality efforts and the management of service quality. Management requires agreement as to the importance of the service quality **purpose**. Management requires a continuous process improvement effort by searching for, identifying, then analyzing significant service quality **issues**. Management requires a disciplined effort on the part of service group members to create and implement service quality **strategies** to enable outcomes that enhance the service quality purpose.

If you are a leader and serious about improving service quality—**manage service quality**.

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