



Spring has sprung and your team members may be getting ready to mentally check out as they make summer travel and vacation arrangements. It's the perfect time to consider how you are making them feel connected as contributors to the growth of the organization. Maybe you ask a certain employee to keep an eye on a trend in your industry. Maybe you schedule a check-in with an employee to see how they are doing on a project and remind them of how it impacts the company on a larger scale. Whatever it might look like for you and your team, be intentional.

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USE LISTENING POSTS FOR VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER INFORMATION

Many years ago, while working with the [Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award](#), I was exposed to the concept of listening posts for “voice of the customer.” Many people capture voice of the customer information through customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, direct calls, customer visits, website tracking, and [NPS scores](#), among others. Yet I've always been fascinated with the idea that *every employee* is a listening post – keeping their eyes and ears open to important customer information and feedback.

But how do you do that? After many years, I've worked with several clients to develop a relatively easy process to instill in a company. I'd like to say it was an easy process, and initially, it is. But it takes real dedication to make it a *sustainable* process.

Steps to Create Listening Posts for Voice of the Customer

1. **Determine your objectives** for creating listening posts. Some common reasons are to:
 - Listen and engage with your customers
 - Better understand the wants and needs of your customers
 - Create a two-way conversation/build the relationship with your customer
 - Collect and analyze voice of the customer data that helps track trending topics/items and customer engagement
2. Create a **listening post training program** that teaches all employees (especially those that have direct contact with the customer) the skills to effectively listen to your customers. This training should identify the types of information to listen for and provide

specific examples to help solidify what you are asking your team to do. Create a cheat sheet with starter phrases such as:

- “I wish you would....”
- “Why don’t you....”
- “How do I...”
- “I love this...”

Also include starter statements and questions on how to probe for deeper information and solicit personal anecdotes:

- “Tell me more...”
- “What was your experience?”
- “That’s interesting. Why is that important to you?”
- “Help me understand...”
- “What do you love/dislike about...”

3. Create a **process that allows all employees to easily provide voice of the customer information**. This part gets tricky as many companies want to make this too complex and burdensome to execute on a routine basis. A simple form or [Google Doc](#) will work. I had one client replicate their IT ticketing system to capture the information (which made it easier to analyze and track who was submitting information). You’ll want to do a few dry runs on this, working to get it just right for your business!

At the minimum, you’ll want to capture:

- Employee name
- Customer name and company
- Type of insight (positive, negative, problem, idea etc.)
- Notes
- Ability to upload photos/screenshots

4. Determine who will **analyze the information**, how it will be analyzed, and if any action is needed. To start, a spreadsheet will work just fine. Again, do a few dry runs on this to see what kind of data you might receive, and how it will be used in the organization.

5. Determine **how it will be presented to the organization’s leadership** – and how often. Initially, you’ll probably want to analyze and present the data at least monthly. Here is a list of potential trends you might see:

6. Sketch out some ideas on **how to share the information with employees** and incentivize them to continue to listen to their customers and document what they heard. I believe this is strongly tied to the organization’s culture and can be used to reinforce the core **values**.

7. After you have laid the groundwork, **let all employees know** that they play a crucial role in capturing voice of the customer information. Provide training and have all managers reinforce those who submit information.

8. **Follow up with especially active employees and customers**. These folks are great resources to tap into your other voice of the customer strategies!

9. **Be patient and periodically review/update the process**. Initially, your listening post information will be all over the board! Not everything is going to work right out of the gate, but if you remain curious, the organization will quickly figure out what to do. More importantly, why it is important – especially as you share the information collected and what you are doing with it with your team. Even if it is something as simple as sharing a trend and that you’re keeping watch on it. Your team will feel more connected as contributors to the growth of the organization.

THE GOODIE BAG PANEL DISCUSSION FORMAT

When you have a good sense of the various topics you want to cover, try this unique goodie bag panel discussion format:

For each topic, select a small (and inexpensive!) “goodie” that represents that topic. For example, you can select a small light bulb to represent innovation; a “first place” ribbon for best practices; a roll of Necco candy wafers for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Buy enough of each item for each person. So, if you have forty people in the room, buy at least forty of each item and the same number of bags to hold all the items. (I like using organza bags so that people can get a sneak peek at what’s in the bag!)

Put all the goodies in an appropriate-sized bag and place them in the center of the tables or at each seat.

When you introduce the topic to be discussed, ask the participants to pull out the item from their goodie bag and share what that item represents. OR have the participants select an item from their goodie bag and have them shout out which one we should talk about!

The best part of the goodie bag panel discussion format is that the participants can keep the goodie bags as a small token/souvenir of the panel – so you may want to pack a few extra goodies in there! You may be wondering, “What if they select one of the ‘just because I wanted to throw it in there’ items?” Good point. Just say “It’s just meant for you to enjoy it!”

Big thanks to my colleague, Elaine Biech, for the inspiration for this goodie bag panel discussion format. I attended her speech where each point was punctuated with an item from the goodie bag! Thanks, Elaine!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: RATIONALITY: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT SEEMS SCARCE, WHY IT MATTERS

I have a few dozen books on my bookshelf about critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. My latest read, Rationality: What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, Why It Matters by Steven Pinker is now sitting next to Daniel Kahneman's Thinking Fast and Slow. Why? Because both of these are hugely informative yet dense books to read. After I read one chapter, I would have to set it down to ponder and navel gaze as to my own rationality. Would I come to the same conclusion as the author or not? How does that apply to me and my own dose of rationality?

Despite its density, the book makes sense to me. Pinker is a professor of Psychology at Harvard University who has a course entitled "Rationality." I think this is a textbook that covers much of his material, along with interesting exercises, insightful anecdotes, and fascinating footnotes about what is rational and what is prejudice or bias wrapped up as rationality.

A key theme of the book is that "None of us, thinking alone, is rational enough to consistently come to sound conclusions: rationality emerges from a community of reasoners who spot each other's fallacies." And that is also the power of teamwork when done well!

While much of the book reiterates the other dozens of books on my bookshelf, I found the LAST chapter to be the most interesting and hopeful: "Why Rationality Matters" where Pinker states, "exercising our godlike reason...can lead to a better life and better world." Amen to that, but good luck!

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