

# Questions & Answers

The Newsletter of SDS Research

## Inside:

*Making the most of employee surveys*

*SDS National Industry Benchmarks*

## SDS Client Focus

Easton Utilities  
Commission  
Easton, Maryland

*"We have had a long standing relationship with SDS. Since 1999 they have conducted five employee surveys, seven annual customer surveys, and one round of focus group discussions for Easton Utilities. SDS is a first rate company with a professional staff that provides informative, easy to read survey results and conclusions from which our company can select priority areas and take action. The surveys have been instrumental in improving several key areas in employee satisfaction."*

**Hugh Grunden**  
CEO Easton Utilities

## Connecting With Customers

By Dale Inkley, President — [dale@sdsresearch.com](mailto:dale@sdsresearch.com)

In their February 2007 *Harvard Business Review* article, Christopher Meyer and Andre Schwager discuss an important distinction between customer experience and customer satisfaction. While they define customer experience as "the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company," customer satisfaction is "essentially the culmination of a series or the net result of the good ones minus the bad ones."

The authors describe these customer contacts as "touch points." They occur each time your customers visit your office, make a phone call, pay a bill, see a company vehicle on the street, read an article in the paper, watch a TV ad, or virtually anything that links your company to that customer. "At each touch point," according to Meyer and Schwager, "the gap between customer expectations and experience spells the difference between customer delight and something else."

Knowing the level of satisfaction that customers have with company performance is vital to the health of any organization. However, knowing what the specific factors are that have created that level of satisfaction provides the leverage to change what will matter most. As Meyer and Schwager suggest, "to understand how to achieve customer satisfaction, a company must deconstruct it into its component experiences."

How much do you really know about the factors that feed satisfaction for your customers? What are their hot buttons? Which "touch points" could your organization improve that would correlate with and improve overall satisfaction?

We, at SDS Research, are committed to helping you find the best measurement systems to accurately gauge both customer experience and customer satisfaction. Once you have measured the appropriate components as close as possible to the "touch point," we are also prepared to help you with the improvement process through our training services.



*Providing Solutions Through Research*



## Making Employee Surveys Work

Employee surveys are an extremely effective way of measuring and evaluating employee attitudes and commitment. But they can also cause more harm than good if done in the wrong way. The following five guidelines will help you maximize the benefits of a survey of your employees, while minimizing the risks:

1. **Start With the End in Mind.** Ask yourself some questions to determine the purpose for conducting the research, and the value of a survey as the tool to use. What are the outcomes you want to see? Have you used this type of research before? If so, what did you learn? Will employees buy in? What, in the end, do you want to accomplish with the results? What do you expect from all involved? What are the potential benefits? What are the possible drawbacks?
2. **Use Someone Else.** The key to an effective employee survey is the candid participation of employees. Partnering with a third-party expert to administer the survey guarantees confidentiality to employees, promoting trust in the process that results in higher response rates and real, honest feedback.
3. **Don't Ask Everything.** With all of the dynamics at work each day in your company, it's impossible to get feedback on every possible issue. Rather than using a long, cumbersome survey that only guarantees writer's cramp, use your current knowledge and impressions to focus only on the essential areas, typically including general satisfaction, communication, supervision, working environment, suggestions for improvement, and so forth.
4. **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.** Spread the results of the survey throughout every level of your organization, using all of the means possible. Use company newsletters, intranets, email, memos, meetings, interviews, and any other means of communication to broadcast the results of the survey and the message, "We heard you."
5. **Process, Not Event.** Employee satisfaction is a work in progress. The objective of an employee survey is not just to measure results, but to act on the input generated by employees. This reinforces the communication in the minds of employees, and validates their participation. While most employees do not expect quantum change from a survey, they do expect to have their voices heard, their suggestions considered, and their concerns addressed. To spur the process along, involve employees in the discussion of immediate results and long-term planning .

### Employee Survey Presentation at APPA National Conference

Hugh Grunden, CEO of Easton Utilities Commission in Easton Maryland, was a featured presenter at the APPA National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. His presentation, entitled "Using Employee Surveys to Improve Employee and Customer Satisfaction," was attended by more than 100 conference attendees. In it, Mr. Grunden highlighted how EUC, with more than 10,000 customers, has used five employee surveys since 1999 to improve employee morale and influence customer satisfaction (EUC employee interaction ratings for 2007 are 96% positive). The central conclusions of the presentation are two-fold: (1) Satisfied employees satisfy customers; (2) Success should not be judged on numerical results, but whether the findings are a catalyst for improvement.



*Providing solutions is what SDS Research does. We provide sound, meaningful research and training services for our clients that lead to loyal customers and committed employees.*

**Customer Satisfaction Audits**

**Employee Perception Surveys**

**Market Research Assessments**

**Focus Groups**

**Quality College of Customer Service**

**Quality College of Supervision**

**Customer Contact Surveys**

**Employee Interaction Assessments**



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