

THE FEEDBACK CYCLE

Customer feedback often ends up at a dead end and that is a genuine shame. Operators know they should be collecting it from their customers but they often lack the tools, or the time, to do anything constructive with it.

Businesses that capitalise on feedback will often be able to apply the feedback to three stages: Analysis, Learning and Action.

Analysis

Good quality analysis is influenced by the structure and content of any questionnaire that you use to canvas insight from your customers.

Yes/No questions work well for measuring operational standards, ratings work well for subjective opinions, and collecting unique comments for each question can be very illuminating. If questions are arranged in sections or tagged according to their type, this helps to group the data in ways that make sense. Getting this right will make the task of analysing the feedback quicker and more effective.

It's important to dedicate time to reviewing feedback and if you don't outsource the analysis part, it can be beneficial to make this the responsibility of a particular individual within the organisation and allocate a time every week or month, the same as you would do for stock ordering or preparing a staff rota, to ensure it is shared with the team.

Any reports compiled from the raw data should be relevant to the audience – a branch manager will have different requirements from a brand manager.

We have found that clear graphics are an increasingly important factor in ensuring clear understanding, and enabling different individuals to see the relevance in the information customers are providing. A dashboard-style approach works well as a starting point. This will show key indicators, trends and benchmarks. It can often function

as a shop window for staff, stimulating their curiosity, encouraging them to delve deeper to look at specific customer comments which reinforce a trend or considering what factors may have influenced the results.

Learning

In this situation, learning is the insight that occurs when we start to understand the causes influencing the feedback analysis. It is also a powerful tool to influence how customers will respond to your service, and, in turn, your brand in the future. Hospitality environments are busy and training can often be haphazard.



Learning on the job can be very effective but for many operators the overall effect can be inconsistent, with pockets of poor performance that linger longer than they should unless a structured training programme is in place which helps to upskill and create a more cohesive and consistent approach. It is now easy and affordable to create good quality e-learning that engages employees and tests what staff already know. It allows rapid deployment for new initiatives and gives new employees a firm foundation from the start.

Another significant weakness for hospitality operators is the management of



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learning where records are often limited to incomplete spreadsheets – this breaks the cycle between feedback and learning. Businesses are now starting to manage their learning online but this is not just about e-learning – it's about blending various forms of learning, including face-to-face, building learning pathways personal to the individual and keeping accurate records of progress.

Action

Action is what happens when your team are properly aware of their performance, motivated to improve it, and armed with the learning necessary to do so. The motivation to improve can be influenced by the feedback mechanism and how this is integrated with reward and recognition. Often it can be more subtle than this though.

If employees are properly involved in learning from the results of feedback, rather than defensive about any areas where they failed, they will feel a greater sense of ownership and this will result in more committed action. This is a culture which is driven from the top.

Of course, Feedback should naturally follow Action if it is to be part of ongoing improvement. And so it should be, for we work in a dynamic industry where businesses that understand people are those that will be rewarded. ●