

Try Something DifFereNt

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If the way you're delivering your services isn't working well, or even if it is, try something different. Otherwise, you'll never know if a different approach would work better than what you're currently doing. Doing things differently is also a great way to get yourself out of a rut.



One way to safely try something different is to conduct tests the way marketers do. Marketers know that it's too expensive and risky to implement a full-scale change when they don't know if it'll have the desired effect. So they run tests by, for example, sending different versions of their promotional material to different subsets of their customer or prospect list, and seeing which version generates the best response.

To apply this idea, consider how you might modify your service strategies slightly with a small subset of customers on an informal basis. For example, try a different way of answering the phone. Instead of "Good morning, service desk," answer every third call with, "Thank you for calling the service desk. How may I help you?" Observe whether your modified response has any effect on the progress of the call or the resolution of the caller's problem.

Another example: Present one of your two-day courses in four half-day sessions and see how it affects enrollments, energy levels, and follow-up requests for help. I've done that with some of my own seminars, offering clients a full-day class in two half-day segments. Participants were more energetic, more focused, and less distracted about being away from their mounting workload for an entire day — a clear benefit.

One more example: If you're running a client satisfaction survey, print some survey forms on glaringly bright yellow paper, and see if more are returned than the snow-white variety. Or



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offer a given survey in both printed and web-based format and see which generates a greater response.

If the change has the desired effect — or simply a worthwhile effect — you can roll it out on a more widespread scale.

There are so many possible things you might try. For example, a customer service group I visited added whimsical clip-art to a set of new customer procedures. The questions the group subsequently received from customers demonstrated that, unlike with previous procedures, many customers actually looked at the information. And customers who pay attention to new procedures are more likely to follow them than customers who don't.

Another group periodically called members of two selected customer departments just to ask how things were going. Despite no other changes in service delivery — and despite the two departments having no inkling that they'd been chosen as test subjects — the group found personnel in the two departments more pleasant to work with.

I offer these examples in hopes of inspiring you to consider your own.

Of course, the determination of whether the changes are successful is rather subjective, but better to select something that you can assess easily, even if subjectively, than to get bogged down in a thankless, quantitative chore. If the thing you do differently has no impact, that's fine; after all, you haven't invested in a colossal change that accomplished nothing. And if it flops, say by upsetting or confusing some customers, you can recover more gracefully than if you had invested significant time, effort and buckaroos in it.

There's a side benefit of doing things differently, especially if you're the sort of person who gets bored repeatedly doing things the same old way. Taking a new approach can keep you from getting into a rut. And it can help you get out of a rut if you've taken up residence there.

One other thought: If circumstances unexpectedly force you to do things differently — or you inadvertently or unintentionally do something differently — notice how that different approach works. Serendipity is a great source of service improvements.

Make it a challenge. Add a what-can-we-try segment to some of your staff meetings and do some brainstorming. Deciding what to change is half the fun, and you'll be amazed at the imaginative ideas you'll come up with. And if your test backfires, you can always play dumb. Glaring yellow survey forms? Strange. Wonder how that happened. ☺

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