



CASE STUDY:

SDN Communications Expands to Eight States with Focus on Service

What started as customer service training in 2007 became an in-depth journey of striving to achieve the same level of service with employees as it enjoyed with customers for SDN Communications in Sioux Falls.

Employee satisfaction levels were studied in 2007 and 2008 to identify retention and job satisfaction ratings, as well as to gather recommendations as to how to make SDN an even better place to work.

“We have very high retention for a telecommunications business,” according to Vernon Brown, Manager of Marketing and Member Services. “In the last 10 years, we have grown from 24 employees in one location to 120 employees in five locations. Keeping everyone informed, working together and focused on service is a challenge related to that growth,” he said.

Employee satisfaction survey results became recommendations to improve SDN in three areas: employee interaction, recognition and communication.

Challenge:

Rapid growth in number of employees in a rapidly changing industry threatened the small business culture and employee cohesiveness that helped achieve SDN’s success in the first place.

Goal:

Sustain an employee culture that achieves high levels of both customer and employee satisfaction as SDN grows into a multi-state organization.

Solution:

Understand the unique needs of a highly skilled workforce in a rapidly changing industry and implement strategies focused on communication, interaction and recognition.

Result:

Customer satisfaction ratings improved from 84% in 2007, to 87% in 2008, and reached 91% in 2009; strong levels of employee engagement; and a culture committed to service success.

Dee Dee Raap
Service Expert, Author,
Speaker, Consultant

www.DeDeeRaap.com

605-371-2299

DeeDee@DeeDeeRaap.com

Interaction. An employee action committee was formed, which they aptly named “GIG,” Great Ideas Group. Each department selected a non-manager member, and with responsibility for the budget and three advisors—two managers and consultant Dee Dee Raap—the group chartered into new areas of planning, budgeting, promoting and hosting events designed to bring people together for fun, to learn, to celebrate and to stay connected as SDN continues to expand. Employees in a survey said the GIG activities they most liked included events like the Super Bowl Chili Cook-off and Christmas party.

Recognition. The CEO, a collector of rare coins, reinstated his Silver Dollar Award for efforts above and beyond the call of duty. Mark Shlanta hands out the awards on a bi-weekly basis to employees recommended by other employees and managers for great efforts.

Communication. Keeping everyone informed begins with the hiring and orientation process. SDN developed an orientation video that gives the 20-year background of growth, market position, department structure as well as a perspective of the customer. New employees are trained annually on service. Employee groups from across SDN meet with the CEO in lunches designed to inform as well as capture successes, and customer-focused Lunch ‘n Learns expanded to feature more department leaders teaching skills to employees.

SDN also takes very seriously the role of leaders in service. “Our management team is responsible for making service a top priority,” Shlanta said. “We run at a very fast pace, and appreciating our employees helps them give customers the service they deserve,” he added.

Leadership training was designed to help SDN leaders acquire new skills as well

as reinforce existing skills that equip them to “reach new heights.” Employees identified the skills and characteristics they desire in leaders in the employee satisfaction survey, and that data was used to customize sessions to build those specific skills and to work together as a growing team of leaders.

Service becomes a marketing strategy when it focuses on not just the customer, but the employees who deliver that service every day. High employee satisfaction scores can translate to high customer service scores in a culture that focuses on communication, interaction and recognition.

*Since 1987, Dee Dee has helped organizations like SDN Communications achieve great service. Dee Dee authored **One Common Thread: Simple Inspirations to Create Customer Loyalty**, published by SDN Communications to celebrate its 20th anniversary. She publishes a monthly service e-newsletter called **Making the Journey Great**, available at DeeDeeRaap.com.*

