

SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD



Read the text and then match the questions below with the sections A-D.
The sections may be chosen more than once.

Which company ...?

has a system in place designed to give support to less experienced employees? (29) _____

encourages competition among its own branches? (30) _____

wishes to continue offering a service to clients after the main work is done? (31) _____

suffered initially from a lack of teamwork? (32) _____

has a very happy dynamic workplace? (33) _____

is aware that its present form of existence may have to be adapted? (34) _____

has proved a lot of people wrong by being successful? (35) _____

deliberately targets one part of its potential market? (36) _____

is a previous winner of the award? (37) _____

involved itself in a major decision? (38) _____

requires employees to come personally and instantly with problems that arise? (39) _____

is regarded as the leader in its field by rival companies? (40) _____

actively encourages its staff to influence the details of company policy? (41) _____

Which company gives the best level of service to its clients? From several hundred nominees for this year's award, the judges have elected a short-list of four. We now publish the written nominations. Which one do you think the judges will chose?

A THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

When the management of this company decided that its pokey London offices were no longer fit for a company at the forefront of workplace construction, the obvious solution was to relocate.

When staff were consulted, however, the overwhelming wish was to stay put. The company elected to refurbish its existng premises, exactly the type of service it usually offers to its own clients. The building was gutted and a 21st century workspace installed. The episode encapsulates the obvious strengths of the company's business - listening carefully to clients, deploying the right skills and delivering the results.

Morgan Lovell has clearly defined its market niche - fast-growing companies that occupy buildings of up to 10,000 square meters - and the services it wants to provide. Alongside its established strengths in workplace consultancy and construction, it is seeking to offer follow-up maintenance and facilities management, providing a one-stop shop for a company's workplace requirements.

It is pro-active in its selection of clients, grading each prospective customer according to a number of criteria which are designed to identify those who are most likely to want to enter into a long-term relationship.

Once customers are on board, they are assigned an account manager, who is responsible for developing the relationship. Clients are fully involved during individual projects and, at the end of each, they fill out a customer service questionnaire, in which they grade each of the company's personnel on his or her performance.

B THE DRAMA SPECIALISTS

This company was formed by two enterprising teachers who were looking for a career change. They wanted something that would utilize their respective areas of expertise - business studies and drama. The idea was a simple one: to offer drama and roleplay to companies and other large organizations as a way of dealing with communication problems. When it was first floated, the idea met with the standard response "nice idea, but impractical, unrealistic", but now, a decade later, the company has grown into a £2 million business, becoming one of the UK's largest employers of actors.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the company is the truly vibrant atmosphere of its headquarters, a converted factory in northern England. Enthusiasm and sheer exuberance seem to infect everybody who works there, and there was equal evidence of satisfied customers, with a small mountain of glowing letters from schools, training councils and private businesses.

The company's employees work in small teams that take the client's brief, develop a script, rehearse it and then go out on the road to perform. Typically work might involve issues such as building confidence and dealing with difficult people. At every performance, feedback forms are collected from the audience, and this is followed by a detailed evaluation of results in conjunction with the client "We don't say: 'this is what we can do for you, take it or leave it,'" one of the founders explains. "We are completely focused on the message the customer wants to communicate."

C THE DELIVERY SERVICE

If service excellence is viewed as a journey, then the vehicle way out in front most likely has this company's name emblazoned on its sides. The choice of the express delivery company as a nominee for this year's award, three years after its previous triumph, shows how much further down that road this company has travelled in the interim.

In spite of the efforts of competitors to emulate its success, this company has gone from strength to strength, increasing its revenues by 54% in the past five years, and introducing a string of innovations in the process.

An indication of just how far this company has come is its customer dissatisfaction survey, initially targeted at 8,000 customers. The company already surveys 4,000 customers twice a year on their level of satisfaction, with results broken down by individual depots. The company's director of quality, explains "We go in with the assumption that there will always be some little niggles and hitches, and we want to find out about them."

Another important innovation from this company is that they go out and seek employees' suggestions in "workout sessions", rather than waiting for them to float to the surface. This way, improvement becomes the responsibility of the many rather than the

voluntary contribution of the few. In these workout sessions, employees identify the threats to their business and the possible solutions. These are fed to managers, who must use them to formulate and action plan.

Employees are also made aware of the performance of the company through the publication of league tables, which rank individuals depots.

D THE ZOO

When the chief executive arrived at this zoo, she found that, although staff were committed to the animals, the human visitors were regarded as "public enemy number one".

In fact, the zoo had been in continuous decline for several years. Morale was low, keepers ruled over their individual domains, and a blame culture was in place.

She set about transforming this culture, putting customer satisfaction at the center of its strategy. For instance, staff were encouraged to engage the park's customers in conversation and introduce them to the animals. The results have been dramatic. The number of visitors has shot up, and turnover has quadrupled in the last five years.

One of the challenges that any seasonal business faces is to instill temporary employees with the same values and incentives as the full-time staff. At the zoo, all employees receive a two-week induction program and great emphasis is placed on mentoring, whereby senior staff advise and assist younger colleagues.

With visitors constantly on the move, it is important that employees are empowered to deal with their needs. There is a "can-do" Service Excellence Award culture in evidence at the zoo, in which each employee is treated as a "walking information post" for visitors, and is expected to deal with any service failure on the spot.

The zoo has already upgraded its objective from becoming the best regional attraction to becoming the best family attraction in the UK. The chief executive has a clear vision for the zoo. "In the future," she says, "the public will simply not accept animals being exploited to make money, and that is why we must develop our environmental contribution. The challenge is to become a leader within the conservation sector."

