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# The Olympic Training Field for Planning Quality Library Services

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## ABSTRACT

PLANNING FOR CUSTOMER-FOCUSED library services begins with looking at these services from the customer's viewpoint. With this focus as a guide, the preparation of goals and objectives needs to be a corporate response to a re-examination of the library's business, the library's customers, and what those customers consider to be of value. Determining what is of value to the customer will require ongoing data collection and evaluation of that data for interpretation into a relevant mission statement as well as roles, goals, and objectives. Just like the Olympic athletes, libraries may want to pursue the gold in terms of offering valued and quality services to ever-changing customers' needs.

## A COMPARISON

The athletes at the 1994 Olympic Winter Games shared a common goal—take home the gold medal. Most of the athletes had worked many years for their chance to perform flawlessly for a few minutes in front of millions of people worldwide. The pressure, pain, preparation, and passion the athletes invested was both inspiring and exhilarating.

The media's interpretation of the athletes' journey to the gold at Lillehammer, Norway, revealed that these young people could boast more than the pursuit of a common dream. Although they had come from all over the world, from different cultures and families, and with different educational backgrounds and financial opportunities,

the athletes were tough, focused, disciplined, high-energy risk takers. More importantly, they were good at mastering and respecting the fundamentals of their sports.

The Olympic Team is an example of a well-marketed service organization which presents itself to the public as a source of pride, accomplishment, and motivation. Like libraries, the Olympic Team is supported by public contributions. One team mission is to reinforce American values and the concept that anyone can succeed. The Olympic Team offers a "feeling" of pride, oneness, and sense of well-being. The media are successful in subtly transferring the winning of the gold, ownership, and the team's success of this act to the American public who in turn support the team.

Those affiliated with the process of developing quality and meaningful library services may not be pursuing a Lillehammer gold medal but do pursue the support of the library's public as well as a personal sense of pride and accomplishment. There is a powerful comparison between the organization's pursuit of excellence combined with the need to transfer "ownership" of the accomplishment to the publics served by libraries.

### THE CHALLENGE

Studies of individuals and organizations who achieve success demonstrate that planning and preparation are fundamental to the realization of that success. It sounds so easy, especially since the fundamentals of planning are readily understandable. However, it is the daily translation of these fundamentals into a successful program that provides the challenge.

Even though the basics are essentially easy to grasp intellectually, many nonprofit organizations as well as profit corporations continue to founder in the application of basic planning techniques. An organization which has a clear but simple grasp of what it is, who its customers are, what products or services it is in business to provide, where it is going, and how it plans to get there is more the exception than the rule in today's changing marketplace and in today's library.

A cover story in *Business Week* (March 26, 1990) featured Frances Hesselbein, former head of the Girl Scouts. The Girl Scouts, as does the American Olympic Team, depends on public goodwill and positive perception to prosper and successfully serve. Hesselbein was being heralded as having turned the Girl Scouts into an "innovative, customer-driven enterprise." She started by conducting "a major re-examination of the Girl Scouts' mission. 'We kept asking ourselves very simple questions. What is our business? Who is the customer? and What does the customer consider value?' ....Hesselbein continued,

'When you are clear about your mission, corporate goals and operating objectives flow from it' " (quoted in Byrae, 1990, pp. 70-72).

## THE COMMITMENT

A key to success, whether on a Norway ski slope or in a corporate boardroom or at the director's desk in a rural public library, is that application of basic planning fundamentals. There is, however, a critical prerequisite to this step. Just like the Olympic athlete, the first step must be commitment to a well-conceived and simple course of action.

That commitment might be defined as acquiring, keeping, and satisfying library customers by providing services and programs that a majority of customers have expressed an interest in receiving. It will mean defining mission statement, roles, goals, and objectives from the customers' point of view rather than operating from the library's historic or even current perspective.

Coincidentally this happens to be the basic premise of the marketing concept. Prior to adopting this concept as a course of action, it will be critical for library leaders to determine whether or not they are willing to actually follow through and provide what the customers indicate they want and need. This commitment to providing what the customers prefer will take the library leadership on a journey, which, when examined closely, may seriously challenge the rationale of earlier management strategy. Administrators may be best able to make such a shift in their management approach only if they completely commit to change and understand the potential consequences in advance of implementation.

The fundamental question to ask is "have customers been getting those products and services which library trustees, administrators, and staff members think they need?" The response will be that the services being offered on this basis are not entirely what customers perceive they should receive. The issue for library growth or even survival hinges on the fact that customers may seek and find the same service or information elsewhere at a price they feel is more comfortable.

Jeffrey Disend (1991) provides a prescription for survival for service-oriented organizations in his book, *How to Provide Excellent Service in any Organization*:

Service-oriented organizations know that just to survive, and then to grow, they have to do more to distinguish themselves from the competition. New products, new features, and consistently high quality are all important. Without these, good service won't matter. Good service alone won't help if the products and services an organization offers are shoddy. But just offering new products,

new features, and high quality isn't enough, either. Successful, service-oriented organizations realize that service is more than icing on the cake. It is the competitive edge. (p. 13)

Disend continues with an illustration from "one of America's most service-oriented organizations. . .":

In spite of the enormous range of products, services, customers, employees, facilities, systems and situations that exist in today's business world, survival depends on making people happy. The ability to deliver superior service is perhaps the most significant measure of a company's prospects for the future [from a Disney brochure for a seminar called "The Disney Approach to Quality Service"]. (Disend, 1991, p. 13)

To understand this approach, it is vitally important to look first at what the library is doing exclusively from the customers' point of view. By removing the "librarian" hats and replacing them with "customer" hats, readers may be able to more honestly see themselves and the services offered. It may become obvious in this exercise that customers do not care about the same things that librarians care about. Customers of any business, service, or product only care about getting the results that they think are the most useful and economical for them today.

Whenever customers investigate the services offered by a bank, grocery, museum, boutique, or library, they instinctively ask themselves two questions, "What's in it for me?" and "How much will it cost me?" These are the price/value questions. Library customers weigh the trade-off between what they will gain and what they will pay. Customers usually pay with commodities like time, convenience, and energy in addition to tuition, taxes, or fees.

When library administrators adopt this modern marketing concept, they are buying into the idea that the existence of the library is justified through the satisfaction of what customers need and want (Crompton & Lamb, 1986, p. 3).

## THE PLANNING

Administrators who adopt the concept that libraries are actually in the exchange business will find that the appropriate application of planning fundamentals is critical to short-term, long-term, or any-term success. Exchange is the price/value scenario. A significant portion of the market has needs which a library may be able to fill by offering selected services and programs. On the other hand, it is not considered exchange when customers are presented a smorgasbord of services which they may or may not perceive as good value for the price they are paying.

The introduction of the “exchange concept” is the fundamental difference between traditional long-range planning and marketing planning. Providing value for the customer in exchange for the customer’s tax money, fees, tuition, or time (price) is the focus of the market planning exercise. The components of marketing planning vary in that the focus shifts away from the institution or product to the ever-changing customers’ wants and needs.

Marketing starts with finding out what the customers want. For the American public, it may be a winning Olympic Team—a group of athletes who are giving their “all” for the prestige and satisfaction of winning the gold medal for their team and country. For library staffs, a common perception is that customers want everything. Customers may seem to want every book ever written, every journal article published, every CD, video, and audio tape in addition to desiring that the library facility be open twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week. The customer seems to expect the library staff to have read, heard, or watched every item in the library collection so they may recommend just the right title at any given moment. This is the world as it may appear from a library staff’s perspective.

However, price/value marketing originates with the determination of what the majority of the customers actually want—not what it may seem that they want. An equally important step from the standpoint of library management will be to match customer wants or preferences with available library resources. It is important to shed traditional thinking and realize that some services may no longer be considered basic and instead might be offered on a partial or full cost recovery basis in order to provide additional services the customers seem to prefer.

It will be critical to not be sidetracked by the wants of the “vocal few.” Every community has a vocal minority, which, when allowed to influence policymakers, may cause the production of a distorted program with marginal community support. There are a few individuals in every community who, because of position, politics, resources, talent, or available time, may be able to get and keep attention on a specific idea. Sometimes these ideas may have merit for the majority. However, each idea, regardless of the source, needs to be examined apart from the messenger and in the context of the needs of the majority the library serves.

That is why it is critical to the success of any customer needs evaluation that it be randomly distributed, readily available, and easily understood so that the results will be perceived as meaningful by the users of the library, as well as by those who are potential users of the library’s services.

What do service-oriented organizations do differently from other organizations which are not perceived as being service-oriented by their customers?

In 1980, Citibank compiled the results of a study conducted with 18 highly service-oriented companies. Citibank conducted detailed, structured interviews with 90 managers in these companies to learn how they think and what they do to create and maintain excellent service.... The Citibank study showed that, regardless of their size or the industry they're in, service-oriented firms have many things in common. They have similar policies and practices for delivering service; they think about service in the same ways; and their people talk about service in the same way, often using the same words. The message is: There's no mystery about what it takes to be a service leader. And the things they do will work in any company. They will also work for associations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, schools and other organizations too. (pp. 15-16)

Specifically, the Citibank (survey) companies do the following:

1. promote from within;
2. continually monitor service levels via service audits;
3. make sure senior management is actively, visibly committed to service excellence;
4. regularly recognize and reward outstanding service by employees;
5. invest heavily in formal, ongoing training;
6. practice teamwork and open communications;
7. measure service performance against explicit standards;
8. actively seek customer feedback on service and use it in decision making;
9. use employee attitude surveys to continuously assess the organization's internal health; and
10. have a strong sense of employee accountability ("Each of us is the company"). (Disend, 1991, pp. 15-16)

Disend (1991) reports the results of additional surveys which offer concepts that libraries might find helpful in developing customer-driven goals and objectives which are customer driven. The following represents additional key survey results related to organizational approach which might be adapted or adopted by libraries in their pursuit of offering customer-focused services:

- Market-driven (customer-driven) innovation . . . creates value for the customer.
- The value the customer receives is more important than the mere cost of the product or service.
- It's best to expand . . . by edging out with small, sure steps, not giant leaps.

- They are obsessive about knowing, even better than customers themselves, what customers want.
- They create and manage customer's expectations.
- They design their products and services to maximize customer satisfaction.
- They make customer satisfaction everybody's business. (pp. 17-18)

Indeed, service organizations such as libraries need to continuously provide, as well as monitor, those mechanisms which successfully collect data from customers. These opinion-gathering devices or processes need to be in place to position the library so that it can readily adapt to changing market interests. Examples of such mechanisms might include customer report cards such as annual surveys which ask customers to rate the library against other information sources which the customer uses. Community surveys conducted every four to five years can provide increased information about a broader base of customer and potential customer needs and wants. Quick response cards titled, "Please comment on the service you received today" will offer insight for consideration. Focus groups organized to allow the library to probe for ideas about new products and services and evaluate existing ones will be useful. And, equally important, the administration of ongoing data retrieval needs to become second nature to staff. As a result, data collection will become perceived as a "normal" business activity to staff, while eliminating its potential threat to the status quo.

Often, in an effort to save time or money or both, administrators elect to conduct customer surveys and engage focus groups without the assistance of an outside independent resource. Librarians collecting and interpreting data collected from customers without professional guidance are similar to lawyers serving as their own counsel or doctors being their own physician. Customers may not be totally honest when asked to say what they think to the same people who, for instance, help their children find resources for homework assignments.

## THE TRAINING

Besides data collection, it is important to institute an aggressive and adequately funded program for ongoing staff training. Staff need to be well trained to be able to provide responsive customer service. This is a financial investment in quality service which is required to ensure that staff is current in relevant areas of professional expertise as well as the provision of quality library service. A plan for training each employee should be established in every library. Because the world both inside and outside libraries is changing so rapidly, focused

staff training programs will help to keep the library responsive to the resulting changes in customer requirements and desires as well as the library's abilities to meet those needs.

When a library has been more product- than customer-oriented, it may be difficult to change that focus; after all, it is mired in tradition and practice. As Joel Barker (1990) says in his film, "Discovering Our Future: The Business of Paradigms," this shift in focus from product to customer could be defined as a paradigm or as a change in the way involvement with customers has traditionally been perceived. Often paradigm changes come from outside a field rather than from within. Some libraries have a longer journey than others to becoming customer focused in their offerings. It may be helpful to educate ourselves to marketing as it has evolved to embrace the exchange concept. This study may help librarians determine where the foundation for their present understanding begins so that they may move beyond that level, if necessary, to one of total commitment to the customer.

Marketing is an often misused and misunderstood term. The explanation for this common misunderstanding may be based on the fact that the paradigm of marketing has actually shifted in three major ways since the concept was conceived. These shifts have caused a general misunderstanding of the contemporary concept of the term "marketing" and its implementation.

Prior to the 1920s, the focus in marketing was on producing large quantities of products as inexpensively as possible. Another way of looking at this era would be to use Emerson's mousetrap analogy. "If a man makes a better mouse-trap, the world will beat a path to his door."

For libraries, this translated into the "library" being the focus rather than the people it served. The library staff and trustees decided what they could do best or what they wanted to do and then offered those services. If the customers didn't use the services offered, the rationalization was that the staff and trustees had done the best they could and something must be wrong with the customers. It would have never occurred to them that the library itself might be off track by focusing in the wrong direction (inward rather than outward).

Eventually the production phase (or marketing paradigm number one) gave way to the sales era (marketing paradigm number two) during the late 1920s. For instance, everyone had a "mousetrap" so industry needed to become more diligent in creating need so customers would be compelled to buy more mousetraps.

For libraries, this second shift in the marketing paradigm translated into services being promoted vigorously in order to increase usage and justify budgets. The take-it-or-leave-it approach of the

pre-1920s gave way to this aggressive sales approach which dominated business and industry until about 1960 and still is used widely by libraries today.

In 1960, Levitt wrote an article which appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Marketing Myopia." The article served as a thought-provoking milestone. Levitt used railroads to illustrate how the sales approach was no longer appropriate or adequate to secure and retain the public's business. His theory focused on the fact that the railroads were no longer growing in the 1960s because the transportation need was being filled by other industries (p. 45).

According to Levitt, the railroad industry had erred in its analysis of what business they were in. They were not, as they perceived, in the "railroad business" but, more importantly, railroads were in the "transportation business."

Levitt (1960) made the following observation about the railroad's demise:

The railroads did not stop growing because the need for passenger and freight transportation declined. That grew. The railroads are in trouble today not because the need was filled by others (cars, trucks, airplanes, even telephones), but because it was not filled by the railroads themselves. They let others take customers away from them because they assumed themselves to be in the railroad business rather than in the transportation business. The reason they defined their industry wrong was because they were railroad-oriented instead of transportation-oriented; they were product-oriented instead of customer-oriented. (p. 45)

Levitt's observations changed the paradigm of marketing for a third time. Marketing efforts shifted to the attempt to determine customers' needs and find the most appropriate ways to meet those needs. The selling concept of the previous era had now given way to identifying customer wants and needs first and then developing programs and services in response to those particular needs (Crompton & Lamb, 1986, pp. 2-6).

Barker (1992) calls this "change in the fundamental rules" a paradigm shift.

Paradigms are like water to fish. They are invisible in many situations because it is "just the way we do things." Often they operate at an unconscious level. Yet they determine, to a large extent, our behavior. . . [Paradigms] have a profound effect on how we live our lives, how we value those things in our lives, how we solve the problems in our lives. They are at the core of who we are and where we are going. To ignore the power of paradigms to influence your judgment is to put yourself at significant risk when exploring the future. To be able to shape your future, you have to be ready and able to change your paradigms. (p. 125)

Shifting from "business as usual" to a customer focus may be a tremendous endeavor for some library administrators and trustees. To consider the consequences if that shift is not made, one has only to substitute the word "libraries" for "railroads" and "access to information" for "transportation" in the Levitt treatise.

Many libraries are still in the aggressive sales mode, though they would probably deny this with exuberance if queried. Their marketing paradigm is stuck. However, in order to expand the public's scarce resources as responsibly as possible, it is important to consider moving (and, it is hoped, to actually move) from the sales paradigm to the exchange paradigm of the contemporary marketing concept.

### THE EXECUTION

The significant managerial value of marketing planning based on customer input is that the process can provide a clear course of action. "General" less specific directions need to be set aside in favor of the preparation of tactical goals and objectives which are customer focused. When library managers commit their operations to the marketing planning process, it is equally important that they commit to the preparation of a thorough and carefully researched document which mirrors the interests of local customers. Anything less will result in the expenditure of scarce resources for a plan that may fail. This line of action will identify specific and popular customer wants and offer customers value which they have identified as an important exchange for the price they are willing to pay. The process forces library administrators and staffs to terminate those services which customers no longer (or never did) value in exchange for those they value perhaps significantly more. The focus channels dollars and other resources where customers perceive they will receive the most value. At the same time, less emphasis will be placed on those services which the majority of customers value less or even the vocal minority value highly. It also may mean that some less popular services may be offered on a full or partial cost recovery basis so that more highly valued services may be offered to customers.

When changes are made, customers need to be informed that they have been made especially when those changes have been suggested by the customers themselves. The customers' perception is fragile, and this perception needs to be regarded by library staff, administration, and trustees as an essential element in quality program development. Likewise, finding a way to routinely respond to customer complaints and suggestions in a positive manner is critical to success.

The team responsible for preparing as well as implementing plans needs to "buy into" the exchange focus in order for the process

to be successful. Sometimes achievement of this level of commitment requires the introduction of an individual especially skilled in team development who is able to bring persons with diverse perspectives and abilities together to a point of workable consensus. It is essential that each team member commit to the focus, the plan, as well as the contents of the final document.

Any successful plan will limit the number of expectations to a level which can be reasonably accomplished. Three or four major objectives may be both realistic and a maximum load that the library staff can effectively handle in any given area of the operation. Giving staff a list of too many expectations can be just as fatal as giving them too few. Groups as well as individuals often have difficulty focusing effectively for sustained periods of time on multiple complex tasks.

Once the plan is defined, finding creative ways to keep the library mission as well as goals and objectives perpetually before boards, staff, administrators, as well as the customers is important to its overall success. Everyone knows someone who has spent the "taxpayers' dollars" to produce a planning document which was put in a drawer and drawn out once a year, more or less, with no special regard for its potential direction. With money increasingly scarce, and consumers more fiscally aware, customers expect to see results for the price they are paying. The plan and the direction in which the library is moving needs to be presented regularly to both those the library serves and those involved in facilitating the plan. The planning document serves as a road map outlining the direction the organization has chosen.

The words in the plan need to be posted strategically so they become a constant reminder of a group commitment. Recently a large Midwestern metropolitan Presbyterian church had a surprise visitor. While working in his study, the minister noticed a long black shiny limousine had pulled into the church parking lot. Since this was not a common occurrence, the minister proceeded to investigate who the limousine visitor was. Near the church sanctuary, the minister was both surprised and pleased to be able to greet Robert Schuller from the Crystal Cathedral in California. Schuller was visiting the city on a book promotion tour and had heard about the church from one of its members. The member had spoken with Schuller while he was being interviewed on a local radio talk show. Schuller explained to the local minister how he had come to stop at the church and exclaimed, "I noticed you have your mission posted in the elevator. I like that!" The minister responded, "Yes, we are intentional here in our regard and adherence to our purpose as a congregation." Schuller turned to his assistant and said, "Write that word 'intentional' down; I don't use that word enough."

Becoming intentional in regard to the development, incorporation, and realization of the organization's mission is critical to its success. Achieving unanimity of purpose requires that each staff member, each supervisor, and each board member personally participate at some level in the development phase of the mission and roles. During the development phase, as is true during the implementation phase, each team member will need to be continuously reminded about who they are and what they wish to achieve. Participation buys ownership which spawns support and interest in achieving long-term success for the organization.

By being intentional, it is hoped, the result will be internalization. Focusing on its mission and roles will keep the library on its chosen path. When every person immediately involved in the potential success of the organization can independently verbalize what the library is about, the realization of its chosen goals and objectives will become second nature to its daily operation.

Another example of constant reinforcement in the internalization of organization goals is illustrated by the experience visitors to the Atlanta, Georgia, Chamber of Commerce headquarters will have. Immediately visitors will be struck by the presence of the chamber's mission statement which is printed on a large fabric banner hanging behind the receptionist's desk. It appears that the mission statement has been edited and re-edited directly on the banner. The authors have boldly written their names across the bottom of the banner.

In addition to having the statement perpetually before the organization and its customers, other important elements include the use of brief and simple straightforward statements which make the mission and goals easier to internalize.

A common objection to the planning exercise is that there is no time. Library staffs are so busy fighting daily fires, there seems to be little time or energy left to plan for the future. This is a common deterrent to planning. Again, just like the Olympic athlete, it takes a commitment of time, attention, and resources. Planning requires taking a few minutes a day for a period of time to plan how to plan. It is not important that every person on the team spend an equal amount of time on planning. However, it is critical that every team member have an opportunity to participate personally. And, in addition to keeping elements of the plan simple and straightforward, it is equally important to keep the process straightforward and easy to manage.

To be appropriately involved, all participants need to be prepared to participate. They need to be assured that, whatever their role, they will be able to contribute value to the process. It is also important at this point in the process to advise the team that the individual

components of the plan will need to be supportive of the mission and corporate direction as well as be consistent and not compromise available resources.

In essence, the determination of a workable and practical process which all participants understand and agree to will be critical to successfully moving forward in the marketing planning process. Keeping a written record of a predetermined process for future reference through the planning phase is important to achieving consistency and will ultimately save time in “trying to remember” the corporate approach to which all team members had agreed upon initially. “Laying the ground rules” would be another way to define process. Yet another way to look at this effort is the mere act of trying to keep everyone involved on the same page at the same time. How is the group going to get from here to there? Who will do what? What are the fundamental rules applicable to each process? How often will meetings be held? Keeping the planning team together is fundamental to moving forward in both the planning and implementation of a well-conceived and workable plan.

## THE GOAL

Many writers have already explained the essential characteristics of goals and objectives as applied in the planning process. Goals are broad statements about intentions, areas of interest, or key issues. Objectives are more specific than goals. Objectives are measurable and explain how goals will be accomplished.

Dirks and Daniel (1991), in their book *Marketing Without Mystery*, offer a series of worksheets which provide a structure for preparing marketing objectives. The questions they recommend be asked while preparing each objective include: What is to be achieved? By when? By whom? How will it be measured? Minimum and maximum limits are added to further define each of these four questions (p. 41).

Goals and objectives need to support the mission of the library. Objectives need to be linked to the single goal it supports as well as to accompanying objectives. Goals are usually long term and objectives are more short term. Goals are not measurable and objectives are.

Goals might be grouped in categories such as the specific services which customers expect, resource management, and administration. Goals need to be clear, always relevant to the customer, and, most importantly, need to reflect reality. When goals are not clear an organization will drift. On the other hand, focus and energy in any organization will result when its participants know where they are collectively based.

Bennis and Nanus, in their book *Leaders* (1985), identified skills that leaders possess. The following comments are paraphrased:

- acknowledging and sharing uncertainty in task force settings with colleagues;
- using their mistakes as learning experiences;
- engaging in goal-setting exercises to force re-examination of current assumptions and priorities;
- using their interpersonal skills to encourage others to join in the search for new ideas;
- constantly enhancing their understanding of their own limits and biases by testing their views against those of knowledgeable colleagues and outside experts (p. 189).

These authors observe that people are more likely to enthusiastically follow leaders who set specific goals and objectives.

The current trend in management is to allow department managers to play a significant role in the development and preparation of goals and objectives since these are the people upon whom the successful implementation of the plan depends. The department level staffs' ownership will serve to aid in the accomplishment of the group's goals and objectives.

Steiner (1990) offers ten important criteria to consider when developing objectives (paraphrased):

1. *Suitable*. The actual achievement of objectives must support the organization's mission.
2. *Measurable Over Time*. The achievement of objectives needs to be expressed in quantifiable terms like dollars, time, ratio, or percentages.
3. *Feasible*. The resources need to be available—like time, talent, or money—to achieve the objectives as stated.
4. *Acceptable*. Proposed objectives need to fit the value system of the organization.
5. *Flexible*. The objectives need to be fluid enough to be changeable in the event of unforeseen contingencies.
6. *Motivating*. Easily obtainable objectives do not challenge or motivate better performance. Objectives need to stretch attitudes and performance.
7. *Understandable*. The choice of words used to describe objectives needs to be simple and straightforward.
8. *Commitment*. The players on the team need to mutually agree to do what is necessary to accomplish the objectives as stated.
9. *People Participation*. Objectives provide specific roles and direction for those who are responsible for their achievement.

10. *Linkage*. Objectives need to relate back to the basic purpose of the organization and be consistent with the objectives of upper management (Steiner, 1990, pp. 165-67).

In addition, Jacob (1990) suggests that these questions be asked when developing objectives:

- Has a specific date for completion been identified?
- Have specific results been identified?
- Are these results measurable (will you know when you are done)?
- Can others see the relationship between the objective and the goal it supports? (p. 67)

### FINISHING FIRST

On the Olympic training field of planning for customer-focused library services, concepts such as the following need to be thoughtfully considered and implemented if the pursuit of the gold or quality service is to be perceived as an acceptable corporate value:

- *Attitude*. Both the individual and collective attitudes of the library administration, managers, staff, and trustees toward providing quality customer focused service need to be perpetually monitored and challenged. Are library staffs indeed listening and performing as customers want?
- *Internalization*. Participants need to have the library mission become second nature to them. Posting the mission statement in several conspicuous places is a good way to constantly reinforce the agreed-to course of action.
- *Process*. Development of a means of successfully achieving all tasks in the planning process is critical to success. The process provides the road map which all have agreed will take the organization forward.
- *Data Collection*. Collection of information about what the customers perceive as value needs to become a continuous process.

The following represents additional Olympic-type training or planning tips which will be useful in the pursuit of offering quality services:

- *Respect the simplicity of planning basics*. Keep the process and application of the basics simple. Avoid complexities.
- *Expose all players to opportunities to learn and relearn appropriate applications of planning basics including data collection*.
- *Examine personal philosophy regarding success*. Is it more important for the library as an organization to succeed than for a single individual or group to succeed?

- *Become focused or intentional about a single mission.* Keep the mission and supporting goals and objectives before all participants and customers continuously.
- *Generating a score of ideas can be stimulating.* Determining whether these same ideas need to be translated into real services is a more difficult task. Often the later step is omitted. It is a common pattern to go directly from idea to implementation. Each part must fit the whole.
- *Resources can impose limits on what it is practical to offer.* It is important to be realistic.
- *Develop a mutually agreed upon direction for each part of the process.* Document the chosen process.
- *Determine whether customer focus is a concept the library can exclusively adopt.* The result of this acceptance will be providing what customers want rather than what the leaders of the library may want.
- *Determine what could stand in the way of being successful and how potential deterrents will be managed to achieve quality service.*
- *Train and retrain staff to be able to successfully offer what customers want.* Remember to spend time with new participants to help them see and buy into the course that the library is presently pursuing.
- *Use talents available to the library creatively and wisely.* Get outside help. Put a team together which brings a variety of strengths. Volunteers can be valuable and valued friends. Match volunteer talents carefully to tasks. An outsider can be a tremendous asset if appropriately assigned.
- *Compromise is not a sign of weakness but one of strength.* Bringing a host of ideas together and developing them into a focused plan can be challenging but ultimately rewarding.
- *Actively solicit frequent customer input.* Determine how to use this information to make adjustments to services.
- *Respect tradition but question it.* Ask if the traditional services are still working or merely comfortable and easiest to offer?
- *Value each customer like a friend.* Monitor customer losses and determine what can be done to avoid future loss.
- *Review progress toward the achievement of goals and objectives regularly at both board and staff meetings.* Ask the customers about progress too.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps libraries of all sizes, shapes, and types are at a crossroads in determining their future. Terms like "re-engineering" and "re-inventing" are becoming common in the discussion of what organizations, both profit and nonprofit, will need to face in order

to flourish. The way things have always been done is no longer adequate. The basic rules remain the same, but the interpretation is changing. The focus must shift from inward to outward. The customers' needs and perceptions are relevant. Service is giving something of value in exchange for something else of value. Where is the plan taking the library? Is it a worthwhile and value-adding journey?

Expect this journey to be different than any one previously taken. Expect the pursuit of providing quality library services to be worthwhile but perpetually challenging. Expect difficulties. Expect to re-invent the library in the context of what the customers think is important. Expect to be realistic about available resources. Expect success!

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