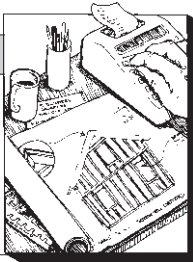


Customer Questionnaire

by Terry Brocius



Our company has a motto that plays off our business of remodeling: Building the Future, Reshaping the Past. When we sent performance questionnaires to our customers, we learned that the best way to build our company's future is to reshape the way we had done things in the past.

With a simple 11-question form (see questionnaire, below), we find out from our customers what we do that pleases them and where we can improve. In as long as it took for a brainstorming session, we came up with a form that we can use for all our customers. Our \$2 million in business comes primarily from multi-family remodeling, but we continue to remodel single-family homes, which is the root of our business.

The survey costs no more than paper, ink, and postage. To make it look professional, we print it with our logo. Each survey arrives with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, which is probably why we get about an 85% return. Another incentive is a company hat or T-shirt, which we promptly send after receiving the completed questionnaire.

Half of our customers respond without any prodding. The other half we may prompt with a phone call, but no more than that—we don't want to annoy anyone, and some people just don't fill out questionnaires.

The Payback

What we get in return is valuable information that we use in two ways:

- In running our business. If our customers tell us we're doing something right, we continue to do it. If they tell us we need improvement, we evaluate their concerns and make necessary changes.
- In advertising. We are proud to show that most of our customers rate us highly, something the survey lets us measure. We put the figures in our brochures and newspaper ads. We also get permission after the survey is completed to use favorable quotes in our ads. People love to see their names in print.

A benefit of a questionnaire is that customers are more comfortable writing their feelings than saying them face to face. That's especially true with homeowners, but even commercial customers tell us more in writing. It's this kind of information that helps us make managerial decisions.

The most important change we've made as a result of the surveys is in the way we supervise our subs. We

found out that our subs were going to the owners in our absence to ask questions, and some were not being careful enough about keeping a neat job site. Now we make it very clear before hiring subs that all inquiries go through us. We also let them know in advance our expectations on job-site conduct such as smoking and parking.

Creating Your Own

To get the necessary detail, ask some questions that encourage your customers to open up. Ask them how they feel about your crews, subs, administrators, and workmanship. Ask for specific examples. Allow enough space between questions for brief answers. Assure them they are wel-

come to use the back of the form or other paper if they need more space.

Don't require written answers for every question. A couple of simple yes-or-no questions will help measure the attitude of your customers quickly and keep the survey short. Try to keep it to one page.

Make it easy for your customers to evaluate your performance in ways you can really measure. We use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 rated "poor" and 10 rated "excellent." Our consistently high grades from customers go into our ads. We can say—and prove—that 90% of our customers rate us a perfect 10.

One thing we don't do is ask for job leads. This is not the appropriate place to do that. Customers would perceive it as the real motive of the survey. The questionnaire is the customers' opportunity to speak their piece. Make it just that and you'll leave your customers with your real message—that you are interested in what they have to say. You'll generate lots of goodwill—and good referrals. ■

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A Valuable Evaluation for Big River Construction

1. How did you find out about Big River Construction and Remodeling?
2. If by personal reference, what was it about our company that prompted you to call us?

Who referred you to us?

3. What are your observations about telephone communications before, during, and after your work?
4. From our first visit to your last construction detail, were our company's representatives courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable?
5. When there were others working on the job (i.e., subcontractors), how do you feel they respected you and your property and how well did they uphold our company's standards?
6. A. How would you rate our company's overall construction performance?
poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent
B. How would you rate our administrative performance?
poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent
C. How would you rate our professionalism?
poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent
7. During construction, how did you feel we handled the day-to-day phases of your job?
8. What could our company have done to make your project run more smoothly?
9. Are you happy with your completed project? Yes No
What, if anything, would you have done differently?
10. How effectively and timely did we handle any problems?
11. May we use you as a telephone reference? Yes No

Please feel free to include any additional comments.

Send Free Gift to: _____
Company: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Thank you very much for your valuable input.