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The month of January is often fueled by the "new year, new you" theme. Organizations are often setting up new policies, new strategies, and potentially addressing weaknesses from the year past. I encourage you not to get swept up in things you just feel like you should be doing. Rather than creating new rules, address specific solutions with your team, and don't forget to focus on what really matters - the customer experience. Here is to a happy and healthy 2017!

Kristin

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#### SIPOC AND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The Six Sigma Tool SIPOC (supplier, input, process, output, customer) is a powerful business tool in the process improvement toolbox. I have used it for over two decades to help organizations map their current processes – and to improve them. However, in the last few years, I've been adding another element – the customer experience – to the SIPOC. You see, the SIPOC is a producer-centric model used to make the process more efficient and effective, making sure that each step in the process adds value to the customer.

Yet there is another dimension we should consider as we are improving our processes – what do you, the supplier, want the customer to “experience” during that transaction? Do you want them to feel happy, excited, delighted? Well-taken care of, appreciated, pampered? Or should the process be completely invisible or “hassle free” to the customer? Let's build these emotions into the process!

For example, at a retail establishment in Scottsdale, Arizona in July when the temperatures are soaring above a hundred degrees, I am always delighted to be asked if I'd like some ice-cold water when I walk in the door. In order to delight me, you need to build into your processes the ability to have the chilled water relatively close to the door.

So here is where process design comes into play. There are all kinds of ways of offering water to a customer: Is it in a glass? A bottle? Where is it kept chilled? How will you hand them the water? So you build in (I like to use the metaphor of “baking it in”) to your process.

It's also important to design the process to be consistent with your brand. A high-end establishment handed me a water bottle that was soaking wet with a hand-pasted label that said, "Glad to work with you!" I was less than thrilled because it didn't match my expectations for that particular establishment!

As you improve your process, don't forget the emotions it generates in the hearts and minds of your customers. So rather than doing a SIPOC, try doing a SIPOCE – and think about the customer experience as well.

### **USE MORE SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS: CREATE LESS COMPANY POLICIES by Joseph Sherren**

Have you ever witnessed a manager who failed to step up and address a one-time problem with a specific solution, but rather created a general "policy" to regulate all employee behavior? This is not only indirect and unclear communication, but it does not resolve the problem and upsets everyone affected.

I had a recent experience working with a client where one of the participants at a training program felt that any food not eaten during a break was fair game. Once everyone left, the participant proceeded to fill up a sack with all the leftover bagels, muffins, and juices.

This left no refreshments available for another break, or for others who were visiting the facility that day. The matter needed to be addressed since this was a three-day program.

Initially, I was told to make a general announcement to all attendees that the refreshments were to be consumed only during breaks and on-site, and not to be taken off the premises. My response was: "No, I will not do that. Why would we admonish, or even implicate dozens of people because of one offender?"

It was then suggested that a policy should be created around the consumption of food at the sessions and published in the handout material participants receive upon arrival. I queried: "How many times in the past 10 years has this happened?" No one could remember it ever happening.

Unfortunately, this is how many well-intentioned, but unskilled managers and business owners react when facing a one-time problem head on. Let's create a policy to deal with the situation, versus dealing with the offender directly. Think about it: If you were in the classroom and I share the new policy, wouldn't you wonder what precipitated it? Was it you or someone else? This is an example of unclear and indirect communication.

Organizations today require clear and direct communication. Otherwise, no one knows exactly what to do or what is expected. An example of this would be if a person in a group had spilled something on his clothes:

1. Unclear and indirect would be to say to the group – "Someone here has a problem."
2. Unclear and direct would be to say to the person – "You have a problem."
3. Clear and indirect would be to say to the group – "Someone here spilled food on their jacket."
4. Clear and direct would be to say to the individual – "You spilled something on your jacket."

Communication which is clear and direct is most effective in all situations. It will solve the problem immediately. I suggested to the client that this is how we should handle the individual who removed the food.

This was done privately and the situation was resolved. Afterwards, food remained at the breaks and the class was none the wiser. Harmony reigned vs. fear of breaking a policy.

Far too often, managers jump to creating policies to avoid dealing with matters directly and clearly. Many of these policies just serve to upset the majority of employees who naturally follow good practices and could eventually inhibit good customer service.

At IBM, we called this, “Getting your brains in a box.” The more policies an organization has, the more it stifles employee creativity and inhibits a manager’s ability to think critically and develop solutions to specific problems.

My message for all managers and entrepreneurs: Do not respond to every anomaly that comes up by creating a rule or a policy. Instead, deal with the offender and educate staff on appropriate behavior, general guidelines, and most of all – how to think.

## PANELIST ORIENTATION: WHAT EVERY MODERATOR NEEDS TO TELL THEIR PANELISTS

Never, ever assume that your panelists have served on a panel discussion. Confirm these details to make sure they are clear about the expectations and comfortable with their role:

1. The Promise. Confirm the panel title, date, time, location, description, objectives and promotional material.
2. The Panelists. Share the names, short bios and websites of all the panelists, where to register and where to meet up just prior to the start.
3. The Format. Describe how you plan to run the panel and the first one or two questions you intend to ask.
4. The Audience. Share audience demographics and estimated size so panelists can bring the appropriate number of handouts, books, etc.
5. The Room Setup. Describe the backdrop, chairs and platform configuration.
6. Presentations. Provide specific instructions, e.g., time frames, slideshow format, getting the slideshows to you, etc.
7. Audio/Visual. Explain the venue’s audio-visual capabilities and determine any additional requirements, e.g., microphones, coordination of video, presentation, etc.
8. Promotion. Declare the degree of appropriate self-promotion as well as use of social media.
9. Pre-Event Call. Have a short conference or video call to allow everyone to connect and hear the same information!
10. Quick Meet Up. Meet about an hour before the event to go over the format and any last minute issues.



For more information about how to make your panel discussion more lively and interesting, visit [www.EventsPanelists.com](http://www.EventsPanelists.com)

## FROM THE BOOKSHELF: BIG MAGIC: CREATIVE LIVING BEYOND FEAR

I first became aware of [Elizabeth Gilbert's latest book, "Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear"](#) during an interview with [Marie Forleo](#). During the interview, Gilbert suggested that ideas float around looking for someone to make them manifest in the world. And if you don't pay attention and grab that idea, than it will float away to find someone more receptive. (my words - as best as I can recollect).

As a compelling visual metaphor, the concept (or idea) stayed with me....and then I saw the book at the airport in Dubai. Knowing I had a long flight ahead, I bought the book and read it straight through. And yes, I found her passage on "how ideas work" - which was much more elegant than my paraphrasing above!

She goes on to say: "Sometimes - rarely, but magnificently - there comes a day when you're open and relaxed enough to actually receive something...The idea, sensing your openness, will start to do its work on you. It will send the universal physical and emotional signals of inspiration...The idea will organize coincidences and portents to tumble across your path, to keep your interests keen. You will start to notice all sorts of signs pointing you toward the idea. Everything you see and touch and do will remind you of the idea. The idea will wake you up in the middle of the night and distract you from your everyday routine. The idea will not leave you alone until it has your fullest attention. And then, in a quiet moment, it will ask, " Do you want to work with me?"

Ahhhh.. so true.

The other section I dog-eared was on "Originality vs. Authenticity." Let's face it. Most ideas have already been done. But they haven't been done by YOU. She says, "The older I get, the less impressed I become with originality. These days, I'm far more moved by authenticity. Attempts at originality can often feel forced and precious, but authenticity has quiet resonance that never fails to stir me."

Perhaps this book isn't that original, but Gilbert's quiet authenticity has stirred me. Just in the last week, I've told five friends about this book - and now I've told you!

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