

A Mystery Shopping Expert Offers Advice On How to Get The Most From Your Program

■ *“What Gets Measured Gets Improved”*

In order to foster sustained growth at your financial institution, it is important to incorporate your mystery shopping program into a larger scheme for organizational improvement, says Rhonda Sheets, CEO of Support Financial Resources, Inc., a financial services consulting firm based in Centerville, Ohio.

“If you skip specific disciplines organizationally, then you have to offer more incentives to get employees to perform,” says Sheets.

“If you set the right disciplines, you can do less on the rewards side and focus on greater profitability and revenue growth.”

The measurement of employees’ skills through a mystery shopping program is one of seven disciplines of “breakthrough” organizational performance, says Sheets.

These disciplines are outlined below:

1) Set expectations.

At the start of any initiative, it is important to set clearly-defined expectations, says Sheets.

Expectations provide the initial framework for future success, she says.

2) Communicate expectations.

Everyone at the bank—from management to customer service representatives—needs to understand what is expected of them, says Sheets.

This lessens the likelihood of a breakdown in customer service because everyone is aware of what is required to fulfill his or her role, she says.

3) Measure expectations via a mystery shopping program or other performance measurement tool.

“What gets measured gets improved,” says Sheets. “Good employees love to be measured. If you’re doing a great job, mystery shopping pinpoints it month after month,” she says.

“If you’re not measuring your performance, you’re missing the opportunity to know truly where you stand and what deficiencies you need to correct,” she says.

4) Provide actionable feedback to managers. “Feedback has to be given in an actionable format, because if it doesn’t come back in that format, it’s not useful,” says Sheets.

Financial institutions should make sure that the evaluations they receive from their mystery shopping vendor offer specific suggestions for improvement, such as tips for how to overcome a customer’s objections to a certain financial product, she says.

5) Deliberately develop managers. Many managers at the retail branch level have been promoted to their positions because they were good individual performers, says Sheets. But these employees oftentimes need direction as they learn how to manage and direct other people, she says.

“A mystery shopping program that measures real experiences, from real customers, during real transactions is the best way to gain critical customer knowledge.”

A financial institution's leadership should be involved in developing branch managers to effectively lead others, says Sheets.

6) Set and stick to clear lines of managerial accountability. "If you fail to set clear lines of accountability or fail to give the proper authority," says Sheets, positive change is less likely to take root at your organization.

"If you are a CEO, your focus should be on the Senior VP's," says Sheets, "Likewise, if you're a regional VP, you need data on your region in order to hold service and sales people in your area accountable," she says.

7) Be action-minded. A mystery shopping program is likely not worthwhile if it does not improve the organization or help its profitability, she says.

"You need to be able to confront the brutal facts in order to make changes," says Sheets.

She cites recent research from the Gallup Organization titled, "Customer Satisfaction is the Wrong Measure," that shows that simply offering satisfactory customer service is not enough to retain customers in today's marketplace.

"You can satisfy the customer and he will still leave you," says Sheets. "You need to make an emotional connection with customers in order to retain their business."

Mystery shopping is one of the best ways to gather data about your financial institution's performance in meeting customers' emotional needs, says Sheets.

"A mystery shopping program that measures real experiences, from real customers, during real transactions is the best way to gain critical customer knowledge," she adds.

If mystery shopping data is used correctly, financial institutions should be able to coach their employees to exhibit the kinds of behaviors that make an organization stand out for its friendliness and warmth, she says.

"The race is on to create a degree of customer satisfaction that connects the customer with you emotionally. The financial institution that accomplishes this is difficult to mimic, and is often the one who wins," says Sheets.

Reporting Web Site For Support Financial Resources, Inc.

Financial institutions that use Support Financial Resources, Inc. (Centerville, Ohio) for their mystery shopping programs can log onto a special password-protected Web site to view reports. A screen shot of this Web site is shown below. Note the institutions can sort this data by employee name, shop date, shop type and score.

>[Dyna Main Menu](#) > [Monthly Reports](#) > [List Shops: 212006-22\\$2006](#)

Select a region or branch or "phone shops" and click "go!" to filter list: *View All*

Shop Number ▲▼	Employee Name ▲▼	Shop Date ▲▼	Shop Type ▲▼	Score ▲▼	SOS ▲▼
FPC1-TL-0206-A02	Olivia	2/28/2006	Teller	5.00	4.33
FPC1-TL-0206-05	Olivia	2/8/2006	Teller	4.80	4.33
FPC1-DT-0206-02	Olivia	2/16/2006	Drive Through	4.62	--
FPC1-DT-0206-03	Olivia	2/2/2006	Drive Through	4.58	--
Subtotal	Olivia	4 Shops		4.75	
FPC1-LN-0206-A02	Nikki	2/4/2006	Loan	5.00	4.20
FPC1-LN-0206-07	Nikki	2/4/2006	Loan	5.00	4.33
FPC1-MS-0206-02	Nikki	2/15/2006	Member Services	4.30	3.33
Subtotal	Nikki	3 Shops		4.77	3.83
FPC1-TL-0206-06	Monica	2/14/2006	Teller	5.00	4.20
FPC1-DT-0206-06	Monica	2/22/2006	Drive Through	4.00	--
Subtotal	Monica	2 Shops		4.50	
9 Shops			Overall Score	4.70	4.20

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Source: Support Financial Resources, Inc. (Centerville, OH)