



What's so "SPECIAL" about our Approach to Process?

I had a very interesting conversation the other day about the approach to process that I have developed and have been delivering in a training program for some time now, that led to a very important question. What led to the question was the observation that people taking the class are walking away with something valuable. They are excited, some even calling it a "life changing experience." We know people who take the class feel very strongly about the experience and their takeaway. Over 50% of the people participating in our classes come from direct referrals. The question is...

What unmet need are we fulfilling?

Wow! What a great question. But do I have the answer? Let me give it a try...

Coming to the Class

I'll start with where I "see" people when they come to one of my classes. In almost every case they are coming because they are specifically looking for something. They have a problem, and that problem is creating frustration and anxiety for them.

Now I think that "problem" puts on a lot of different clothes. It dresses itself up as the need to make business improvements, cut costs, deliver on a project, communicate the "why" of what we want to do and lots of other things. But the common denominator is that people who come to our classes are frustrated - and they are stuck. It seems that in our world today many people in our organizations know what they want to do, but they don't know how to navigate the current "landscape" to get there... and what they've tried so far just isn't working.

And that's the rub. People want to be successful. They want to solve problems, achieve successes, and feel good about what they have accomplished. But the people coming to my classes aren't feeling very successful. Why? Because no matter how hard they work, no matter how hard they try they are not able to produce the results they expect to produce or that their company expects from them. Would that frustrate you? Of course it would!

So they come to my class looking for an answer and what do they find? They find this...

Process at a Macro-Level

We look at process at a macro-level, avoiding that good old “devil in the details” for starters. Trust me on this folks, that makes it SO MUCH EASIER to get our heads around these “processes”. It keeps us out of those detail devils that we could spend days arguing about AND it allows us to quickly achieve consensus. At this level we can quickly agree (in a couple of hours) that this IS our process.

Then we take them to a different perspective on process, kind of like the difference between standing in front of a building, looking at it compared to looking down on the building from above. We move people to a new observational perspective on process by identifying the interactions in the process with the Customer, people in the organization, and the systems we rely on to get work done (Moments of Truth, Break Points and Business Rules).

That doesn't sound so special though does it? But it is. It really is. The way we go about building this “process perspective” starts immediately giving people an understanding of the process they didn't have before. They start to see the real process, what it really is as a totality. It makes sense and by making sense it starts to change things immediately.

This is a “process” in itself of course, a process designed to help people identify opportunities that they can be successful with. That's the next magic moment in the class, the finding of opportunities that lead directly to success.

Process Diagnostics

So we once again change the game for people in the class. Where their current training tells them to engineer problem areas so they aren't problem areas anymore we challenge people to do something different. We challenge them to identify actions that eliminate as many of the “Process Diagnostics” (Moments of Truth, Break Points and Business Rules) as possible. Makes sense right?

Yet that isn't what we do now. In most cases we try to control things better by engineering the heck out of 'em. That introduces more complexity and a bunch more places where “things can go wrong.” It reminds me of my control engineering days when I designed a complex conveying system with a really elegant control system and a myriad of sensors to really make it flexible and reliable. Boy did I learn a lesson. No wonder all the old hands at the game used simple gravity-flow conveying design wherever they could. Gravity doesn't break, and there aren't many failure points in something that just rolls or slides downhill. My system on the other hand was a maintenance nightmare. Sure, it was a wonderfully elegant design - *that was completely inappropriate for the job at hand*. Live and learn, live and learn...

But wait, I need to regress. By building the observational perspective that we do, we are also granting people permission to challenge the process. Ok Terry, what does that mean? Well, by identifying the process characteristics that we KNOW are the very causes of work and customer dissatisfaction we are in affect giving people permission to challenge them and eliminate as many as possible.

Customer Dissatisfaction and Process Efficiency

What causes customer dissatisfaction? It's not a hard question to answer. Dissatisfaction comes from every place where a customer touches the organization and things don't go as they (the customer) expected. How hard is that to understand? From the point of view of the customer it is really, really simple. So we want to minimize those touch points wherever possible – plain and simple.

But there's also this efficiency thing out there that suggests we could perhaps reduce the cost of our processes a bit? Far more than you think. The majority of work in every process is not necessary, and while that may be a hard pill for some of us to swallow, it's the truth.

So these interactions where we are handing off our work and “business rules” that tell us “we will do things this way” deserve to be challenged. And guess what? If we **can** take actions that eliminate some of these things we **should**. Why? Because by doing so we are eliminating non value-added work and the creation of unintentional work when things don't go as we planned. Participants in our class take this back to their work and tell us the difference it makes:

- Results in 30 days or less.
- Management buy-in on the first presentation.
- Other people ASKING them to come and help in other places.
- Results equal to or better than what we expected.

Does this sound different? YOU BET IT DOES.

So I think the takeaway we are giving to people is we are giving them an approach to achieving goals that has a very high success rate, *one that is a lot less complicated to actually do* than what they had before they took the class. It's simple, and its simplicity makes it that much more powerful. It's easy for them to share with others in their organization – and it makes sense to other people because it, well, it's just obvious when we see it! No need to interpret the bloody thing or have a specific set of skills or knowledge. It's obvious... obvious why we should take these actions and obvious why they are going to produce value (and success).

The Need to Succeed

At the end of the day the one thing we all share in common is a desire to feel we are competent, successful people who have earned the benefits and respect that competent, successful people get. I don't think there is anything more frustrating for people than working hard, sometimes very, very hard and then receiving no acknowledgement for our efforts. We all want to do well. We all want to make a difference. We all want the respect that we believe we have earned and we all want to feel proud of who we are, and what we have done.

In my view, I believe that is what the CPP program is providing to people. We are giving them the insight to identify the best opportunities for improvement (achieving goals, success) with permission to do things they know are the right things to do. In a world that has become more complicated than many of us care to think about, that is more than a breath of fresh air – it is the difference between business success and business failure. Just as it is the difference between personal success and personal failure.

No wonder they leave the class with excitement and enthusiasm. We have actually given them what they really needed even though they didn't know what that was when the came to us.

We are granting people permission to be successful. We are giving them a way to use process to create that success however that is defined for them.

We are making their lives simpler, easier and more successful...

Social Responsibility

Finally, I see one more thing that impacts people coming to the class. A lot of what we give people has to do with the experience we (the company) provide to our customers. We make the connections between our "processes" and the customer – what they REALLY experience - in our class. Why is that so important? Because it allows us to be part of doing something that directly improves the experience of the customers of our company. Do you know how negative it is for people to work in a company where they KNOW many of the interactions customers are having are BAD? Whether we think on that or not it impacts us very, very deeply. It strikes to the heart of our personal pride. It diminishes our EGO, making us less than what we want to be. It's one of the biggest reasons that "employees" just "do their job" and why people leave to find other employment. I don't want to work in a company that is providing poor customer experiences, do you?

So while the message on the "tin" is process improvement, customer alignment and process innovation I think the value for people who take the class is very, very personal. We help people by making their working lives simpler, easier and more successful... and we help them to do things that matter to THEM. We help them improve the experience of the customers of their company, and I'm not sure you can put a monetary figure on what that means to the people who make that happen.

We are making their lives simpler, easier and more successful...

...while giving them the ability to make their customers lives simpler, easier and more successful.

I'd say that is something well worth doing!

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