

Making the Grade, Passing the Test

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Companies must measure the performance level of their service providers. O'Leary, using the example of household goods transportation companies, explains how to best gather and evaluate the data.

BY PAUL O'LEARY, CRP

Hanging up the phone, the relocation manager had a sense of déjà-vu. Another problem had come up regarding the service delivered by her provider. It was not really a big issue this time, but it was something that she had noticed before. This time, the employee definitely was upset—and that is not a good situation from which to start the new job.

After swapping a few e-mails with the transferee and the service provider, she arranged for a three-way conference call between the provider's customer service representative, the employee, and herself. All went well from that point; however, it seemed as though this was not the first time she had experienced trouble with that moving company.

Sometimes in the rush that today's relocation industry workforce faces, there is no time to stop and evaluate how service providers actually are performing. Are corporations getting the level of service they are paying for? Are some suppliers simply unaware of issues that slow a new employee's start into his or her new position?

It is important to use quality surveys to measure the performance of service providers and even compare the performance they are giving. This allows for constructive feedback, continuous improvement, and helps determine how a particular service provider compares to the competition.

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Quality is an overused word. So for the sake of this article, quality surveys will be used when referring to the level of quality, or more specifically, the concept of measuring quality.

Because many companies talk about the level of quality they already have, their interest in doing a quality survey lies more in being able to measure that quality versus what is being provided by others for the same service.

This article addresses the situation of household goods carriers that will be referred to as “providers.” But quality surveys can be administered to any type of service provider.

Being Held Accountable

Quality surveys are among the best ways to measure the value of employee benefits that an employee receives. A company might have limited information from its counselors about a particular carrier that is not performing well, but typically this is only anecdotal evidence. And even if only one service provider is used for a particular service, quality surveys can be effective.

If several surveys during the same month indicate poor quality for a given provider, that provider must be held accountable. If the quality scores that a company receives all rate well, the company still can find value in the results by comparing them to industry benchmarks.

Measuring quality enables companies to pinpoint the strengths of a particular provider. Once top performers have been identified, a company can negotiate tradeoffs for services between the top-performing carriers. This will maximize service.

Some providers perform well in certain geographic areas, and not as well in others. Some might consistently provide outstanding service on very short notice. So, if an employee

must move by a particular date, one carrier might be the best at short-notice moves. And more specifically, quality surveys can be used to measure the performance of particular truck drivers during a given move.

As companies change, their quality level can fluctuate. Quality surveys should be done on an ongoing process. Quality is not always tied to price. Quality might depend on the level to which the company is paying attention to its supplier’s services. If a company shows little interest in how a provider performs, the provider will not spend as much time on improving. Many companies notice that the quality they receive increases simply because their providers know that someone is paying them attention.

On a Scale From 1 to 100

Companies can get answers to specific questions that nag them by conducting quality surveys. For companies that want to know if the provider arrived on time, and was helpful and courteous, they should ask their transferee to rate the provider on a scale from 1 to 100. Or, simply ask transferees if they would recommend using the mover again.

Scaled questions are used to measure an issue that lends itself to a “gray area” response. For example, “Was the provider helpful or courteous?” should be answered on a scaled format. This will help determine how helpful or courteous the provider was. Simple “yes or no” answers should be used when the issue is less important or requires less information.

Be careful not to give a transferee a survey that asks too many questions. If too many questions are asked, the depth of the information provided by the transferee is reduced.

If the transferee is completing the survey on the telephone, they may choose the path of least resistance, by giving every question an “average” rating, just so they can get off the phone. For surveys that are filled out and mailed in or performed online, transferees might choose to abandon the survey in mid-course. This is the case when a survey comes back incomplete, or with many responses that appear repetitive or thoughtless. This type of respondent provides little to no information on the quality of the provider, and even can be misleading.

Surveys that are too long may suffer from a low return rate. Respondents might only comprise those who have free time, such as retired spouses; those who enjoy filling out surveys; and spouses in foreign countries who have not yet been able to receive a work permit. In that case, the overall response would not be a fair representation of a company’s relocating workforce.

Companies that allow their transferees to write specific comments can provide invaluable information to suppliers. One example would be if an employee said that his relocation went well, but only gave it an “average” overall rating. Perhaps a misunderstanding occurred during the move that the transferee could only fully explain by completing the “comments” section. One example would be if the transferee wrote that he did not appreciate that the household goods movers called his goods “junk.”

In that case, after following up with the provider, the company could discover that the provider typically labels all boxes that have garden tools, rakes, and garage items as “junk.” So, when a member of the provider’s staff said, “It is time to go get the junk,” they did not mean it

Staff Profile

Leslie Erin Miller

"I work with a team in the membership department to develop marketing strategies and am responsible for the printing of all communications and all mailings. I also coordinate the exhibits for annual conferences. I have been with ERC since September 1999.



"My favorite ERC memory is working with our old membership team. We had a special way of having fun while getting the work done together. Even coming in on the weekend working on the Directory with everyone — we didn't like to have to be there but we always had a good time together. I also liked when it would snow at the old townhouse [ERC's offices at 1720 N Street].

"I was born in Cumberland, MD, and I live on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. I've got one sister, Janay. She's 29 and lives with her husband and two puppies in Centreville, VA. My mom and dad live in Leesburg, VA. My dad works for the National Rifle Association.

"My favorite hobbies are traveling, camping, bike riding, and going to the beach.

"One thing that you don't know about me is that I'm going to be an aunt in May! Janay is pregnant with my nephew, Jack.

"I'm proud of my family. We have an amazing friendship that just keeps getting stronger. We always have so much fun together."

in a derogatory way. Knowing this, the employer went back to the transferee, explained the situation, and then the transferee quickly improved his overall impression of the moving company.

The Perfect Survey

One of the worst mistakes a company can make is to base a company's entire performance on a single rating from a single employee. Because all are human, it is important to note that providers are not perfect all the time. Quality survey results should be tabulated based on average. The pool from which to evaluate should include no fewer than five surveys.

Quality surveys are best done in an ongoing manner. In an ideal situation, data should be reviewed on a quarterly basis and compared quarter to quarter as well as against the same quarter from the prior year. Consider whether the provider is willing to make improvements to its service; and notice whether the provider's service representative is aware of the issues that the client's employees are having with their service and that they act accordingly. It is important that companies share their response information with the provider.

On a more technical level, companies should seek trends by comparing data by category. Consider if a trend is formed in instances where a certain type of a move is used, such as a temporary assignment, transfer due to a plant closing, or a new hire. Or, perhaps ratings are low because of factors beyond the provider's control. For example, check to see if scores fluctuate depending on a particular representative or driver.

Using quality surveys to measure the performance of suppliers provides a valuable tool that gives employees the ability to be more productive in their new position. Also it allows companies to spend less time and money dealing with less-reliable providers and lends valuable information to consider when formulating relocation policy. ■

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