

AN OPEN-LETTER CHALLENGE TO ALL HP MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

by John Minck, Marcom Manager, SPD

I think someone needs to say this.

And since no-one else has, I will.

It's about attitudes.

And it's about coaching.

And it's about customers.

As I've watched HP grow for ~~for 20~~²⁸ years, the changes have been dramatic. From 1500 employees to 85,000. From about \$40 million per year total (can any of you new folks believe that?) to \$6 billion sales. And, in the last few years at least, maybe some hardening of the arteries.

Now any organization with our size certainly needs a management superstructure. And the very complexity of our product line and customer and industry sectors leads to a very complex management organization and a fairly large bureaucracy.

The thing I wish it did not create was the large-company syndrome of over-concern about job status, job titles, we-they attitudes, budget fights, product strategy interferences, etc. But, much more importantly, it seems to create a loss of vision of our number #1 corporate person, our customer. And one significant reason for this I feel is that the ownership of the job of selling something is too easy to leave for someone else. And couple that with the enormous changes in our organization that have taken place these last 1 1/2 years in field and group and factory, and you can see the opportunity for a serious loss of customer attitudes.

Yet, there's been no lack of activity to try and improve many of these attitude problems. We've had lots of re-organization to re-match customers with our field force. We've had lots of training on customer-orientation. And lots of good and successful efforts on TQC. Customer focus groups, management consulting programs, market research, and many, many other activities are happening across the length and breadth of HP world-wide. There's almost an MBA/analytical frenzy about it.

All well and good. But I contend that an important part of our solution mix is that we have lost a layer of old-style coaches. Notice that I didn't say the word "managers", because lord knows we've probably got all of those we need. We've got layers of them. But, let's be frank about it. There is only so much you can learn out of books on management theory. I like the comment I read recently about learning to make love. You can read all about it in books and study all the masters and learn it well. But most of us would agree that reading is nothing like learning by doing.

Let's take our customer-orientation for the first example. I'd hate to find out how many millions we have spent on training at all levels to build our sensitivity to customer-needs. It's great, and with all due recognition, we are a far better company because of it. Has it helped us as much as it should? Well, yes and no.

My first example sounds like I'm picking on our field force. God love 'em, I'd never have that job---in a million years. Imagine yourself facing the mirror every morning, knowing you're going to get kicked in the teeth several times during the day. You hype yourself up--"Let's go get 'em Charlie (or Charlene)! There are customers out there who need me--although some may not know it yet!" And it's off to the races. What a tough occupation, and especially in these times. My hat is off to you all.

Having said the good news, here's the example about customer attitudes. Some time last year I attended a wine and cheese reception that followed a customer technical seminar in a sales office. Most customers stayed around to chat, and like most engineers I know, they sort of got their food and drink and stood around the edges and ventured a few words with other strangers. The HP people consisted of two types. The first types were out talking with the visitors. But many were simply there talking with each other, including several managers.

Next, a Vice-President who happened to be in town, came by. Now he was like a magnet in the middle of the room for all HP people. Unfortunately, most of the customers were still standing around the edges, talking with each other, and me.

Here is my point. It's easy to understand why HP people gather together. You haven't seen a friend for a while. You may not even have talked with your own manager for a while. And a Vice-President's ear is a real catch, and a once-in-a-year opportunity. It's human nature to do exactly what everyone did. But I contend that it wasn't the right thing to do. Or the friendly thing. Or the HP thing.

The senior HP managers present were the ones at fault. A good coach among them would have immediately have said to the HP group, "Well, nice to see you---let's get over and meet some customers, and sell something. No matter they weren't your own customers. And if the intermediate managers didn't take that role, the VP should have made it clear what his expectations were. And, of course, the same comments hold for factory travellers.

There's no wonder we develop bad habits when we managers give bad example. But besides giving the good example, managers should also be coaching their troops that anytime there is a customer within sight, there is nobody else of importance.

Another example. Take a close look at the action in the booth in any industrial trade show. With dozens of customers or potential customers walking by the booth, HP people will be talking with each other. In fact, we sometimes are almost shoulder-to-shoulder so if a customer even wanted to get at our display, they'd have to ask their

way through.

I must confess that I don't see much coaching going on here. Maybe I'm going to the wrong shows, but HP-swarming is something that goes on much too often. I hereby challenge our senior managers present at all shows to lead by example and to make your expectations known to the intermediate managers and in turn to the front line troops.

When we open the doors to our customer RF/MW Symposium, there's a period of time in the morning before starting registration when customers who have driven a distance and came early to beat the traffic just stand around with their cup of coffee as HP people swarm and greet each other and meet the day. I don't know if it's a matter of owning a particular customer, but my attitude is we all own every customer.

Come buffet lunch time, watch how the HP people seat themselves. There may be dozens of customers eating by themselves or getting up enough nerve to join a table, but more than half of us from HP will join a mostly-HP table. I wish I was wrong on that.

Now that I've antagonized the field force, let me turn attention to the factories. For a company which prides itself on customer-orientation, I find strong contradiction in what our engineering and marketing management (and general management for that matter) says and what they do.

First division example. How many of our division engineers belong to customer organizations like IEEE, AFIPS, ASQC, AFCEA, SOLE, you name it? How many of our managers belong? Do managers support verbally and with encouragement those project people who get out among real-life customers? I think it is poor to spotty. I wish I was wrong.

Now let's go up a level. Is it part of a Marketing or R & D Manager's report card to lead by example in customer-contact? Shouldn't he/she lead by coaching and encouragement for active membership in customer organizations? What a wealth of market research these real-life customers are and how convenient to find them in a non-threatening environment of technical meetings.

Why doesn't HP pay for IEEE membership? It seems to me that the market research aspect alone is well-worth the small cost to the company. The three customer-organizations I belong to give rich rewards to me and also to the company. I think I bring a subtle HP message of support to those organizations as well as all the customers I deal with. And they offer me extremely valuable insights into everything about HP's problems in returning phone calls to product strategy.

There's a well-kept secret about customers. They don't bite. And they are genuinely friendly to HP people. Sure, you take some friendly criticisms addressed to the Jolly Blue Giant who is now you, a flesh and blood person instead of an anonymous and faceless

corporation. They might even call you to find out how to get an HP person's name for something they need.

There is such a wonderful diversity of customers, and so much work to be done. Let me make some suggestions to those of you who have good intentions but never got going. The IEEE must have 40 professional groups working from antennas to technical writing. Quality assurance personnel have local Quality organizations and in many cases a good many members are aerospace-oriented and are good customers.

There are Logistics groups working on procurement and support methods. There are safety and technical environment groups. There are a myriad of groups in the Computer, Networks, and data processing areas. Medical and Chemical areas must be just as fruitful. This specialized world even has an electronic warfare group and a military communications group--large ones.

Most of these associations have 5 to 10 technical committees who are desparately looking for intelligent help. They are writing new standards and methods. Many of those involve measurements, and who else but HP could help more? The often require data gathering and processing, and who else but HP could help as much there?

Now here comes the challenge. Managers, you start things off by joining at least one organization actively. Coach your people to get involved in at least one. Make participation with customers part of their job performance review. Now I know there are arguments that too much outside activity hurts our company. I reject that. Bill Hewlett and Barney Oliver were National Presidents of IEEE in a very busy management time of their lives. Bud Eldon this year is just finishing his year as IEEE President. HP not only grows in prestige with such dedication, but we offer something back to the industry which nurtures the infrastructure we operate in, and buys our products, and pays our salaries.

I'm talking about getting pretty creative here. Every manager is a candidate; Order processing, Product Support, Finance, Quality, Production, Inventory, Materials Engineering. Even Marcom Managers are fair game. I think it is preferable to join groups of measurement or computer customers since they are the prime customers. But Finance Managers and Quality Managers buy lots of HP stuff too, especially from the computer and terminal and peripheral groups.

To all of you who are already active, my hat is already off to you. Congratulations and Attaboy/Attagirl. (That is hard to phrase). I want HP management to specifically recognize your dedication. And I want an army more to join you out there in the front lines.

Did I miss anyone? Don't wait for anyone to cheer you on. Get out there and sell something. Find out what needs to be invented. Find out how our stuff is doing in the trenches. You will be both gratified and astounded by what your customers tell you. My observations are that customers generally like us but they will have lots to say about how we could make their life easier. That is the

ultimate objective of these contacts. Our customers. Our future.

To the Readers of MEASURE:

I know it's unusual for you to read this sort of material in MEASURE. But since I wanted to reach all HP managers with my challenge, I felt that it was probably the only HP publication which at least goes to everybody and thus had a chance of being read. At the same time, all employees can help. You can sell HP to your seatmate on an airline or to a neighbor who is buying a personal computer. We're all in this together.