

NGA PATHFINDER

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TRANSPARENCY AHEAD

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CAN WE TALK?

NGA hopes to improve business with engaging discussions

By Sara Barker, Xperience Communications Team

Who knew fruit could be so meaningful?

“You’ll never look at a banana the same way,” said Xperience directorate’s deputy director, Christy Monaco, after hearing the story about Bob Stone at a recent session of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s “Lead with your Customer” conversation series.

Stone, a former senior leader at the Pentagon, wanted to recognize and reward employees for excellence in customer service. After being blocked time and again by the numerous guidelines that existed in the traditional bureaucratic channels, he decided on a less cumbersome approach: a banana.

Instead of a formal award, anytime he heard about an employee going above and beyond for a customer, he personally delivered a banana to them. He explained to each recipient that this was his way of recognizing them for their excellent customer service and contributing towards the mission. Instead of being delayed by a process, Stone found a more personal way to express genuine appreciation to employees.

The story captures the spirit of NGA’s “Lead with your Customer” conversation series, sponsored by the Xperience directorate’s Customer Engagement Office. The series is being led by a team that includes MT&H, and Mark David Jones and J. Jeff Kober, founders of World Class Benchmarking and former leaders of the Disney Institute.



The four-part series, which started in April and will run through September, aims to connect the dots that lead from leadership excellence to employee engagement and from employee engagement to customer centricity and customer consequence — a process that the most renowned public and private sector organizations consider their secret to long-term success.

The catalyst for the series is the pressure on the agency — due to fiscal realities — to ensure it is providing its customers the biggest bang for their buck. This means not only improving the efficiency of how the agency serves its customers, but also carrying out proven customer-centric approaches to delivering real value to customers — what NGA Director Robert Cardillo calls “customer consequence.”

“Agency leaders are starting to ask employees how their work is relevant to their ultimate customer’s mission. It’s very much a new direction for some employees who were, in the past, only focused on delivery of their ‘widget,’” said Jim Griffith, deputy director of operations at NGA.

The new focus requires motivated, engaged employees, which is what the “Lead with your Customer” conversation series intends to deliver. If employees are not truly engaged in their work it will be nearly impossible for them to

provide a customer experience that consistently enables positive customer consequences. The 2014 NGA employee climate survey reports that only 29% of the workforce feels engaged, for context that is close to the national level of only 30% according to Gallup’s 2013 State of the American Workplace report.

Xperience Customer Engagement office deputy director Sherry Crumpler views the series as an opportunity for NGA employees to learn insights into customer centricity from organizations that do it best.

“This training will enable NGA to deliver more impactful consequences for our customers,” said Crumpler.

As a precursor to the conversation series, in March 2015, a group of senior leaders from NGA visited world-class organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area to learn about their customer-centric successes.

“[I]... learned, or relearned, important lessons from the leaders of each of the businesses we met,” said NGA’s Chief of Staff Ed Mornston. “It was a great opportunity to think about

our business through the lens of other businesses, and then to project what they have learned to NGA.”

Human Development directorate’s Vietta Williams said that she was impressed by how REI, the outdoor gear retailer, encourages their employees to literally “walk in their customers’ shoes” by offering them complimentary days to go out hiking, camping or traveling, which affords them first-hand experiences of the value of REI’s products.

“REI encourages consultations rather than simple transactional interactions with customers,” said Williams, explaining how the retailer’s staff members take the time to understand a customer’s needs and guide them toward the right purchase.

According to the company’s management, their customer-centric focus is what prompts customers to choose REI in the future over other competitors.

“Managing a customer interaction — not by the clock — but with the intent of building a relationship may seem simple, but it’s extremely effective,” said Williams. “It’s a habit that we at NGA, and all government agencies, should strive to adopt. While expediency is critical, not taking the right amount of time up front to understand customers could waste everyone’s time later.” *