

Identifying front-line motivations versus supervisor perceptions to reform library customer service

**THE PROJECT**

High-quality customer service is a priority for academic libraries, but is often a struggle to deliver a consistent level of quality.

Could corporate models for customer service be adapted and cross-applied to library customer service using select principles found in John R. DiJulius III's book, "Secret Service: Hidden Systems that Deliver Unforgettable Customer Service" (2003)?

Could part of the problem be a disconnect between what supervisors think motivates their employees to give good customer service and what actually motivates the employees?

**SELECTED RESULTS**

**Survey Demographics**

- 41 employee respondents
- 22% identified as staff (exempt)
- 19.5% identified as faculty (not tenure-track)
- 19.5% identified as graduate student workers
- 51% work in a doctoral-granting institution
- 44% work in a reference position
- 29% work in a public services position

- 47 supervisor respondents
- 34% identified as staff (exempt)
- 23% identified as faculty (tenured)
- 64% work in a doctoral-granting institutions
- 23% work in a reference position
- 49% work in a public services position

**THE METHODOLOGY**

Developed surveys with corporate administration models in mind to collect data on potential gaps in customer service motivation.

IRB Approval through University of Tennessee Knoxville.

**LIMITATIONS**

Better proof-reading in survey: typo caused confusion for respondents on supervisor survey

Pre-survey or focus groups to understand the best ways to phrase survey questions to appeal to library supervisors and employees

**THE SURVEY**

2 Versions of the survey:  
- 1 for supervisors of front-line employees  
- 1 for front-line employees

3 Categories of motivating factors:  
- Work Environment and Working Conditions  
- Relationships with Co-Workers & Supervisors  
- Other Factors

**SUPERVISORS**

What do YOU think motivates your employees?

**EMPLOYEES**

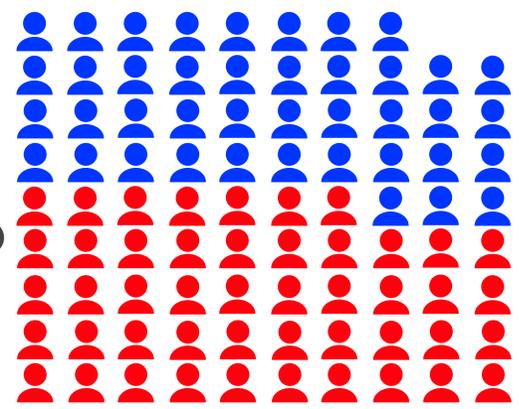
What ACTUALLY motivates you?

Based on your experience or in your opinion, please consider the following and how they affect your employees' motivation to provide great customer service in their job.

	Greatly reduces my employees' motivation	Tends to reduce my employees' motivation	Tends to increase my employees' motivation	Greatly increases my employees' motivation
Being expected to take responsibility for tasks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having to train a new staff member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending professional development or addition training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supervisory responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promotion and potential salary increase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please consider the following and how they affect your motivation to provide great customer service in your job

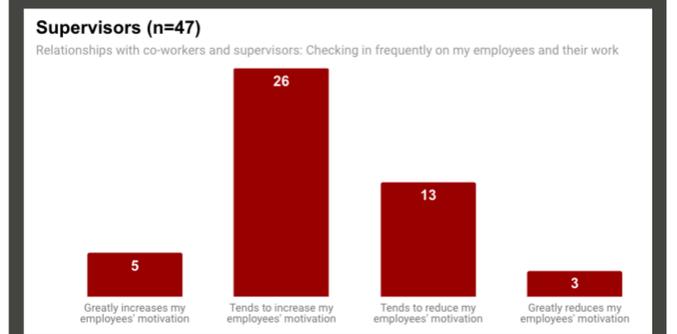
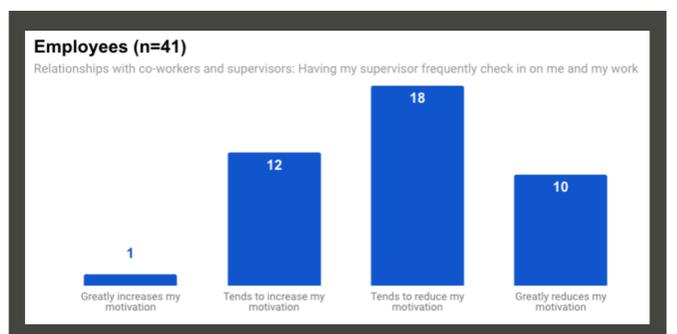
	Greatly reduces my motivation	Tends to reduce my motivation	Tends to increase my motivation	Greatly increases my motivation
Being expected to take responsibility for tasks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having to train a new staff member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending professional development or addition training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supervisory responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promotion and potential salary increase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**NOTABLE GAP**

For me, it is important to have autonomy in my job, but it is also extremely important to have a supervisor who can help answer the really hard questions. I have been in my professional library job a little over a year now, and I have found that I am extremely unmotivated when I can't get answers from my supervisor --they tend to not respond adequately often.

Some will be extra motivated to give better customer service if they get negative reviews from users; for others it will make them angry, cynical and less likely to care about good service. That is, distinguishing supervisor perspectives from the staff member's personality is tricky territory.



68% of employees surveyed reported that frequent check-ins by supervisors either reduced or greatly reduced their motivation to deliver great customer service, while 29% reported that it tended to increase their motivation.

Supervisors were split, with 55% believing frequent check-ins would increase employee motivation, and 28% believing it would tend to reduce employee motivation.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Not as many gaps as we anticipated. Many of the comparisons between the supervisor survey and the employee survey revealed that respondents are on the same page when it comes to motivation to give good customer service.

Only one really significant gap was identified from these surveys. This could be due to too small of a sample size, or a disproportionate sample size. We still believe that the field of librarianship can benefit from alternative customer service training models, which will be further explored in the second phase of this research project.

**Supervisor Survey Comment**



Phase 2 of this research project involves interviewing front-line supervisors and front-line employees to better understand responses to these surveys.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**



Recruitment for interviewees, and another round of modified surveys will begin in 2019 and is expected to take much of the year to collect and analyze data. A full report will be forthcoming in 2020.