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# COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

A SERVICE QUALITY DIVISION PUBLICATION

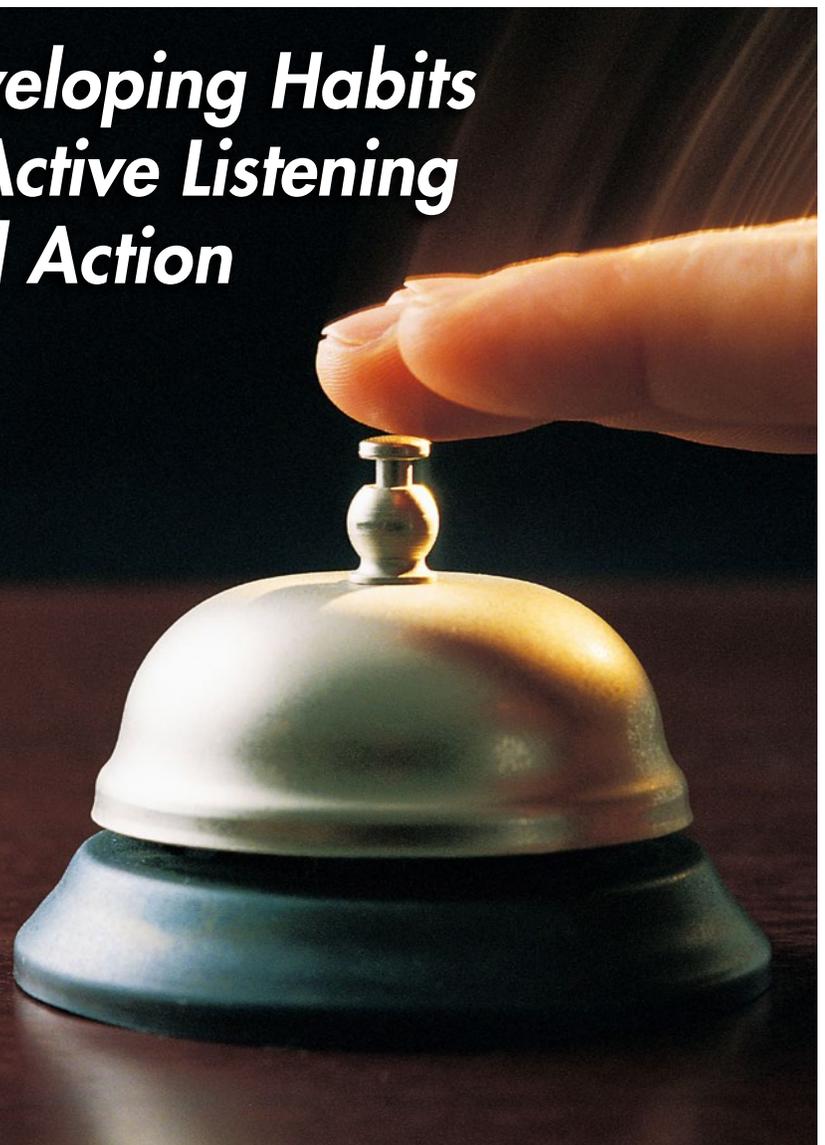


Service Quality  
Division  
The Global Voice of Quality®

You have a good organization with good clients, but it takes great clients to become a great organization. How do you develop great clients?

First, focus on understanding what drives each client—what they expect and perceive. Then, design their experiences with the organization. Knowing what each client wants and needs allows you to engineer the relationship with that client, driving increased loyalty, more profitable projects, and more satisfying results for the client, for you, and for your shareholders.

## *Developing Habits of Active Listening and Action*



# Developing Habits of Active Listening and Action

by Ryan Suydam

*continued from page 1*

Today's fastest-growing companies create more than advocates; they foster advocacy habits. These clients tell others about you. Word gets out, and soon everyone knows about you, and wants to be involved with you. Social platforms grow entirely on this premise. All businesses—especially professional services firms—should learn from this model. The following discussion provides a framework to assist high-growth companies develop compelling services, deliver high-quality experiences, and drive new habits in the marketplace.

Each of your competitors can likely do the work you do. Each can provide quality services and creative solutions that rival yours. But you can do more. You have the opportunity to deliver amazing client experiences that result in real client advocacy. Client advocates are the biggest source of effective marketing, stellar sales, high revenue, and lucrative margins. There's nothing smarter or more urgent than understanding and delighting each one of our clients, so they will all become our advocates.

Before you can develop advocacy habits with your clients, you must first develop internal advocacy toward your clients among all your employees.

The first step in creating internal advocates is built upon actively listening to clients. The foundation of amazing relationships is giving each client a voice, listening to what they say, and responding accordingly. Client insight is a precious economic asset that allows you to constantly deliver higher-value services that delight every time.

Clients depend on us to deliver the right solutions and solve their problems. No one is better positioned to delight our clients than we are. It's not an easy task without the right support, tools, and training. But with those resources, discovering what delights each client is simple. You have only to ask.

What do you mean, ask? I talk to my clients all the time! Of course. And yet, we've found that

many clients are reluctant to discuss concerns directly. Others have seen excellence and don't know how to recognize it. What's missing is a clear, objective method to discover client perceptions quickly, easily, and unambiguously.

Asking isn't where we stop. The most critical next step is responding to their feedback. By acknowledging their feedback, the client knows we heard. By adjusting our processes or managing expectations, the client sees we listen. By verifying improvements have happened, our clients know we care.

The process is quick and simple. The return on investment is huge.

A client listening program must be designed primarily to benefit the clients. To make sure this doesn't become just another survey, we employ the five key strategies (at right).

When dealing with a challenging response ask yourself one question: "I wonder why he said that?" When you focus on why a client responded a certain way, defensiveness evaporates and empathy grows. You'll enter conversations with an effective curiosity that leads to solving problems. The same approach applies when addressing exceptionally positive feedback.

Feedback—positive or critical—is almost always about the process, not the people. Rather than focusing on trying to change your client or yourself, de-personalize the feedback and look at the process. Processes are impersonal and can be more easily changed. Invite your clients to help design the processes to best fit their needs, and they will own the process as much as you. Focusing on process design is a simple way to promote mutual success while protecting the ego and personalities of both parties.

In closing, focus first on understanding what drives each client—what they expect and what their perceptions are. Design their experiences with your organization. Once you know what each client wants and needs, you are able to engineer your relationships with them in a manner that focuses on making it easy for clients to do business with you. This focus drives lasting client advocacy, resulting in increased loyalty, more profitable projects, and more satisfying results for the client, for you, and for your firm.

## Five Key Strategies

- First, clients don't want to tell you what's going on *after* the project is over. They don't want you to do better next time. They want you to do better *this* time. The only way client feedback drives results is when you ask during the project.
- Second, clients change. Circumstances change. A successful strategy today may not work tomorrow. The only way to keep up with shifting expectations is asking often enough to maintain alignment.
- Third, clients want to talk to you. Anonymous doesn't work. If you don't know who said it, how can you respond? And clients don't want to talk to the boss, or marketing, or some third party. Odds are, those people can't fix what needs fixing. When the ask comes from you, your client will respond, trusting you to take action.
- Fourth, when the client responds, the scores don't matter. What matters is what you *do* with the scores. Too many organizations put undue focus on the scores, and not enough on the reaction to the scores. Always remember that the scores are nothing more than the client's perceptions based on his or her expectations. Use the scores as insights into each individual, and respond accordingly.
- Finally, follow up. While the scores don't matter, they are meaningful. Responding to that feedback does matter. When you ask, and a client takes time to respond, show the client respect by acknowledging you heard. Your clients will quickly see the value that feedback adds to the relationship.

**Ryan Suydam** is director of operations and co-founder of Client Feedback Tool. He works with clients to help implement the tool in their firms. He also manages the development team using feedback from customers to continuously improve and enhance the Client Feedback Tool.



## A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Service Quality Conference in Orlando, FL, in September was a great hit with all! We heard time and time again about the value and how the tools and techniques gathered at the conference are so very useful to the attendees. I would like to thank all the speakers, sponsors, leadership team, volunteers, and the conference chairs—Keith Joy and Lori Dellinger—for the hard work and dedication that made it possible to offer such a high-quality conference to our members and those in service quality professions.

If you missed us in Orlando for this year's conference, please make your plans now to join us next October for our silver anniversary conference! **We are going back to where it all started 25 years ago—CHICAGO, IL—October 24 – 26, 2016.** We will have more information next year, but please save the date!

Our Service Quality Division (SQD) leadership team is completely focused on maximizing the value we provide to our members, but some of the names in our key roles will be changing soon. In January, I will transition to the immediate past chair position, and your new chair, Leia Patzernuk, will bring fresh ideas and reimagine our traditions into the “customer experience evolution”! I have met many new faces and learned much more about service quality than I ever imagined 11 years ago when I just volunteered to “help a little.” As the 2014–2015 chair of the SQD, I would like to say thank you to the 2,500+ members who have supported the division over the last few years. You inspired me to bring more value to your membership, and hopefully we have done just that. To the dedicated and loyal leadership team that has worked so, so many hours and has become my second work family, thank you! Your friendships are dear to me. Thank you to the volunteers who answered our call when we needed a hand. Thank you to all the sponsors and speakers who supported our division conferences for the last few years. You have helped us attain some of the best satisfaction ratings for our conferences! Finally, I would like to give a special thank you to Alan Bruno, our treasurer for the past 10 years. Although Alan is not leaving us, just stepping down as treasurer in 2016, he has done such a fantastic job over these tenuous years and he has set a standard that will live for many more. He was, and is, extremely diligent about watching our investments and managing our money so that we can proudly say SQD is a fiscally responsible, healthy, and strong division today. Thank you Alan for all that you have done and all that you will continue to do for SQD!

It has been an honor to serve as the SQD chair for the past two years. Thank you all!

**Jan Peace**  
Division Chair 2014-2015

## 2015 DIVISION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chair **Jan Peace**  
jpeace@conexis.com

Chair-Elect **Leia Patzernuk**  
leia.patzernuk@gmail.com

Secretary **Robert Houle**  
robert\_houle@tufts-health.com

Treasurer **Alan A. Bruno**  
abruno52@comcast.net

Immediate Past Chair  
**Lori Dellinger**  
loridellinger@gmail.com

Auditing Chair **Arvind Tripathi**  
atripathi@flowserve.com

Awards Chair/Scholarship Chair  
**Holly R. Mensen**  
chmensen@gmail.com

Body of Knowledge Project Manager  
**Zubair Anwar**  
zubair-anwar@live.com

Conference Co-Chair **Lori Dellinger**  
loridellinger@gmail.com

Conference Co-Chair **Keith Joy**  
ksayo57@aol.com

Education Chair **Maria V. Stoletova**  
m\_stoletova@hotmail.com

Internet Liaison **Andy Entrekina**  
aentrekina@ks2inc.com

Marketing Chair **Tania Salarvand**  
tania.salarvand@valeocon.com

Membership Chair **Ed Matthews**  
Ed.Matthews@honeywell.com

Publications Chair **Polly LeBarron**  
plebarron@nqrinc.com

Nominating Committee Chair  
**Lori Dellinger**  
loridellinger@gmail.com

Volunteer Coordinator **Keith S. Joy**  
ksayo57@aol.com

WCQI TPC Coordinator  
**Robert Houle**  
robert\_houle@tufts-health.com

# 24<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SERVICE QUALITY CONFERENCE

## WRAP-UP

Attendees at our 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Service Quality Conference in September considered their participation to be a very valuable educational investment, as well as a networking jewel. Many attendees took advantage of the Monday evening networking events to mingle with other quality professionals and make new acquaintances. Our 25 speakers not only shared their experience and knowledge during their sessions, but also during the many networking opportunities included in the program. In addition, our attendees, including speakers, had the opportunity to discuss their individual challenges and successes with each other during our hugely popular Service Quality Café.

Thanks to everyone who attended and participated! Our hope is that you learned from

quality presenters and had many takeaways to bring back to the office to use immediately.

*"I have been a quality professional for 28 years, and this was the first ASQ Service Quality Division conference I have attended. I would like to thank ASQ and all the many volunteers for putting on such a great conference. There are many lessons from the conference, but the most important thing is being genuinely rejuvenated by meeting, listening, and sharing with other quality professionals facing the same challenges. It was a great experience, and I highly recommend it to others."*

— Attendee Marty Stivers

See you in Chicago!



Keynote speaker Ryan Suydam



Networking reception



Sponsor Minitab booth



A Service Quality Café table

## SQD NEWS

### CONGRATULATIONS TO SQD'S PRIZE-WINNING CONFERENCE ATTENDEES!

In addition to the opportunities to exchange ideas and learn about successes from leaders in the service quality industry, several attendees at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Service Quality Conference also won fantastic prizes.

The lucky winners were:

**Jeanette Blyden**  
Orange County Clerk of Courts  
Free 2016 Service Quality Conference Registration

**Teresa Robinson**  
AFLAC  
iPad Mini

**Jim Wilkerson**  
Memorial Health System  
Software Package

**Terri Nokleby**  
Cargill  
Gift Card

**Congratulations!**  
We hope to see you again in Chicago!

### GET INVOLVED WITH THE SERVICE QUALITY DIVISION!

Follow the Service Quality Division on Twitter (@ASQSQD) and join the conversation on LinkedIn.



# OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Every year, the Service Quality Division (SQD) recognizes members and their contributions to service quality through the SQD Awards Program. At the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Service Quality Conference in Orlando, FL, leadership had the opportunity to recognize two deserving individuals with the Outstanding Service Award.

**Leia Patzernuk** has supported the SQD for several years and served on the leadership team for the past seven years. She is currently the chair-elect and will be the division's chair in 2016. Leia's contributions are many. She has been the awards chair, secretary, Internet chair, and worked with ASQ to upgrade the SharePoint sites, where she has been administrator of the SQD site. In addition, she has volunteered to be a part of or lead various ad-hoc committees to further SQD goals.

**Tania Salarvand** has been on the Marketing Committee or the chair for over five years and has done an excellent job for the team. We first discovered Tania when she was selected to present at one of our Las Vegas, NV, conferences. Not only were her sessions dynamic and successful, but she had a genuine interest in being part of the leadership team. She has created LinkedIn and Twitter accounts for SQD and is the moderator. She is responsible for bringing our booth "alive" during the World Conference on Quality and Improvement and here at our own SQD conference. She holds monthly marketing meetings with her team to plan and execute the next event.

The Service Quality Division is grateful for Leia and Tania and their commitment to service quality!

(For more information on the SQD awards program, go to [asq.org/service/about/awards-service.html](http://asq.org/service/about/awards-service.html).)

Leia Patzernuk (top) and Tania Salarvand received Outstanding Service Awards during the Service Quality Conference in Orlando, FL.



## DO YOU HAVE A QUALITY STORY TO SHARE?



### SQD IS SEEKING ARTICLES FOR FUTURE ISSUES OF THIS NEWSLETTER!

We are looking for articles that explore the key concepts of quality and target the interests of specific sectors and varying experience levels. We are particularly interested in the following types of content:

- **Case studies:** Step-by-step descriptions and results of specific projects that you or your organization completed.
- **Perspectives pieces:** Your own assessment, based on experience and/or research, of trends and developments in quality.
- **Tutorials:** How-to discussions or illustrations for quality practitioners at any level of experience.
- **Human-interest features:** Less technical discussions of your own role, experiences, or insights about working in the quality profession.

Visit [asq.org/service/interaction/submission-guidelines.html](http://asq.org/service/interaction/submission-guidelines.html) for more information.

# PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

*Competitive Advantage* is a newsletter published by the Service Quality Division (SQD) of ASQ. The Service Quality Division of ASQ does not necessarily endorse opinions expressed in *Competitive Advantage* by the managing editor, features editor, or contributors. Items and letters are chosen for their general interest to division and Society members, but conclusions are those of the individual writers.

## Submission of Articles Considered for Publication in *Competitive Advantage* and All Other Communications Regarding *Competitive Advantage*

### Excluding CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Contact: Polly LeBarron, plebarron@nqrinc.com

## Communications Regarding the Service Quality Division

Contact: Jan Peace, jpeace@conexis.com

## Communications Regarding Change of Address and ASQ Membership

Contact: ASQ

600 North Plankinton Ave.

P.O. Box 3005

Milwaukee, WI 53201-3005, USA

Phone: 414-272-8575 or

800-248-1946 (USA only)

Fax: 414-272-1734

For additional information visit the ASQ website, [www.asq.org](http://www.asq.org).

## Targeted Publication Dates

*Competitive Advantage* is published quarterly with targeted publication dates at the beginning of January, April, July, and October. The actual dates may vary to coincide with division and Society events. The cut-off date for article submission is 35 calendar days prior to above targeted publication dates.

Vision of *Competitive Advantage*: To be the highest value newsletter in the world on issues pertaining to service quality.

Division website: [asq.org/service](http://asq.org/service)

## VISION, MISSION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES – SERVICE QUALITY DIVISION

### VISION

The ASQ Service Quality Division will be the leading worldwide provider of knowledge resulting in the improvement of service quality operational performance excellence.

### MISSION

The ASQ Service Quality Division addresses service quality globally by providing a body of knowledge to individuals, organizations, and communities through the creation, gathering, and exchange of information.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- We exist to serve our customers, and value their geographic and occupational diversity.
- We strive for operational excellence and continuous improvement in our endeavors.
- We support ASQ and follow the ASQ Code of Ethics.

## You can advertise in *COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE*

The following are the advertising rates for *Competitive Advantage*.

Size of Ad	Single Issue	Four Issues
Full Page	\$425	\$1,500
Half Page	\$225	\$ 800
Quarter Page	\$125	\$ 450
Business Card (1/8 Page)	\$ 65	\$ 200
Insert (Full Page)	\$275 +	Call

Checks for payment should be made payable to ASQ, Service Quality Division, and full payment is due on receipt of ad copy. The deadline for inclusion in the next issue of *Competitive Advantage* is 35 calendar days prior to the listed targeted publication months.

Editor: Polly LeBarron, plebarron@nqrinc.com

## SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

SQD is looking for volunteers to record webinars on topics interesting for the division members. If you have written a paper, delivered a presentation, or know about some innovative, “best-in-class” service industry practice, share your knowledge with your fellow quality professionals. Please contact Maria Stoletova at [m\\_stoletova@hotmail.com](mailto:m_stoletova@hotmail.com) to discuss webinar opportunities.