

Treat your Customers as Totems!

Assume that you are the CEO of a company with several important customers; one of them is say, the Finnish mobile phone company Nokia. How would you behave if you were to apply the Nhunggabarra approach in your company and start treating Nokia as totem customer?

Your company's Mission would be simple: Keep the customers alive. On an overall level you would have to make sure that all customers' habitats are kept neat so your customers' customers thrive. This will make your customers thrive as well and enable them to buy more from you.

You would delegate the responsibility for sustaining the customers to all people in your company; you would appoint members to the Nokia Clan. Hence, membership of the Nokia Clan would be widely distributed right across the whole firm, not only the sales and the marketing departments as is the case today. Some of the production people would of course belong to the Nokia Clan. Also people from the IT department, the accounting department (who only talk to customers when they have not paid their bills), even some of the HR people (who never get to see a customer) would be members of the Nokia Clan. The Nokia Clan's mission would be same as the overall mission, but it would be focused specifically on Nokia's well-being.

All new employees would be assigned a Customer Clan immediately during their introduction in your company and one of their first tasks as a new employee would be to go out and learn about their totem customer; the new Nokia clan members would learn about Nokia, etc. They would not learn from other Nokia clan members; they would have to learn first hand, preferably by using Nokia products, by talking to Nokia employees, etc. They would have to report their findings back to the Nokia Clan seniors, (who as a consequence would also increase their knowledge about Nokia.

The Nokia Clan members would strive to learn so much about Nokia that they would "become" Nokia; they would always act with Nokia's best interest in mind, in principle acting as Nokia advocates inside your company. And this goes for the Nokia clan members in all departments. The Nokia Clan would convene meetings from time to time to brainstorm ideas on how they could improve Nokia's business with all the tools, services, products and processes of your company. Because they would come from all over your company they would have perfect overview of all activities that you could undertake to help Nokia.

If Nokia's business shows signs of deteriorating, the senior members of the Nokia Clan would immediately convene the whole clan to discuss how to help Nokia.

The Nokia Clan member would further try to find ways to convey knowledge to Nokia; organising meetings with Nokia representatives to give them ideas as well as joint projects. Their aim would be to enhance Nokia's chances of survival in its habitat.

There is of course the totem dilemma: If you treat your customers in this way, will there be any profit? How would you ensure that your own company is sustained? The resolution to the dilemma is the same as the Nhunggabarra: You will need to 'hunt down' orders that are profitable for you and make sure it is a worthwhile business. However, those hunts must not be made at the cost of the totem customer.

To treat customers as totems implies a much higher level of customer orientation than traditional customer account management.

If you were the customer, Nokia's, CEO: What would you say if you had a supplier like this?