



One of the challenges facing executives today is having quality information to make informed business decisions. The problem isn't the lack of data, but often the design of the tool used to acquire the data.

Executives need to ask themselves a serious question: Am I collecting data to take action and grow to be a better company or just to be able to look good? Consider that this is like any other form of insight; that at a minimum the objective is to deliver basic actionable insight into the connections between your customer and your company.

A core tenet of the success of any feedback or Voice of the Customer (VoC) program is that the feedback gathered should be able to drive action and should not be a measurement for measurement's sake. You should be able to understand your customer and what they need and this feedback should be in a form that can be turned over to the employees whose actions will equate to value *not to stroking*.



Unfortunately, not everyone is interested in improving the current situation. They design a survey instrument and survey processes specifically to ensure they get top-box results. Frankly, their thinking is that nothing else matters but that Top Box and this is the only feedback they are interested in. There is no insight

generated and no follow-up action. I call these surveys “**Gratification Surveys**”. All top-box results mean they are doing a great job or their plans and ideas are on-target. No fault can be found and no heavy lifting occurs to make improvements. Imagine if these were your only listening post for the customer, would you really be driving any value other than that manipulated ‘feel good’. Ever been asked to participate in one of these?

These days when you bring a car into the dealer for service you probably will see signs touting their high level of Customer Satisfaction. When you pick up the car, the service adviser will frequently say something like this:

“In the next few days you will be called (or will receive an e-mail invitation) by our district office asking you to participate in a survey. We would like you to give us all 5’s. Right now, if there is any reason you would not rate us all 5’s, please let me know and I will make things right.” And this is not the worst example I have seen – here it is with the names covered to protect the guilty:

“I read your response to our service inquiry this morning. Thank you for the kind words.

We work very hard to earn our customer's praise.

You may soon receive another survey either by e-mail or via "snail-mail" from Ford Motor Company. We respectfully ask you fill out the survey with the grades of "Completely Satisfied" and "Definitely Would" where applicable on the survey. Believe it or not any grade that we receive less than a "Completely Satisfied" or "Definitely Would" is a failure for us.

For every customer that returns a survey with "Completely Satisfied" and "Definitely Would" grades will receive a \$25.00 gas card from **Muz** Ford.

We look forward to seeing you for service in the future.

Bob Chandler
Service Director
Muz Ford”

I recently saw a not quite so gross example of trying to rig the reported results in a hospital (again edited for privacy). The card was handed to us as we completed a routine blood test but the signs were posted all around the hospital:



██████████ MEDICAL CENTER


Dear Valued Patient:

We hope you had a **VERY GOOD** experience today at ██████████ MEDICAL CENTER's Imaging Department. You may receive a phone survey from ██████████ in the next few days. We know that your time is valuable and would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to answer some questions about your experience with us today. In order for us to continue giving you **VERY GOOD** service, we need your help!

If you have any additional comments or concerns about your visit, please feel free to contact our Manager, ██████████ at (508) ██████████ or ██████████.

I hope I was able to make your experience here today as pleasant as possible, as well as provide you with **VERY GOOD** service.

(name) Anne

You may receive a telephone survey from ██████████ regarding your visit today

WE STRIVE FOR VERY GOOD!

Tell us how we are doing!	very poor	poor	fair	good
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



If an individual is told about a problem and fixes it this one time, how likely do you think it will reoccur either at the same location or another in the same network? How likely do you think it is that someone in a management position will be able to evaluate what is going on in their operation? How likely are we (the customer) to critique the individual asking us for the top score if he or she is the problem? We know that this viewpoint differs from that held by Dr. Fred Reichheld, the father of Net Promoter Scoring®, who believes that front line individuals are best positioned to implement improvements. We agree with Dr. Reichheld when talking about a “small” business, but when looking at a larger, diverse and complicated enterprise, the individual contact points generally follow a defined process.

Enterprise wide processes have central control, although front line individuals can and should influence the central organization to respond to customer feedback. Our concern is that when people get busy, as we all are these days, we tend to fix a problem and move on without taking the critical, last step of escalating to the controlling organization. For a further discussion about this point and the Gratification survey please read this [article](#) by my friend Dr. Fred Van Bennekom of Great Brook Consulting.

When the front line person fixes the complaint and “earns” a top box score, the organization and its management will pat themselves on the back and justify a good bonus payout! Will this be ample to evaluate the customer’s perception of our products and services...most probably not? Remember that the path to customer experience success requires a deep understanding of the customer not just a feel good grab at it. Hope you don’t have to deal with this type of business very often.