

3 Ways to Dominate Your Market

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Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

My area of expertise is in leadership development using the philosophy of Lean Six Sigma, in other words “process improvement strategies”.

Now join me on the journey I call *A Tale of Two Companies*: One business allowed its workers to be engaged by making improvements that allowed the customer to be first in mind. The second created an environment of “it’s not my job” eliminating employees from using client-first thinking. Now you might ask, “How can the customer not be first?”

Many believe Lean Six Sigma is solely for engineering and manufacturing companies. That’s the first misconception. This managerial approach is built on the premise of eliminating wasteful elements and focusing solely on the customer. Having taken that quick glimpse of Lean, as an entrepreneur, you can now see that this philosophy applies to all businesses. Every business operates in what Lean practitioners call SIPOC, (Suppliers, Input, Processes, Output and Customers). Understanding that small segment of *lean thinking* will open the door for you to look at the three ways to dominate your market.

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How can I hinder?

Meet Office XYZ, a Dental Facility that has a small staff of 5-7 individuals each having their unique jobs when dealing with patients. I called this facility to make an appointment for my mother and was told they needed to verify her insurance and would call back once they received the approvals. Two weeks went by before I realized I had not heard from anyone regarding the insurance verification. I called the office and asked to speak with the individual that was to call back, whom we'll call Kelly. I was informed that Kelly was out of the office and had been ill for the past two weeks. My next question was: "is she the only person that verifies insurance?" The response was affirmative and I then asked to speak with a manager. I was told Kelly was the manager. Let's stop here because now we enter that well-known rabbit hole of "it's not my job."

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How can I *help*?

Meet Office ABC, A Pizza Company with a similar-sized staff. One night I called for a pizza. Upon placing the order I was told my meal would be about 30 minutes. *Half an hour on a Friday evening?* This company operated far differently than the first. When I placed my order something incredible happened, I received a text with the following message: "We're making your order. It's all coming together now. The kitchen staff is busy with your order making sure everything is just right."

A few minutes later I received this missive: "It's on the way. The driver has left the store and will be at your location shortly", followed with, "Delivered! Time to eat. It's been our pleasure serving you". And it was within the time promised by the associate.

The “go and see” mentality

These two very different experiences gave me moment to pause. Did Company XYZ know about the importance of “lean thinking” and did Company ABC know they were using the lean six sigma philosophy in their operations? Did the leader of Company XYZ actually walk the process to see if there were any wasteful elements that allowed their service to lack the three main components of customer first thinking: quality, speed and delivery? And what about Company ABC, did that leader utilize the concept of Gemba, meaning “go and see” to improve their value stream and get to the point where they asked what their customers appreciate?

When exploring Lean Six Sigma’s methodology the first step is to find the root cause for the identified waste. Then you move into seeking what the customer defines as *quality*, you determine the *speed* of getting your customer the item or rendering the service and you seek an appropriate method of *delivery*.

Focusing on the three lean strategies

One can’t assume to know what the clientele defines as quality unless they have actually been asked. In Company XYZ it is evident that no one took the initiative to seek input through surveys, focus groups or used any feedback techniques. There is a concept in the Lean lexicon called (VOC) Voice of the Customer. It simply means find out what your customers want and are willing to pay for. This is where you will find that notion of quality.

In the tale of Company ABC, you can attest to the fact that quality for their customers, myself included, is hot pizza, and being notified as to what’s going on with their order. How

did they come to know and implement this into their operations? After receiving such great service I had to call and speak with one of their leaders. I was informed this is how they compete as a reckoning force within the market.

The need for speed

Being the fastest in your field has a huge impact on your market. As you can tell from the visit with Company XYZ speed played no major role in what they deemed as important to customers. Two weeks to verify insurance is beyond an acceptable practice. And, by the way, I failed to mention that I did speak with another person, upon request, who did call back within 24 hours to inform me that they did not accept the insurance. Yet I waited 2 weeks for something that could have saved me both frustration and aggravation. Speed and convenience are major players in our buying experience.

Company ABC, epitomizes the importance of speed. On each text message I received that time stamp of delivery was also listed. Today there are ample services to ensure your customers get items and services in a speedy manner. This company has a system in place that allows employees to know time schedules for various sizes, as well as any increase in time based on selected toppings. Have you looked at your level of quickness, while keeping the high standard of quality appreciated by your customers?

Why is the method of delivery so important to your customers? Is it easy to obtain your product or service? Delivery in its simplest form equates to how a customer receives your product or service. Simple right? Company XYZ's delivery was neither exceptional nor satisfactory. The level of professionalism of their staff created an angst for the customer and therefore any method of delivery they deemed appropriate was subpar. There was no option as to whether they could email, text me or call me. Based on their performance I don't think any of those

options would have changed the outcome.

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Company ABC created a delivery method that allowed me to select how I wanted to receive the product. They of course deliver in their vehicles, but I had an option to have it delivered to my door and left in an appropriate place, to have them ring the doorbell and I receive it face-to-face or contactless, it's in the trunk and I come out and retrieve it. This allows the customer to select an option.

We have just visited two companies: One eliminated waste and the other added to it. Which business are you?

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