

Those annoying satisfaction surveys

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It seems that the United States has gone satisfaction survey mad. You get your oil changed, they ask you to fill out a satisfaction survey. You make a doctor's appointment, they ask you to fill out a satisfaction survey. You call the company technical support phone line, they ask you to fill out a satisfaction survey. These surveys typically ask you to rate how well various aspects of the interaction went, be it how easy it was to make the appointment, how knowledgeable the person who helped you was, how long you had to wait, whether the music in the waiting room was soothing, and what really bothers me is that all of these satisfaction surveys are striving to score "exceeds expectations" on every question. Um, if you are exceeding all expectations, then people will adjust their expectations so that what was previously "exceeding expectations" is now just "meeting expectations". In other words, the only way to consistently exceed expectations is to intentionally set low expectations. I think these people look to Lake Wobegon as their ideal town, because "all the children are above average". Sometimes I try to explain this on the satisfaction survey. One such survey asked, "How can we improve our performance from 'somewhat satisfied' to 'extremely satisfied'?" I replied,

Manufacture some sort of artificial disaster, let everyone know about the fake disaster, keep them up to date with hourly fake status reports, and then "resolve" the problem three hours later, thereby making people think you're really awesome.

Another time, I simply responded,

I am satisfied with "somewhat satisfied".

Bonus chatter: One time, I was told by the person assisting me that I would receive a satisfaction survey in the mail and that "the only thing they look at is whether you rated something *exceeded expectations* or not. All the other ratings are meaningless."

Of course, all management is doing is devaluing the meaning of "exceeds expectations." Now, when somebody actually exceeds expectations, you have no way of saying "This really did exceed my expectations; it's not just one of those perfunctory *exceeds expectations* that everybody is required to give." I wonder if they will just go one higher and create a category

called *significantly exceeded expectations*. Of course, the natural next step is to require all customer service representatives to meet this new level of service. Merely exceeding expectations won't be good enough any more.

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