

**ORIGINAL SITUATION**

A decade ago, Wolters Kluwer Health resolved to find a competitive advantage that would distinguish it from the competition. They looked inside the organization and found the edge they were looking for – a commitment to customers that, if properly harnessed, could become the company’s trademark.

**BUSINESS IMPROVEMENTS**

Customer focus was recently identified as one of the company’s five core values. Employees’ customer focus is now part of all employee evaluations. Over the past ten years, sales have increased an average of more than 13% each year. More importantly, customer retention has increased equally dramatically.

## Building A Tradition of Excellence.

*A Commitment to Customers.*

More than a decade ago, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, now part of Wolters Kluwer Health, resolved to create a competitive advantage that would distinguish it from the competition.

Unable to compete on price without compromising quality and unwilling to double its sales force to compete head-to-head with its primary competitor, leaders looked inside the organization. There they found the edge they were looking for – a commitment to customers that, if properly harnessed, could become the company’s trademark.

**Success by Design**

Ten years later, Wolters Kluwer Health’s vision to be recognized as a leader in customer responsiveness is a reality. As part of Wolters Kluwer, a multinational information services company with annual sales of more than € 3.9 million,



**RESULTS ACHIEVED**



Wolters Kluwer Health is a leading information provider for medical professionals worldwide. Wolters Kluwer Health publishes more than 275 periodicals and 1,500 books in more than 100 disciplines, as well as websites, electronic products and online information services under the Lippincott Williams & Wilkins brand. Its sister companies provide similar services to educational institutions and other professions.

Company leaders credit Strategic Enhancements Group, its partner since the journey began, with helping to refine their vision, identifying the skills needed and creating strategies to build those skills – strategies that are now firmly entrenched in the company’s culture. Initially, those strategies included customized *Counselor Salesperson* and *Signature Customer Service*. Over time, *Social Styles*, *Managing Sales Performance* and *Negotiating to Yes* were added as the company’s service culture matured.



To date, more than 100 sales representatives in 3 divisions have completed *Counselor Salesperson* training and 18 managers have been trained to manage according to these customer-focused principles. In addition, all 150 employees of the company’s warehouse and distribution system – including the vice president of distribution and every shipping clerk – have completed *Signature Customer Service*.

### Passing The Freshness Test

Keeping the training fresh and relevant over the years has been a challenge.

“Susan’s support and expertise have been invaluable,” said Wallace. “She’s helped us find new ways to reinforce the training and recognize employees for ‘living the values.’”

Reinforcement has taken many forms over the years. Some examples include creating an internal database of best practices employees can access for ideas and to renew their energy, development of a library of videos, CD-ROMs and other materials, promoting mentoring relationships and realigning company operations to support and reward employees for focusing on customer needs.

“*We don’t think of the courses as training – the concepts are a way of life for our employees. They’ve become an integral part of our business process.*”

**DALE WALLACE**  
Wolters Kluwer Health

“Wolters Kluwer Health is an excellent example of the cultural change that can result from focusing on the customer at all levels of the organization,” said Susan Hall, project manager for Strategic Enhancement who has worked with the company for the past two years. “They’ve been very open to new ways of integrating the concepts into their daily operations. I think that’s been essential to the overwhelming success of the effort.”

Dale Wallace, Senior Manager, Human Resources for Wolters Kluwer Health said, “Today, these principles define our company’s character and values.”

Company leaders are so committed to the customer-focused approach that they require all new sales and customer service employees to complete either *Counselor Salesperson* or *Signature Customer Service* training within months of starting with the company.

“*When they asked us to help identify the ‘Ben Duffys’, I knew that Counselor Salesperson and Signature Service had arrived.*”

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Wolters Kluwer Health

## COMPANY PROFILE

Founded in 1836 in the Netherlands, today Wolters Kluwer is a market-leading global information services company with 19,000 employees serving customers in over 150 countries with operations in over 40 countries across Europe North America, Asia Pacific and Latin America.

Wolters Kluwer enables legal, tax, finance, and healthcare professionals to be more effective and efficient. providing information, software, and services that deliver vital insights, intelligent tools, and the guidance of subject-matter experts.

Wolters Kluwer creates value by combining information, deep expertise, and technology to provide customers with solutions that improve their quality and effectiveness. Professionals turn to Wolters Kluwer when they need actionable information to better serve their clients.

To keep employees on track, an extensive schedule of refresher courses has been created to ensure that the training continues to be relevant to experienced employees. Wallace noted that the courses are flexible enough to be easily customized making it easy to address targeted needs.

"We can leverage program content and activities as needed without diminishing its value," she said.

To accommodate this demanding schedule, several Wolters Kluwer Health employees have been trained to facilitate the sessions. Wallace said that Hall has played an important role in this effort by acting as advisor and sounding board.

### Walking the Talk

Strategic Enhancement has been instrumental in helping Wolters Kluwer Health integrate the key principles of the training into the company's daily operations and strategic plans.

For example, customer focus was recently identified as one of the company's five core values and it is now linked to many of the company's key programs. By the end of 2004, employee's customer focus was part of all employee evaluations.

*Counselor Salesperson* and *Signature Customer Service* "language" has also been integrated into the company's hiring processes. This effort included revising interview questions to help isolate a candidate's "problem-solving mindset" rather than focus on specific technical skills. Performance review and measurement systems have also been redesigned.

While the company hasn't formally measured employee commitment to the concepts taught in the courses, Wallace has no doubt of the impact they have had on the organization.

"We don't think of the courses as training – the concepts are a way of life for our employees. They've become an integral part of our business process," she explained.

### Trickle Down Effect

A recent event illustrates how deeply ingrained the approach has become.

"Several weeks ago, the marketing group asked us to help them prepare to launch a new product at the annual sales meeting. When they asked us to help identify the 'Ben Duffys', I knew that *Counselor Salesperson* and *Signature Customer Service* had arrived. After all, just two years earlier the same group had politely told us that sales training and marketing were unrelated and that they didn't need to understand the counselor sales approach," said Wallace.

Ben Duffys are the key questions or issues a customer is likely to have and possible responses to them. The key, of course, is that the issue and responses are focused on the customer, not the company.

"*Counselor Salesperson* and *Signature Customer Service* are a true competitive advantage," explained Wallace. "By being committed to doing what is best for the customer, our employees can create solutions that suit the customer rather than fit a 'package.' Customers recognize and appreciate this focus and our employees are rightfully proud of the service they provide. Everyone wins," she said.

The numbers speak for themselves. Over the past ten years, sales have increased an average of more than 13% each year. More importantly, customer retention has increased equally dramatically.

"SEG has been a wonderful partner over the years. It's a true partnership," said Wallace. "Every encounter with Susan reinforces how effective the counselor sales process is. Strategic Enhancement practices what they preach. Susan models the process very skillfully."

Hall in turn feels fortunate to work with an internal advocate with such a strong commitment. "It takes years to change a corporate culture. Dale has been an unfailing champion," she said, adding that a strong internal advocate is critical to the success of any training initiative.

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To learn more about these concepts and how Strategic Enhancement Group, Inc. can help you in addressing these issues, contact us at (630) 377-4300, (888) 668-9382 outside of IL or [StrategicEnhancement.com](http://StrategicEnhancement.com).