



Catering to customer care

To emphasize the importance of customer relationship management, the Corps of Engineers Europe District held its first Customer Care Workshop April 4-5. The resulting initiative was simple: Find out what the customers want, and give it to them.

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Historically, the Corps has been inwardly focused, concentrating on processes, efficiencies, and conducting best business practices.

However, Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Carl Strock has recently and repeatedly indicated a strategic direction that focuses more on relationships. That is, striving to achieve customer satisfaction.

In Strock's strategic vision, headlined by the Corps' relatively new slogan – "One Team: Relevant, Ready, Responsive and Reliable" – he mentions how he'd like to see the Corps think more about "delighting the customer."

Mark Roncoli, deputy district engineer for the District, repeated this message during the two-day workshop in early April and illustrated his position by pointing

to the district's three-letter initialism, EUD. Although this has stood for both EUropean Division and EUrope District, it has also come to represent "Efficiency in service, Understanding customers, and Dedicated workforce."

Roncoli, in an effort to maintain emphasis on performance, added the following bullet to the initialism: "Project delivery performance."

"The reason we are doing this," said Col. Margaret Burcham, District commander, "is because, to me, customer service and customer care are extremely important to what we do. We are in the service industry, and the success and effectiveness of our customer care is going to make all the difference in how successful we are."

The workshop was held in response to feedback collected from a recent customer survey about the District's performance. "We did get a lot of feedback; and it was pretty useful feedback," Burcham said. "And as I read those comments, I thought, 'this is too valuable not to do something with.'"

The discussion helped participants dissect the meaning of customer relationships and allowed for an open forum on customer expectations and customer satisfaction.

It was explained in the workshop that communication is essential to effective relationship management, not only because customer expectations may shift, but also because the project delivery team's understanding of

the customer's expectations may shift.

Because of this, project managers should be responsible for establishing and maintaining continuous interfacing between the participants, it was explained.

Burcham reiterated this point at the June 20 town hall meeting held in Wiesbaden, Germany.

"Communication is key to solving almost any problem," she stressed, adding that regional program managers must strive to facilitate active dialog with the customer.

"They help facilitate liaison between the District and the customers we're supporting. And it's really important that they keep up the communication."

Also stressed at the meeting was the importance of continuity of program managers and other members of the project delivery team. "We can't always keep the same team every time," she allowed. People get promoted or shift jobs, she said, but continuity is so important to maintaining relationships that "we've got to keep that [shifting] to a real minimum."

On the other side of the coin are the customers. One of the biggest customers the District works with is the German Ministry of Construction, liaised by Herr Peter Fröhlich, a senior leader in the German Ministry of Construction. In response to a recent meeting with the District, Fröhlich indicated his desire for more unfettered communication, recommending the creation of an "unbureaucratic information platform"

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-Col. Margaret Burcham



The program and project managers at Europe District discuss with leadership the importance of practicing consistent customer relationship management throughout the organization during the Customer Care Workshop April 4-5 in the District's eighth floor conference room.