

Advantage

Four Steps to Success

A Guidebook for Suppliers Seeking to
Action their Customer Feedback

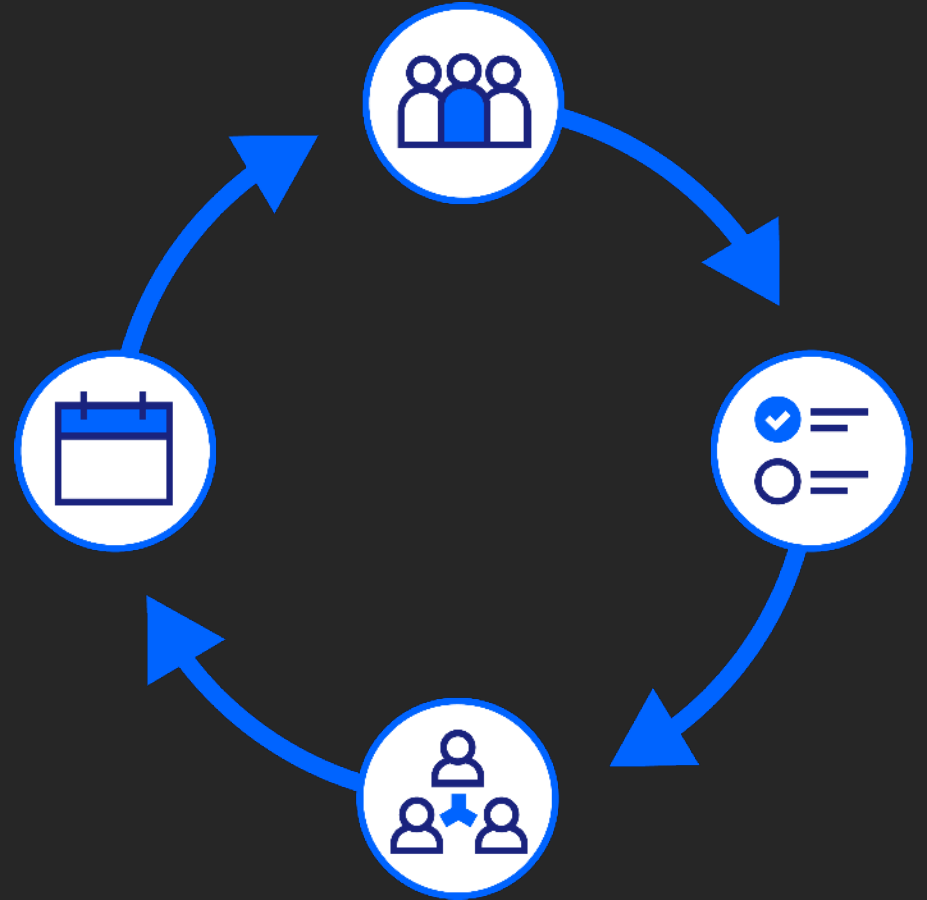


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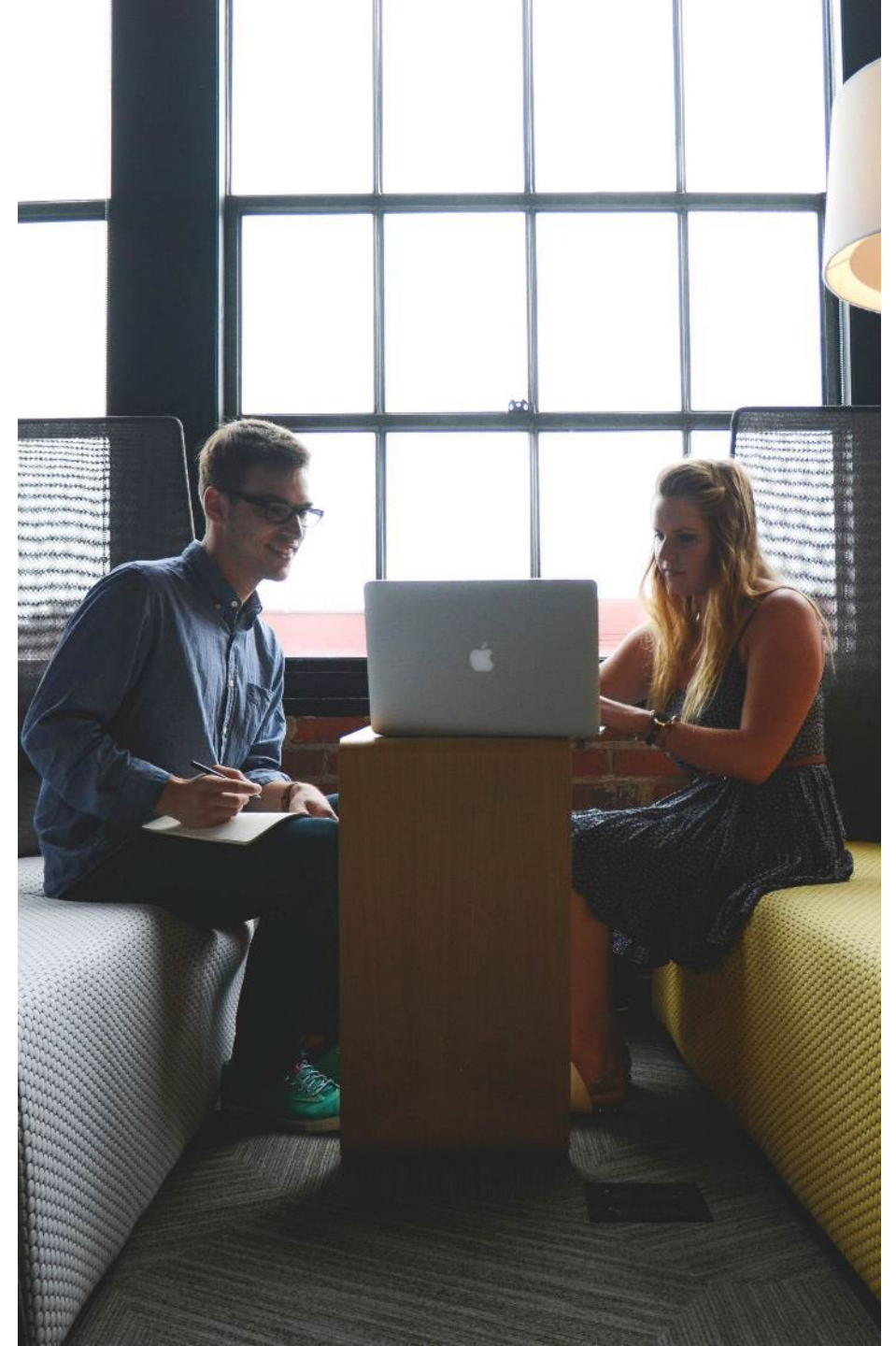
Step 1:

Sharing Feedback Internally

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As the first step in driving success in your customer relationships, sharing results internally is an opportunity to unify your people and processes around a strategy that places customer success at the very core of the *how* and *why* of your day-to-day work. This is how you will instigate effective changes and create lasting improvements.

Actioning feedback is not only the responsibility of those working directly with retailers today; it is up to every team member and leader within your organization, from the board of directors to the individual contributor, to view the customer as the focal point of their workflow and decision-making process.



Step 1: Sharing Feedback Internally

The Best-In-Class Suppliers:



Are intentional about cascading the results and feedback they receive from their customers throughout their organization

This requires that every function in the business (sales, supply chain, marketing, category insights, e-commerce, sustainability, human resources, and finance) is brought into the process of understanding and actioning feedback.



Recognize that customer engagement is a continuum, not an all-or-nothing concept.

Understanding that the management of relationships is an evolving process equips individuals throughout the organization with the confidence to discuss the customer engagement culture with their colleagues and trading partners. Embracing this improves communication and innovation.

Step 1: Sharing Feedback Internally

The best-in-class suppliers discuss their Advantage Report customer feedback and ask the right questions:



These questions include, but are not limited to:

- What's positive?
- What's not?
- Why might that be?
- Where can we go from good to great?
- Where do we need significant improvement?
- Are there any urgent fixes required?
- Where are we with our customers today, and where do we want to be tomorrow?



Click to Access Your Key Internal Questions Template

Step 1: Sharing Feedback Internally

Ideas to Support Cascading Feedback Internally



Use results in senior management strategic presentations to support cases for change and investment.



Learn from one another – set up communities and transfer best practices across functions, regions and customer teams.



Hold team and company events to celebrate positive feedback. Reward and thank those within your company for their continued work and support.



Consider an internal video announcement to share key findings and request support for key initiatives (Advantage can support you with this).



Produce physical awards for customers to publicly highlight their achievements (Advantage can support you with this).

Important Context to Remember when Sharing



The Advantage Score indicates how well a company meets its customers' expectations compared to others in the benchmark set.



A high Advantage score means the supplier meets the expectations better than other companies in the benchmark set. A low score does not immediately indicate that the supplier is a poor business partner. It may signal more areas of improvement for the supplier than the peer group companies. If you are the best-in-class supplier, check out how far you are from a perfect score – you may still have opportunities to delight your customers and drive up your category's performance!



The purpose of the Advantage Report is to help people and organizations work better together through data and insight to foster the development of best business practices.



Advantage Report is not intended to replace day-to-day feedback and discussion with key customers but to strengthen it with set objectives, measured feedback and competitive context.



Step 2:

Goal Setting and Action Planning

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In the goal-setting phase, **your previous work of sharing feedback internally** allows you to answer the question, "Where do we want to improve?"



The answers to the question, “**Where do we want to improve?**” will identify opportunities for setting goals, which helps to hold individuals and teams accountable for delivering success.

To promote a healthy discussion among your team, you can ask yourself questions to help you align. Then, use the answers to frame the SMART goals that your organization will focus on improving.

Some examples might be:

- Is there a burning platform against which we need to leapfrog? Which accounts?
- If we are in the lower tier of our category and seeking to improve, what customer priorities can make our progress more efficient?
- Are we closing the gap to be the industry leader? How close do we believe we can get? What is the timeline for this? What are the most significant areas of competitive opportunity?
- If we are already best-in-class, how close are we to a perfect score? How can we push the envelope to be even better? Have we looked beyond our category?
- Do our customers’ priorities match ours? Is there an opportunity to get better aligned? Which of our customers’ priorities are essential for us to address?
- Are we trying not to be reactive? What do we have to address in order to plan more strategically with our customers?
- Which companies are we compared to? What do we know about peer relationships with our customers?

***HINT:** Consult the “OurVoice” dashboard within Advantage Report.*



Click to Access Goal Setting Template

Step 2: Goal Setting and Action Planning

Goal Setting Tips

Goals Can Be Based on Overall Performance, Engagement Drivers and Competencies You Identify as Representing Opportunities

There is often a lot of feedback to consider; the trick is to stage your action plan. Isolate a few things that you will take on over the next 12 months and set goals around those. You can't do everything at once, so rather than become overwhelmed, be focused, and you will improve your chances of building a robust action plan that people will be excited to follow.

Set Goals as an Organization, Customer Teams, Functions/ Departments and Individuals

Let your customer feedback support the personal growth and development of your employees:

- What does each team member want to get better at based on the feedback from their customer(s)?
- What would they like to see reflected in the interview commentary as well as the scores next year?

Caution: *if using the Advantage Report to set KPIs, it is essential to focus on score change, i.e., moving in the right direction and understanding the industry, competitive and company dynamics. A focus on rank and a lack of broader context can have the opposite effect of motivating the right behaviours.*

Please consult your Advantage Advisor if you want to chat more about this.



Step 2: Goal Setting and Action Planning

Bringing teams together to make it matter



Once you've defined your priorities and the path to achieving them through goal setting and action planning, think about the importance of getting the basics consistently correct. Supply chain, customer service, and retail execution are prerequisites for improved customer engagement regarding promotions, categories, or strategies. What's crucial is that you remain consistent in your actions and the messages you deliver. Your customers have many interactions across companies and people in a single day; you need to be remembered for adding value to their business and their roles and objectives.

Remember, it is essential to create action plans at both the market and customer levels. Company-wide objectives can help you get a higher return on your investments across accounts. Still, the more granular approach to understanding and delivering your individual customer feedback is where the prize resides – your individual customers see and value the difference you bring. Again, rather than trying to tackle everything in one sweeping gesture, it is focus and consistency that will give you the most robust foundation from which to grow in your continual improvement journey.

Action planning sessions should have a regular cadence and be discussed throughout the year, allowing for sharing best practices and approaches between customer teams. The best way to ensure this happens is to formalize this review process and set up recurring check-ins, workshops, and feedback sessions internally and by engaging your customers in the process!



[Click to Access Action Planning Template](#)



Step 3:

**Engaging and Communicating with
your Customers**

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Setting conversations up for success



The depth and breadth of your customer interactions signal the success of the relationship and your business. The key to making them matter is finding ways to discuss challenges and opportunities easily and regularly.

The process of consistent, effective communication with retailers is no simple feat. Alongside the trepidation some team members may feel in raising issues or concerns, there is also the fear that customers become frustrated by communication that feels forced or like wasted time. That's why we encourage receiving thorough feedback, followed by internal alignment, goal setting, and action planning as the preliminary steps necessary to deepen your customer relationships.



[Click to Access Template to Help with Your Customer Discussions](#)

Step 3: Engaging and Communicating with Your Customers

The “Dos” of Engaging Your Customers with Advantage Report

Your customers want to know that you heard them and value hearing from them. Thank them for their participation and state how valuable their feedback is to your organization.

Share your proposed action plan with them and seek their input—set milestones and dates for discussion on progress.

- ✓ **DO** approach discussions as an opportunity to learn more about what can be done to improve relationships and business performance.
- ✓ **DO** begin a collaborative discussion to identify priority improvement opportunities concerning customer expectations.
- ✓ **DO** review findings with senior customer personnel as part of dedicated planning discussion(s).
- ✓ **DO** clarify and identify issues, opportunities, strengths, expectations and improvement strategies.
- ✓ **DO** initiate a discussion on the feedback based on mutual business improvement interests.



Act now. Your timeliness to engage with your customers is critical to the successful outcomes of your plan.

Step 3: Engaging and Communicating with Your Customers

The “Don’ts” of Engaging Your Customers with Advantage Report

Be careful not to challenge them on the ratings. It is better to discuss themes and remember that whomever you are speaking to is likely not the only person to provide feedback; you need to acquire input from the organization, not your primary contact solely.

NOTE: The risk of inappropriate use of customer feedback (via challenging the feedback) is the loss of customer participation in the program.

- ✗ **DON’T** jump to your conclusions about the data. Validate your findings first.
- ✗ **DON’T** present your improvement plan without consulting and seeking their feedback first.
- ✗ **DON’T** ask about the reasons for their rating. e.g. Why did you rank us 8th?
- ✗ **DON’T** refer to rankings and ratings. Instead, discuss themes within those rankings and ratings.



Don’t take too long to discuss your proposed action plan.

Act now. Your timeliness to engage with your customers is critical to the successful outcomes of your plan.

Step 3: Engaging and Communicating with Your Customers

4 Steps to Reaching Customer Engagement and Communication



1. Lead the discussion

The incentive is to deepen your customer relationships and show them why it matters to them. You should approach retailer conversations with a clear goal and plan – to better understand their feedback, align short and long-term goals, and recognize your shared opportunities. Best-in-class companies lead a discussion while ensuring that their partners feel engaged and listened to.



2. Be gracious and grateful

If your customer has participated in the Advantage Report survey, this is an excellent indicator of their commitment to your relationship, but don't take that for granted. Be sure to thank them for the time, effort, and resources they've put into providing feedback.



3. Focus on them

Your job is to lead the conversation but not to dominate it. Your customers' feedback, pain points, and goals should be prioritized. Let the feedback they've provided be the backbone of the conversation, bringing key themes you've spotted with you to frame ideation. Don't fall into the trap of challenging the feedback or asking for justification. Remember, your customers are not rating your company but providing an assessment on a 5-star rating scale relative to the performance of other companies. For a productive conversation, stay focused on themes and feedback, not scores and rankings.



4. Find and discuss opportunities

Once the scene has been set and you're in dialogue with your customers, the aim should be to move the conversation toward opportunities to deepen your relationship. The best way to do that is by narrowing your focus to a single competency at a time; this gives you two clear benefits: more tangible and actionable outcomes, and more opportunities to discuss feedback with your customer.

Step 3: Engaging and
Communicating with Your
Customers

Communication Tips

Consider how You Present and Manage Yourself when Discussing Your Customer's Feedback with Them:

Expressing humility and empathy (without overdoing it) can help create a more open and willing platform for the discussion.

- Social mirroring is a powerful tool in relationship building, so use it as you put yourself in their position and see things from their point of view. Match their body gestures and posture when they show interest and enthusiasm. They will appreciate you doing the same.
- Take pride in your appearance, be it in-person or virtual, show them that you care about the impression you make and have taken the time to present yourself well.
- Stay objective and speak their language; viewing their priorities through an objective lens gives you greater clarity and increases the likelihood you'll see patterns emerge between your goals and theirs.
- If you don't know their priorities, objectives, or goals, now is the perfect time to ask.

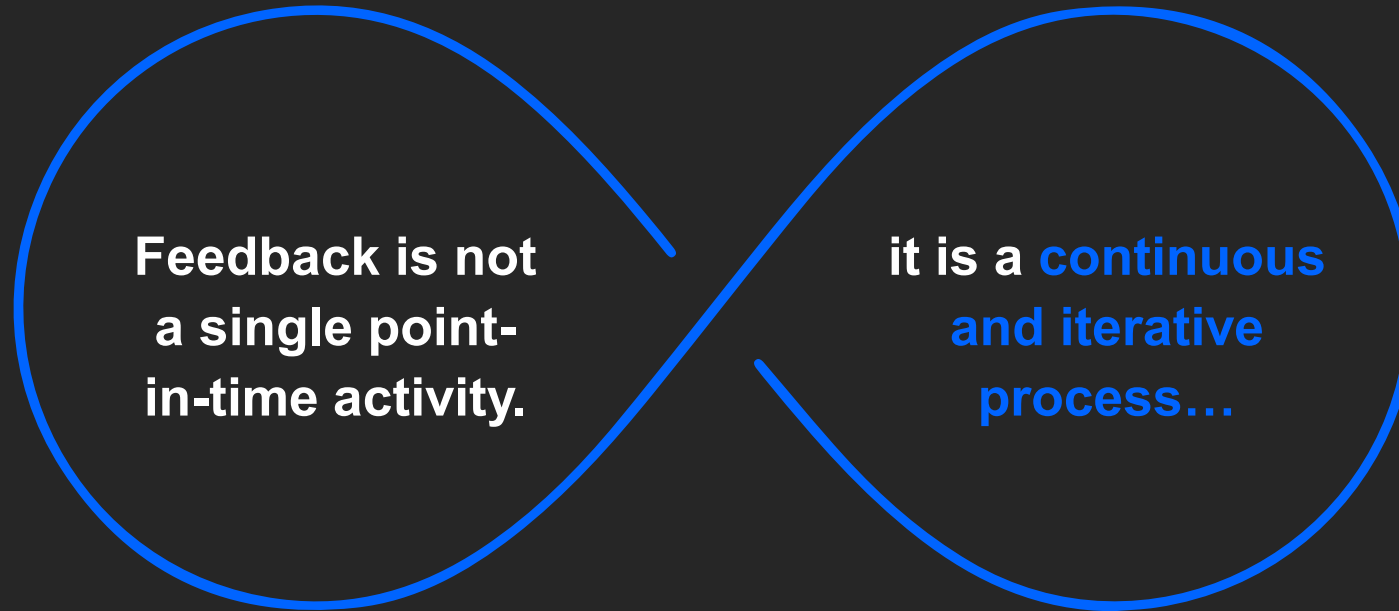




Step 4:

Preparing for the Next Wave of Customer Feedback

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that can dramatically impact your customer relationships and business performance.



Click to Access Customer Readiness Checklist

Step 4: : Preparing for the Next Wave of Customer Feedback

Continuous Communication Tips

Communicate Progress, Plans, and Feedback across Functions

Individuals from across functions in your organization should be involved in the internal review, while the external review should be kept to client-facing teams. However, to achieve customer success, you need the whole organization behind you. This means that part of your continuous feedback process must include ongoing communication with every team in your organization.

Be Honest About Challenges, Setbacks, and What's Work in Progress

Continuous feedback and iteration are essential because *"the best-laid plans of mice and men do oft go awry."* The only way to overcome challenges and setbacks, and to be given the necessary time for your plans to actualize, is to be honest with your teams and your customers. A strong relationship is about being in it together and sharing goals. Transparency is the cornerstone of being better together.

Thank Your Customers (Often)

Customers who have committed to the Advantage survey show dedication to your shared goals and success; this deserves recognition. Continuous feedback and iteration require effort, resources, and time. Do not take for granted customers who care enough to invest that energy with you. Let them know how seriously your organization prioritizes customer feedback and your commitment to listen and drive action. Reiterating this message is how you will keep them engaged and become advocates for your shared success.

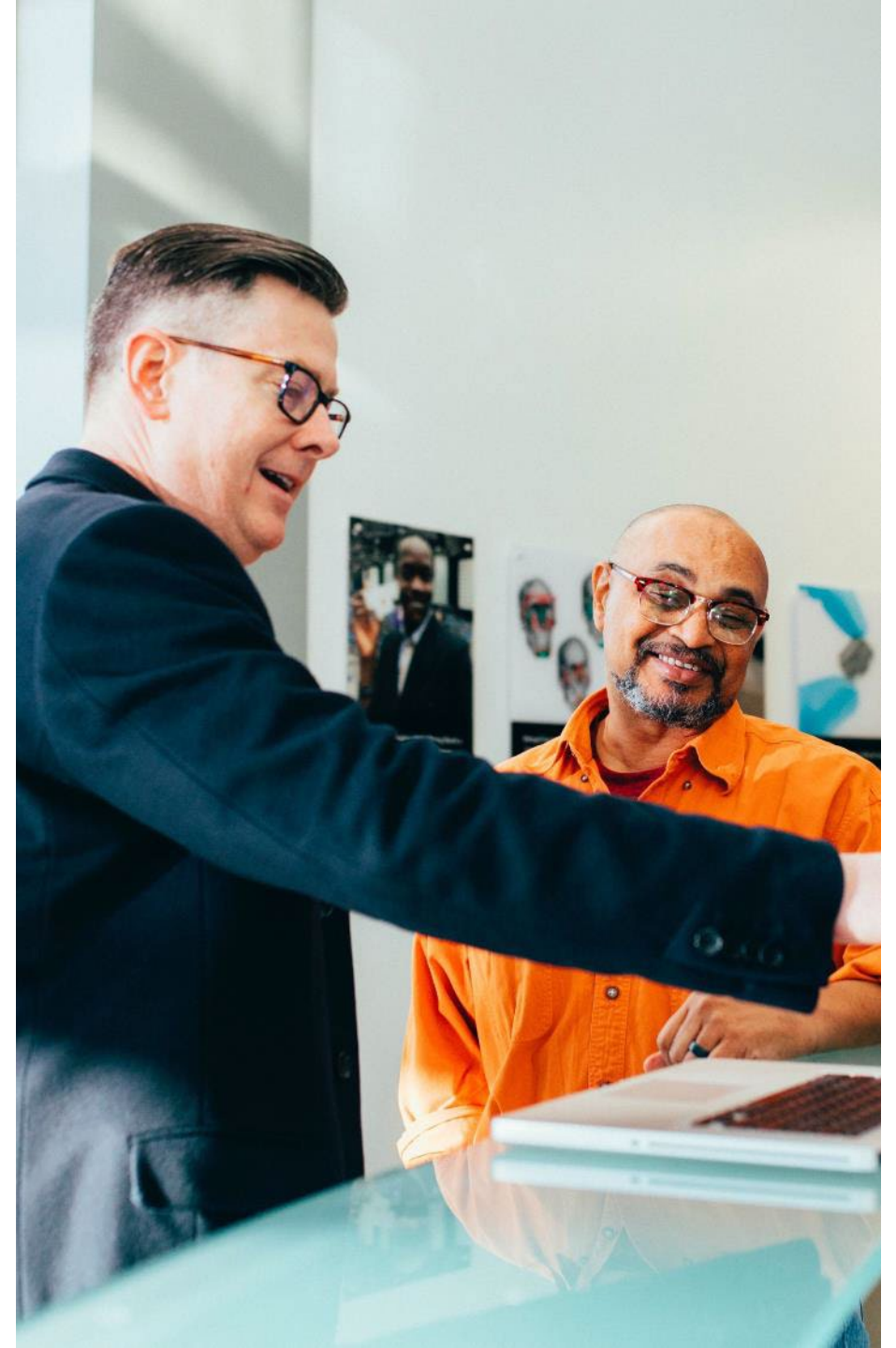


Step 4: : Preparing for the Next Wave of Customer Feedback

Perception is Often Reality

Through listening, sharing, goal setting, action planning, and consistent reviewing, you can further your customer relationships along the engagement spectrum - improving the process, enjoyment, and outcomes (for everyone). **However, it's critical to remember that facts and statistics don't define relationships; perceptions define them.** The impressions you leave behind in every interaction ultimately make the difference between success and failure in the long term of your customer relationships.

Listening, genuinely listening, is the only way to stay on top of perception, allowing you to course-correct early and often before those best-laid plans go awry. The more you engage with your customer and collaborate openly with them, the better chance you have of driving value for the end-consumer and winning **with long-term sustainable growth plans for today and tomorrow for both you and your customers.**



Thank You



AdvantageReport

<https://www.advantagegroup.com/4Steps>