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April 26, 2013

Update – Contractor Engagement Initiative

As you may recall, in 2012 TSSA began its initiative to gather feedback from a cross-section of contractors in the Elevating Devices and Fuels sectors to help better understand issues that specifically concern you, as contractors, when interacting with TSSA. The primary objective remains focused on improving the working relationship with the ultimate goal of further enhancing safety in Ontario.

Over 200 contractors have provided very constructive feedback through focus groups, one-on-one discussions, TSSA Industry Advisory Councils, meetings with industry associations, emails and various other means. I want to thank everyone for their participation and thoughtful contributions to this process. In reviewing all of the insights a number of common themes have been identified. These include: communication and education; fees and billing; consistency; partnership/enforcement; training and licensing; and TSSA processes. This has been a key step forward as it has allowed TSSA to focus its attention on addressing issues related to these themes as the organization moves forward.

Having gained insights from contractors, the next step was to engage TSSA staff that regularly interacts with fuels and elevating devices contractors. The objective, as with contractors, was to gain further insights related to the relationship between TSSA staff and contractors. Similar to the efforts with contractors, input was provided through a various means. Feedback was received from our inspectors, engineers, training and certification staff, licensing/registration/certification and examination teams, TSSA Contact Centre staff as well as supervisors and managers. Overall these interactions provided insights that were relatively consistent with those identified by contractors.

The process to date has provided very important insights that TSSA is continuing to assess. The next step will be to identify various initiatives to begin addressing the issues identified. With these in hand, we believe it is very important that we re-engage with contractors to discuss the initiatives and use this input to further refine our plans prior to implementation. The intent is to conduct this process between May and July 2013. As with the previous process TSSA will be seeking input through a variety of means including focus groups that will be facilitated by Modus Research, an independent third party organization, who will also be responsible for recruiting participants for these sessions. While focus groups are a very valuable engagement tool, I recognize that they do not provide an opportunity for all contractors to provide input. With that in mind, to assist other contractors who wish to offer input, more detailed information on the insights and feedback gathered through the focus group sessions will also be posted on TSSA's website, www.tssa.org. I would encourage all contractors to review the information and provide their feedback to me via email and/or telephone.

I want to again thank all of those who provided their input previously and look forward to further discussions in the coming months. Finally, please feel free to contact me at any time should you have any questions or comments regarding this initiative.

Sincerely,

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Contractors' Perceptions of Value: Findings Report

Purpose – For Information

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of findings based on the research work conducted to date on contractors' perceptions of value that TSSA provides as a safety organization.

Background

Since 2006, TSSA has been conducting quantitative and qualitative research, using accepted statistical methodologies, among its customer base with an aim to providing the organization with research intelligence to help in the development of an effective value proposition and ultimately gain valuable insights to support customer relationship excellence strategies. Using an external research firm, TSSA has maintained third-party independence as well as confidentiality for respondents.

The goal of the research has been to strengthen customer relationships through establishing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of both customers' and TSSA's understanding of the value TSSA provides as an organization.

In 2012, the research studies were further enhanced to better understand the variables affecting perceptions of value and satisfaction with two key underperforming customer groups – contractors in the Elevating Devices and Fuels sector. This task was carried out through a series of diagnostic focus groups, both with contractors and internal staff. The primary objective is to improve the working relationship with the ultimate goal of further enhancing safety in Ontario.

Specifically, TSSA solicited feedback from a cross-section of contractors in the Elevating Devices and Fuels sectors in an effort to gather input and feedback on issues that concerned them and to ultimately assist us in identifying those areas where we can mutually work on improving our relationship. This was accomplished with contractors two-fold: qualitatively (through focus groups and independent feedback) and quantitatively (through the telephone survey).

TSSA then sought feedback on contractors' perceptions of TSSA and specifically contractor interaction challenges from an internal perspective. Insights were gathered from staff who interact with contractors on a regular basis through various service perspectives such as inspection, engineering, technical desk, licensing, registration, certification, training and examination and the customer contact centre. These focus groups included all levels of staff from front-line to leadership.

Overview of Findings

The research process to date has provided very important insights both from the external and internal perspective. In reviewing the input and feedback provided the insights garnered from internal staff are relatively consistent with those identified by contractors. It is important to keep in mind that the view and opinions expressed both by contractors and internal staff are reflective of their perceptions of the current state of affairs and personnel – and perception for them is a reality.

Both contractors and staff seem to be of the same mindset that communication and education, training, consistency and processes are the primary areas where improvements can be made; however, it appears that resourcing (time and money) is a major roadblock. This view is also held by a number of contractors who get the impression that field staff are hamstrung in helping them, as they need to bill for everything they do. While both contractors and staff believe the organization is committed to its safety mandate and recognize that the organization requires revenue to operate, there is a widely held view that revenue generation takes priority.

Additionally, there are conflicting views and opinions on what TSSA's purpose really is and/or should be; that is, enforcer and/or advocate. In other words, while TSSA is promoting a vision of becoming a valued safety



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advocate - something that customers see value in – there is a perception that TSSA is not moving or is only moving too slowly in this direction and that the organization is actually shifting its focus of its mandate from “protecting public safety” to compliance and enforcing codes. From an internal perspective, there are also differing views and beliefs on what TSSA’s role is and/or should be. Specifically, some staff view TSSA as strictly an enforcer while others are more aligned with TSSA’s stated vision – to be a valued advocate and recognized authority in public safety.

Contractor and Staff Feedback

Over 200 contractors provided very constructive feedback through focus groups, one-on-one discussions, TSSA Industry Advisory Councils, meetings with industry associations, emails and various other means. In total, seven focus groups were held at four separate Ontario locations between February 29 and March 7, 2012. The locations included London, Toronto, Kingston, and Mississauga. Two groups were held at each location – one with FS contractors and the other with contractors in the ED sector with each session lasting approximately 1.5 hours. Participants were recruited randomly from TSSA’s customer database in the cities where the groups took place.

Similar to the efforts with contractors, TSSA staff provided very constructive feedback through focus group discussions and various other means. These focus groups included all levels of staff from front-line to leadership. Specifically, feedback was received from staff that regularly interacts with ED and FS contractors, i.e. inspectors, engineers, training and certification staff, licensing/ registration/ certification and examination teams, TSSA Contact Centre staff as well as supervisors and managers. The objective, as with contractors, was to gain further insights related to the relationship between TSSA staff and contractors.

In all instances, the group discussions were structured to allow customers and TSSA staff the opportunity to identify and discuss some of the issues that they felt could be beneficial in addressing contractor challenges and the relationship with TSSA. That said, discussions were quite open-ended to ensure that participants felt they could freely express the issues that concern them.

The objective of this whole consultative process was to explore whether there were some general/commonly held views and perceptions across the entire customer groups that need to be addressed. As the consultation process progressed and after having reviewed all of the insights garnered through the various channels, it became apparent that there were indeed a number of recurring themes from external and internal participants:

- communication and education;
- fees and billing;
- consistency;
- partnership/enforcement;
- training and licensing; and
- TSSA processes.

These key themes are further detailed below and encapsulate views expressed by participants.

Communication and Education

Customers are strongly calling for provision to information that they need and education to help them comply and have a safe operation in place. They see this as the key to having a proper partnership with TSSA –which many currently feel is not in place. They want to have a robust level of interaction with TSSA that goes beyond the current practice and would include updates, briefings, training, seminars and so forth. Accessibility, timeliness and responsiveness were other communication issues customers raised, particularly among those in need of technical assistance. Contractors fully accept and recognize that there is a shared responsibility, between contractors and TSSA, in achieving enhanced safety outcomes. At the same time they clearly indicate



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that TSSA can take a greater role in assisting them to acquire the information needed to achieve higher levels of compliance.

TSSA staff recognize that more could be done to communicate with/educate contractors on matters of relevance to them. While things like the newsletter work well, other tactics could be beneficial to customers specifically as it relates to communicating requirements, codes, standards, and keeping contractors, mechanics, trades persons up-to-date on matters that are relevant to them. It was cited that TSSA should consider ways to transition between understanding/applying requirements and communicating those requirements.

Fees and Billing

While customers value the organization and support its role strongly, many feel they do not get sufficient return for the fees they pay - participants want more for the money. Feedback included the willingness to pay additional funds for a service if they knew such funds were dedicated to a service they would benefit from – e.g. training to better understand codes or common non-compliances, etc. A concerning perspective that was regularly mentioned or alluded to is the feeling that they cannot interact with TSSA without getting billed for it; many expressed reluctance to contact TSSA indicating a concern that they would be billed.

TSSA staff acknowledge that education and training is good and should be provided but are limited by resources. There is a belief that taking on a greater advocacy role would be valuable to customers; however, there is an unclear understanding of the degree of flexibility they have regarding taking on an advocacy versus enforcement role with customers.

Consistency

Customers report a variety of problems and frustrations in perceived inconsistency and more so when dealing with multiple contacts; this is particularly pronounced among larger organizations that have operations across various regions of the province. Customers feel consistency amongst employees is a matter that needs to be addressed at the management and supervisory level, recognizing that TSSA is dealing with a wide range of complex issues to regulate.

TSSA staff perceive consistency as an issue and something that needs to be addressed both internally and externally.

Partnership vs. Enforcement

Another key theme raised by customers is the feeling that TSSA has drifted from being an organization focused on safety to one primarily concerned with compliance. This is related to some extent to the perception that front line personnel are required to bill for activities and that safety requires a more collaborative and less structured relationship. For some longer term customers, this is also seen as an outcome of TSSA's creation (i.e., taking it out of government). Contractors clearly understand the costs associated with regulatory processes and accept that these must be covered through fee for service – the question is focused on how effectively and efficiently those services are being provided and whether they are driving safety improvements.

Differing viewpoints exist within TSSA personnel on whether TSSA's role is that of an enforcer/advocate, or both. Staff indicated that similar to the fee for services theme, they often feel conflicted when interacting with a customer and felt that perhaps this may add to the issues surrounding consistency.

Training and Licensing

Fuels participants expressed concerns about licensing the trade; i.e. requirements for getting a licence (G2) changed over the past five years ushering in a new breed of 'book smarts' but lacking in hands-on/field experience. It was also cited that people are licensed that are not qualified to do the work while people qualified to do the work are not licensed to do so; unlicensed contractors on the jobsite – the problem persists and it's a safety concern, and one that TSSA is not addressing. Long wait times for getting a licence.



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Staff believe that a number of TSSA training programs would be useful/helpful for customers; however there appears to be push back from customers that fees/costs for these sessions are seen as barriers to accessibility of these programs.

Processes

From the customers' perspective, TSSA is understaffed and does not have enough resources to serve customers. Additional views centered around TSSA operating like a government agency – bureaucratic, red-tape, resulting in inefficient processes and information TSSA has about its customers could be put to better use (when it comes to inspections, billing, obtaining customer information etc.); in some cases licences are going to the wrong address.

In general, there were comments from staff on a number of processes, which from the employee perspective, are seen as redundant and tedious and can be improved. It was also noted that some applications/forms, such as maintenance lists, are not being completed/provided properly and this is a safety issue.

Feedback overall indicated that most feel there is much to be gained from reviewing various TSSA processes to remove inefficiencies that are affecting customers and staff alike. Similarly many felt that TSSA could make much better use of current technology (e.g. on-line payments, submission of forms on-line etc.) to improve efficiencies.

Next Steps

The next step will be to identify various initiatives to begin addressing the issues identified. With these in hand, we believe it is very important that we re-engage with contractors to discuss the initiatives and use this input to further refine our plans prior to implementation. The intent is to conduct this process between May and July 2013. As with the previous process TSSA will be seeking input through a variety of means including focus groups that will be facilitated by Modus Research, an independent third party organization, who will also be responsible for recruiting participants for these sessions. While focus groups are a very valuable engagement tool, TSSA recognizes that they do not provide an opportunity for all contractors to provide input. With that in mind, to assist other contractors who wish to offer input, more detailed information on the actions/initiatives that will result from this next round of insights and feedback gathered through the focus group sessions will also be posted on TSSA's website, www.tssa.org