

## *Fulfilling the Public's Trust*

Third in a series of articles about the public service standards essential to attaining excellent customer service in the Clerk's Office (June 2002).

### **Innovative Practices**

The world around us is constantly changing, whether we like it or not. Due to new laws or court rules, evolving societal expectations, new technology, different judges and staff members, or any of a host of other factors, the Clerk's Office must adapt in order to function effectively. For example, even if we have been on the right track in the past, unless we continue to move forward in the right direction, we will be run over by all of these changes—sitting still will keep us from achieving our goals. Fundamentally, we must always seek out and embrace effective innovative practices that respond to the new challenges we face.

The word innovate means to begin or introduce something new, to make changes in something established, and to renew or replenish so as to make as new again. Using innovative practices does not mean that everything must be changed, simply that we all must scrutinize everything we do in order to ensure that every task or process is of the highest quality and efficiency. Change in and of itself is not the goal; we do not change for change's sake. Good innovators are open and receptive to positive changes, while they preserve what currently works.

The Japanese have a concept about innovation called *Kaizen*, which means continuous, incremental improvement. *Kaizen* has three components: a constant examination of the status quo to see what changes need to be made; a definite focus on lots of small changes—rather than on huge revolutions—which add up, over time to large results; and a clear reminder of the necessity that change should be positive and not implemented merely for the sake of change. We in the Clerk's Office can use this concept of *Kaizen*. We can always ask the question, "Can we do it better?" to create the future we want to achieve: increasing service quality and timeliness, decreasing costs, and meeting (or exceeding) customers' expectations. We can acknowledge that each of us has the ability to think of small ways to improve what we do individually and as a group and encourage that these new ideas get considered. Finally, we can ensure that we make only those changes that will be positive and that will improve our service. In sum, using the *Kaizen* approach to innovative practices can help us create an office that constantly renews itself and can help us rise to the challenges we face every day.

For many years our office has had a commitment to improvements connected to organizational aims, most memorably with the total quality service initiative. This is still true today, where we need to ensure our work meets the wants and needs of our customers. Think "TLC," *think like the customer*, when considering innovations.

It has been said many times that the only constant in our world is change. Given this situation, we must actively seek and use change to achieve our goals. If every staff member is an innovator who constantly looks to create and implement improved procedures and systems for doing our work, we will go a long way to being the best Clerk's Office possible. Innovative practices, then, are fundamental to our providing excellent customer service and fulfilling the public's trust in us as public servants.