

## Self-Heating Can: Customer Needs

### Description

In this episode, we visit a museum of failed products. We see shelf after shelf crammed with products that failed miserably in the marketplace. Every product failure has its story. This story is about a preoccupation with a technology that ignored customer needs.

The culprit is a self-heating can created for hikers, campers, and other nature enthusiasts. Even if you have never set foot on a hiking trail, you probably know more about the needs of these customers than did the makers of this unfortunate product. You know that campers and backpackers want lightweight, convenient food on their adventures. You will see how these commonly understood needs were ignored, in part because the product developer was technology-driven versus customer-driven.

### Learning Point

When an organization misinterprets its customers' needs because it is overly *technology-driven* versus *customer-driven*, the result can be a clever failure instead of the anticipated profitable success.

### Discussion Questions

**Question:** What happens to the customer's needs when an organization is technology-driven?

**Answer:** Companies may try to meet all customers' needs with the same solution, i.e., with the technology with which the company has expertise. A company can lose its objectivity and try to answer all problems and needs with the same answer.

**Question:** What happens to this same technology-driven organization when an advanced technology is introduced by another organization?

**Answer:** If an advanced technology is introduced, companies who tend to answer customer needs with their own technology are left "in the dust."

**Question:** Discuss whether your own organization is technology-driven. In what areas? What are the disadvantages? What opportunities have been missed?

**Answer:** Answers will vary. Probe: In what areas has the competition been able to anticipate and meet customers' needs more effectively? What could be done in the future to assure that your organization keeps aligned with your customers' needs?

**Question:** What have been some of your organization's biggest product failures? What contributed to the product failures?

**Answer:** Responses will vary, depending on the product failure. Probe: Were any of the failures due to being too focused on applying new or advanced technology versus meeting customer needs? How could these failures have been avoided?