Internal and External Customers

I often get asked by leaders of internal groups how they can create a Customer focus when their team has no direct connection or interaction with the paying Customer. I dealt with this as a Supervisor when I worked at Chevron many years ago, so my advice comes from my three-part combo experience: As a leader in the middle of an organization, as a former sales person in that same organization, and now as a business owner and consultant for 23 years. Given that perspective, here is my three part answer to the question.

1. *Help your team see that the internal person really is their Customer*. That without the group (or individuals) and what they deliver to them, their job wouldn't be needed. Helping people make that mental shift is important — and when you can help create that shift, things will get easier faster. Start by talking about this concept and then consistently refer to these people/groups as Customers, ask questions of them as if they are Customers, and continue to, through your actions, drill that idea home to your team members.
2. *Give people a line of sight.* Help your people see how what they do fits into the bigger picture. When they see the forest for the trees, they will understand the demands placed on them by their internal Customers in a new way. They may also begin to see how they can contribute to the end goal more effectively. (As an important side bonus, doing this may increase employee ownership and engagement, not just internal Customer relationships.)
3. *Help them get to know the real (paying) Customer.* This sort of goes beyond the basic question, and it is too important to leave out. When people can personalize who the real Customer is, what they look like, what their needs are, etc., they will be more connected to the whole process. Get your people connected to real customers through visits, video or even conversations with outward facing groups like your sales team.

This common question is a good one and the challenge is real — but when you do things like I have described here, you will have increasing success in creating a Customer focused mindset for your internal team.