



Customer Centricity

A Present and
Future Priority

PHIL GELDART

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Eagle's Flight, Creative Training Excellence Inc.
ISBN 978-0-9939360-6-7

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Printed in Canada

Dedicated to Jenny Schmidt, whose incredible talent and commitment has once again brought another book to life, as she has with so many of our programs and client requests, adding her personal brand of magic.

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Introduction

The Customer Is Not Always Right, but They Are Always First

I was once told the story of a friend's son who was in a college Hospitality program to learn to become a chef. As part of their training, they worked in a fine dining restaurant run by the school and on campus. Their professor served as the maître d' on the evenings it was open.

At one meal, the student served an individual who ordered a very expensive bottle of wine. When he'd tasted it, he became extremely angry and rude, complaining about its quality. Not knowing how to handle the situation, the student asked his professor to come to the table and deal with the guest.

The professor politely asked if he could taste the wine for himself, and then did so. He then responded to the customer: "Sir, there's nothing wrong with this wine, but I would be happy to replace it with another bottle for you." The customer was appeased and proceeded with his meal.

Later the professor met with the student and said: "The customer is not always right. The customer is always first, but not always right."

This story has stuck with me because of the powerful truths it demonstrates. Very often the customer is not right, and in fact is coming to the organization for a product or service to address an issue they need help with. They may initially believe they know best, and believe they are “right,” but they are nonetheless looking to the experts providing the product or service for advice on what to do or purchase. To lack the courage or personal conviction to speak up when the customer’s thinking is “wrong” is to do a disservice to the customer. In many cases they aren’t right, and to act as if they were will only compound the problem or issue.

However, they are always first. There is no room on the part of those serving the customer for arrogance, or lack of courtesy. Part of the customer experience is getting their need met with what’s “right,” but a large part is also how they get that need met. A truly customer-centric organization does both, and in so doing truly puts the customer first.

It is my hope that this book will help you and your organization take the next meaningful steps forward on your journey to create a culture of true customer centricity.

*PHIL GELDART
CEO, Eagle’s Flight*

Chapter One

Customer Centricity

Customer Centricity Defined

A customer-centric organization is one in which every employee, in every function, always has the following question top of mind:

“How will the decision I am about to make impact our customers’ experience?”

Two options then surface.

- Option 1:** They do not know the answer. In a truly customer-centric organization where employees are empowered to improve the customer’s experience, they should find the answer before making the decision.

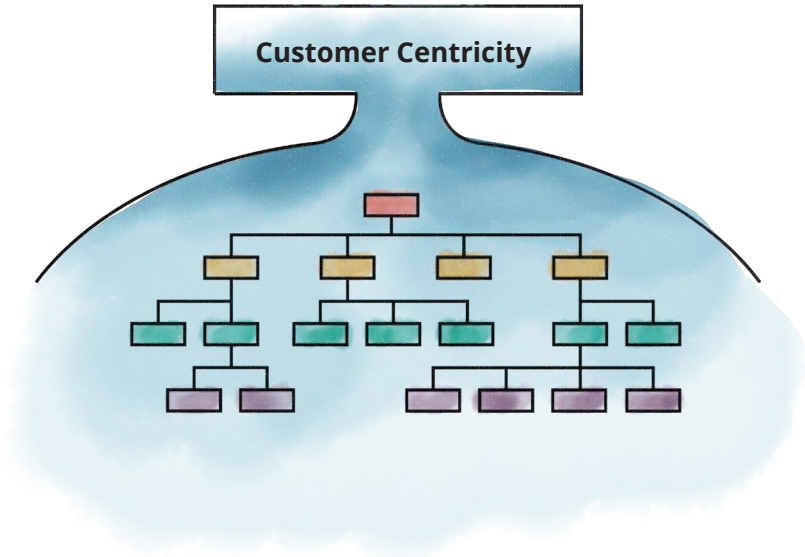
- Option 2:** They do know the answer and from that vantage point can then decide how best to proceed.

A note about the word “impact” in the question, and why it is not “improve.”

At times it is not in the best interests of the organization to improve the customer experience, because doing so would have an unacceptable net cost. Knowing this, and knowing the impact of a decision, allows employees to choose the most appropriate course of action. Later in this book I talk more about what “appropriate” action is.

Secondly, most decisions have consequences for other internal departments. The goal is for the sum total of all those decisions to result in a truly outstanding experience for the customer. However, on that journey, there may be trade-offs required: a single decision taken by itself may appear to be best for the customer, but when taken in conjunction with many others, may not result in an improved customer experience. Each decision must also be looked at through that lens.

Creating a mindset around this question, dealing with all the implications of asking it, and encouraging everyone to ask it, is the focus of this book.



Every employee asks:
*How will the decision
I am about to make impact our
customers' experience?*



Don't know...find out
Do know...decide wisely

Customer Service versus Customer Centricity... What Is the Difference?

Customer service is what happens at the front line, between the one paying for a product or service and the one providing it.

As a customer, how you feel, and what you get, are both critical, so it is not difficult to see why customer service has become such a focal point in organizations around the world. As a result, most organizations typically have clear “service standards” for frontline, customer-facing staff. For example, at a restaurant, those service standards might be to: smile, greet people politely, deliver the meal correctly and efficiently, and check up on the patrons periodically throughout dinner. Whatever the standards, they can be measured, or their impact can be. Many organizations stop there, but companies are increasingly looking to improve their competitive advantage through “customer centricity.”

Customer centricity is when every person within the entire organization thinks about how their actions and decisions will affect the customer experience.

When this happens, the positive impact on the end customer takes a quantum leap forward.

You arrive at your vacation destination...

You check in to a resort for a much-needed vacation in the Caribbean. The person at the front desk asks for your passport, enters your data into the computer, validates your reservation and then, ultimately, you get the card to your room and you are on your way. However, at this particular resort, the computers at the front desk take about three minutes to complete the validation process after all the manual entry steps. So, you and the person providing the service engage in casual conversation to pass the time while you wait. But you do not want small talk. All you want is your card so you can unload your luggage and put your feet up. Unfortunately, you cannot do that because the IT person who created the software did not think about your needs during their design process, so the total transaction time was never a concern in their mind.

That IT person was not being customer centric. They were thinking only about their IT function, and the software they were writing.

Consider a different scenario...

As you check in, it appears that for some reason the room you reserved is no longer available, nor is there a vacant one comparable to it. Further, the person you are dealing with at the front desk does not have the authority to upgrade you to a vacant but larger room for the same price. It is reasonable to assume that the "empowerment" guidelines for those employees were crafted far from the front lines, perhaps in Human Resources, where it was decided what the boundaries of authority should be for their customer-facing staff.

In effect, their decision about empowerment reflected, “We do not think we can trust or train the people at the front desk to make those kinds of decisions, and that opinion takes precedence over the customer’s experience.” As a result, your experience was unsatisfactory not because of the person’s actual level of service, but because of the policy around their degree of empowerment.

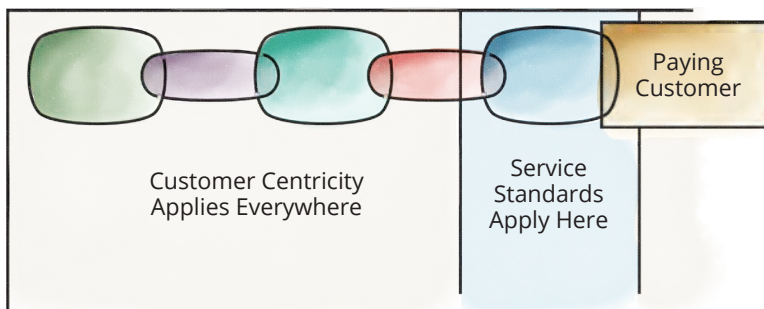
As in the IT example, this is not a customer-centric organization. In a customer-centric environment, decisions and training would have everything to do with the customer experience, and not just the customer interaction.

Customer centricity is every person in every department asking themselves,

“How can I personally ensure that the customer gets the best possible experience?”

To become customer centric as a company is to transform your company’s culture. Customer centricity actually transforms the way people think, as well as how they behave. If you’re going to think about customer centricity, you may also need to think about true culture transformation.

The Organizational Process Chain



Is Customer Centricity a Value or an Operational Imperative?

An organization is driven by its values. Company values permeate everything the organization does – how they hire, manage, lead, communicate, promote, and so on. A value might be to “respect the worth of every individual,” which is demonstrated by showing dignity, integrity, diversity, and inclusiveness towards every person in the company. Another value might be “commitment to quality”; in this case, the company is dedicated to ensuring that their product is always safe, not subject to failure, reliable, and consistent. “Safety” is another common value. Here, whatever employees’ roles are in the organization, the company is committed to making sure they go home the same way they came to work: safe, and free from injury.

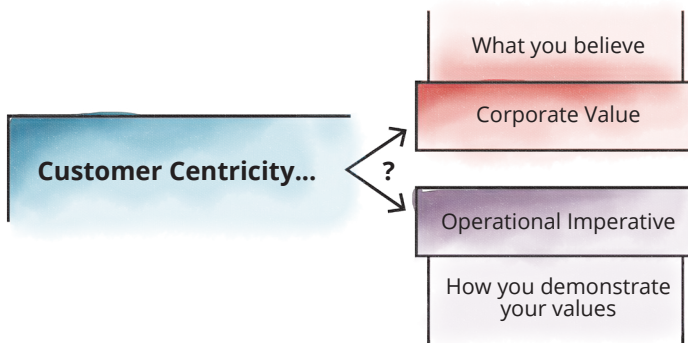
Operational imperatives are the ways in which those values are demonstrated in the marketplace. For example, in a food company the operational imperatives for the “commitment to quality” value might be regular quality checks, equipment inspections, scheduled maintenance and repairs, and hourly product tasting off the production line.

The operational imperatives for a “respect the worth of every individual” value might translate into meticulous hiring processes, ongoing training programs, promotion milestones, continued education, and empathetic management teams. For a “safety” value, operational imperatives may include the development of a safety policy, safety training and enforcement, incident reporting systems, and rewards for good safety measures.

So, what is Customer Centricity...a value or an operational imperative?

Is it what you do because of what you believe (therefore an operational imperative), or is it one of the things you believe in (therefore a value)?

The answer may well differ from company to company, but in my opinion, I would say that customer *service* is an operational imperative coming from the core value of customer *centricity*.



Customer service, the way in which the customer is treated and the personal interaction between the customer who pays and the employee who gives the product or service, is an operational imperative that is based on the value of customer centricity. Customer service only touches the end, customer-facing employees, whereas customer centricity touches every single employee throughout the entire organization and, by definition, a company value is something that touches every employee in the organization.

While a customer-service interaction may touch several employees in an organization, and may even encompass an extensive, multi-employee process behind the scenes, it is still just a process, whereas customer centricity should be a common mindset shared by everyone in the entire company.

If your organization really and truly wants to be customer centric, the wisest, most effective, and logical way forward is

to make customer centricity a value, which is then manifested in your customer-service initiatives.

If you want to be truly customer centric, you make it an organizational value.

A couple of quick diagnostic questions may help to move the issue forward:

1. Are we truly customer centric, or are we actually just operationally focused on customer service?
2. Does it make sense to add “customer centricity” to our list of values, and then train accordingly?

At the returns counter...

Imagine a frontline sales employee who lets their superior know that customers want faster returns at the store, but the current policy does not allow for this. The Operations department of the company is notified, and the Operations manager immediately changes the policy to grant permission for frontline sales employees to make a decision on the spot about accepting return items from customers. Now we have great customer service in the store as a result of a customer-centric culture.

In a non-customer-centric organization, everyone is simply focused on their daily activities. The frontline employees accept product returns at the cash according to policy, not able to respond to customer feedback, or pass it on, and the Operations Manager continues to enforce existing policy.

There is a distinct difference between the two.

By making customer centricity a value, you integrate into your organization a new way of thinking that revolves around the customer experience. From there, you can easily shape and form operational imperatives to bring that core value to life.

The Link between Customer Centricity and Customer Service

I once had an opportunity to meet a highly skilled chef at a renowned restaurant. In the back of his kitchen, I was introduced to the large team that was responsible for assisting the chef to source and prepare the food. The chef walked me through the many steps they took prior to the actual meal-preparation process: selecting ingredients reflective of the time of year, daily picking herbs from their own gardens, purchasing produce that was particularly fresh and suited to the menu of the day. I quickly realized that the sourcing and buying of ingredients was just as important – if not more important – than the actual meal-preparation process itself.

First, the chef and his team decided what ingredients they needed. Then they selected precise places to acquire those ingredients to make sure they were among the freshest and highest quality. Finally, the ingredients arrived in the kitchen and only then did the process of meal creation actually begin.

When patrons arrived at the restaurant and food preparation began, a tremendous amount of work had already gone into ensuring the delivery of an outstanding meal. An equal amount of work then went into making sure the food was hot, meals were properly plated, sauces were of the perfect consistency, and so on.

In the world of customer service, what matters is that the meal is acceptable. Whereas, in the world of customer centricity, what matters is everything that goes into preparing the meal before the patron ever arrives, as well as the actual preparation of the meal itself.

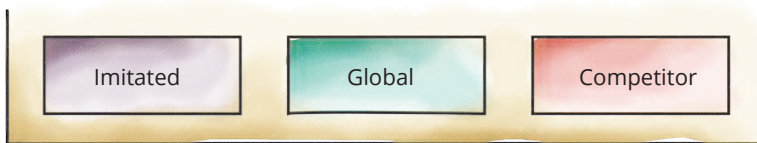
Ultimately, the customers at a restaurant must enjoy the food, and if that food does not taste good, then all of the work and time spent in the actual preparation becomes irrelevant. On the other hand, if every step of the process is executed flawlessly, including the actual meal preparation, then the meals produced do not just taste good...they taste spectacular. The restaurant is not just a restaurant...it is a renowned restaurant run by a renowned chef.

In this metaphor, if customer centricity speaks to all the work that goes into ensuring exceptional meals at a restaurant, and customer service is the preparation and presentation of the meal itself, then it can be said that a customer-centric organization exists to deliver a second-to-none dining experience. The demands of the final customer experience drive everything that happens inside the organization. It is the responsibility of the chef to be clear on the customer expectation and to deliver that.

Only with this customer-centric mindset on the part of all involved, from executive to frontline employee, can an organization deliver exceptional customer service, and so provide an enviable customer experience.

Providing an Envable Customer Experience

While there are many measures of corporate success, one is particularly powerful: “imitated global competitor” – in other words, a business that others in a similar industry want to be like, on a worldwide scale.



“Imitated”

The concept of imitation seems relatively simple at first glance, but is much more sophisticated and complicated than meets the eye. Consider the fact that there are numerous elements that comprise a corporation, and in a truly imitable company all of those elements would be worth replicating: culture, work ethic, research and development, leadership, marketing, profitability, product mix, and so on. If an organization’s product is great but its corporate culture is terrible, then the product may be worth imitating but certainly not the whole company. Similarly, if a company’s R&D is world class but its profits are dwindling, again, no other global company wants to imitate it.

If you find your organization on the receiving end of being imitated, this indicates that you are truly part of something great, since everyone wants to do what you are doing, and the way you are doing it.

“Global”

Imitation alone is not enough to aspire to – you must also obtain that imitation on the global stage. Local imitation is not too small to be discounted completely, but global imitation points to the fact that you are now being compared to others inside a very large pool. If you come to be imitated on this scale, it is a profound achievement.

“Competitor”

You have imitators and you have them globally, but still it is not enough. The moment you lose your competitive edge and become complacent, the future is at risk. Just because you are imitated globally this year, does not mean you will be the next, and so the focus must remain on staying a leading competitor in your industry over the long term. Others on the global stage will then continue to regard you as a company worth emulating.

Being World Class Is the True Objective

Executives often say, “I want to be the best.” The problem with this statement is the fact that it is elusive. What your idea of “the best” is, and the associated measurement criteria, may be very different from someone else’s. How do you actually define “the best”? Instead, strive to be “world class.”

When your organization is world class, you are in a group where every participant is at a similar level of excellence. Others may be as good, but no one is better.

You become part of an elite group at the top of their game.

Being in that group means you truly are an imitated global competitor. Not “best,” but “world class.”

Application to Customer Centricity

When we apply these concepts to customer centricity, what we have is a way of measuring success that is significant, and goes beyond being purely numerical. Think back to the title of this section: “Providing an enviable customer experience.”

Provide more to your customer than a product or service; provide an experience so good that not only do you have loyal customers, but other companies also envy the experience you provide. In other words, they want to be like you...an imitated global competitor!

Your company sets the pace...

Your company has such a solid return process that your customers feel comfortable buying from you time and time again, and other corporations are now trying to replicate that success; or, you have such a stunning, compelling, and high-converting website that customers frequent your site daily and competitors are trying to replicate everything from design, to development, to your calls to action.

Envable

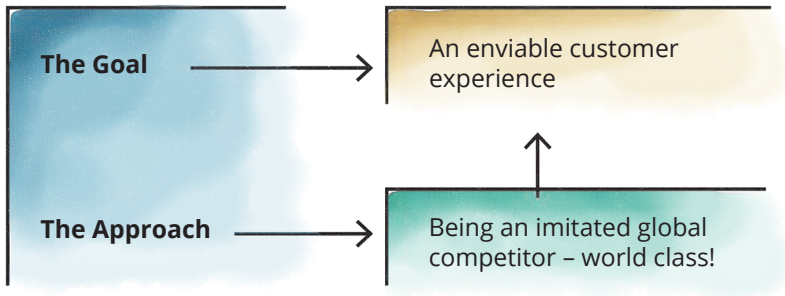
To be an imitated global competitor with respect to customers, your customer’s experience must be enviable. That is, the customer experience is consistent and predictable. The customer always gets what they want. The customer’s entire experience is important, not only the service, which is transactional, and not only the product you sell, which is tangible. A truly enviable experience is all-encompassing and includes subtle yet profoundly important elements such as customer feelings, how the customer is treated, overall quality, thoughts around price, decisions about whether or not the customer would buy again, etc.

When the customer's experience is so good that they wish every other company were like yours, then they go back to your company again, and again, and again.

An organization's ultimate goal should be to become an imitated global competitor that provides a truly enviable customer experience.

In pursuit of this objective, organizations must take into account many elements, and make provision for each: the human factor, competitors, storms, power outages, layoffs, strikes, errors – everything that has the potential to affect the customer's experience. Taking all of these factors into consideration and acknowledging that they all play a role, organizations that aspire to be enviable need a customer-centric approach within every function, and a commitment to be ready, proactively, for any eventuality. The culture must be customer centric. Without this, the customer experience may be good, and at times even great, but not enviable.

Customer Centricity



Chapter Two

The Implications of Customer Centricity on Performance

The Implications on Results

Every stakeholder wants a return on their investment, and the financial investment to become customer centric makes sound business sense. In addition to the abundance of research on this topic, linking strong customer focus to improved results, consider the following.

1. Every Organization Has a “Reason to Be”

That is, an organization or company can have many different ultimate priorities or measures of success, such as:



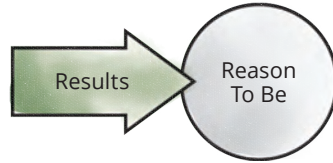
- Improve shareholder value
- Earn a profit
- Meet social needs
- Invest in R&D for long-term success
- Protect the environment
- Accelerate growth
- Demonstrate social responsibility

One or more of these define an organization’s “reason to be.”

2. Against That Reason to Be, There's Only One Thing That Matters: Results

That's it.

If you are the CEO presenting to your Board, the only thing they care about is results against the agreed "reason to be" mandates.



You present results against what you are charged with accomplishing. So then, the next question becomes...how do you get, influence, or improve results?

3. All the Results, in Every Company, without Exception, Come from the Behaviors of People

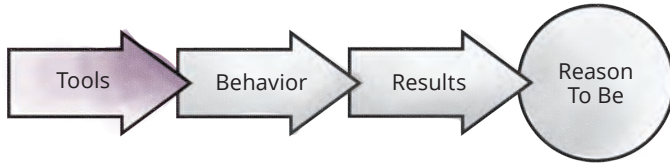
People's behaviors, in their aggregate, produce an organization's results.



Companies heavily dependent on robotics require people to manufacture, program, and maintain those robots. Organizations in the digital space need people to drive creativity, design, and programming. Marketing-based companies with massive brand equity would see the quick erosion of that equity if they were to shut their doors and lay off all their staff.

Results come from the behaviors of people. Therefore, if you want to change results, concentrate on changing the behaviors of the people – which, by the way, is no easy task.

4. Tools Can Help Drive Behavior Change



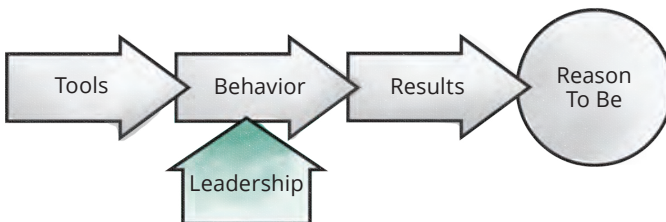
Tools have a place because tools can help people make behavior changes. They cannot do the job in and of themselves, but they can help. Unfortunately, many organizations decide simply to focus on tools and then hope they get the results they want. For example, a company may introduce new software thinking it is going to produce great results; but people must use the software, and if they are inadequately trained to use it, then the results don't come as envisioned. Being equipped with the necessary behaviors to appropriately use the tools was not made a priority.

Improving Results through Behavior Change

Two key areas must become a focus for true behavior change to happen.

1. Frontline Leadership Capabilities

Leaders within the organization are the greatest influencers of behavior. Organizations follow leaders. Individuals follow their

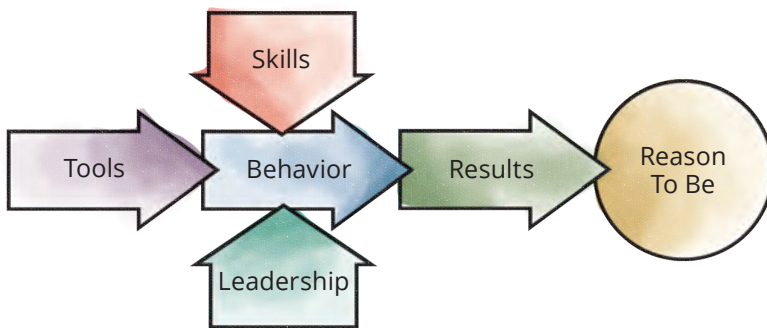


immediate supervisor. Changing how these people lead results in changing the behaviors of the people who follow them.

2. Skills of the People

If we build, improve, and enhance the skills of the people in an organization, then their behaviors change. That focus on skill improvement should include three things:

- The reason behind acquiring the new skills (to build conviction)
- The knowledge of how to behave differently (to build confidence)
- The capability to apply that knowledge in practice (to build competence)



In short, if you help people to be more skilled and train leaders to be better, then you can substantially change the behaviors of the people inside the organization.

When we link this overall approach back into the behaviors related to customer centricity, results improve: Net Promoter Score, your customer statistics, online ratings – whatever it is by which you measure results.

This recognition of the importance of the potential contribution of every single person moves the organization from thinking, “We should be customer centric,” to, “Changing the behaviors of the people to be more customer centric will improve results.”

The rationale behind becoming customer centric is: if you change behavior, you change results; if you change results, you then influence your reason to be. If one of your reasons to be is to improve shareholder value and profitability, then there is a wealth of data that says improving the customer experience will positively impact those objectives.

When every single person is thinking about how their actions are impacting the end customer, then the customer’s experience will be significantly improved – which means significantly improved results.

The Relationship between Customer Centricity and Perceived Value

You may be fully committed to your customer's experience, but if your idea of a great experience is significantly different from that of your customer, then your efforts go to waste – or worse, you might even end up with an angry, dissatisfied customer.

Focus your customer-centricity efforts on what your customer really values.

When any customer comes to a particular company, they are looking for a product or service for which they are willing to pay money. How much they pay is linked directly to the value they believe they get, or will get, from that product or service.

If you want to be customer centric, you must know what your customer values; otherwise, you run the risk of making wrong assumptions and investing time, effort, and resources into the improvement of an experience in a way your customers may not even care about!

The concept of value is defined by the customer as an exchange between what I am giving, what I am getting, and how important it is to me.

This value concept is then tied to the notion of personal importance, which is in turn linked to two things:

1. **The practicalities of life** – the tangible elements
2. **The emotional side of life** – things that may not have great extrinsic value, but are of meaningful intrinsic value

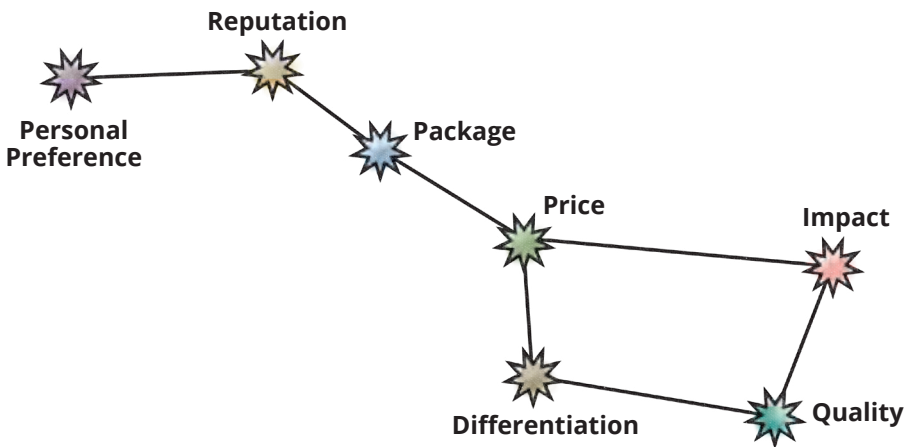
Think of an old clunker of a car...

From a tangible perspective, it is worth next to nothing, perhaps a few hundred dollars at most. But from an emotional standpoint, it is pure gold in its owner's world. It was gifted by a well-loved grandfather who passed away 11 months ago; he used it to teach the owner to drive. It is the only vehicle the owner can currently afford, and it will get them from Point A to Point B to see a grandmother who will also pass away shortly. Clearly the actual "value" to the owner is much greater than simply its extrinsic blue book price.

The importance of something to the user is, in large part, what determines its value. You need to think about what the customer values when you start thinking about improving their experience, which means you need to understand the factors that influence value.

The Value Constellation

The big dipper has seven stars. In the Customer Value Constellation, there are also seven “stars” that represent the seven factors valued by the customer, and on which they might come to place the greatest weight.



“I bought this phone just because I like the way it looks and feels.”

1. Personal Preference

Very often, customers make decisions based primarily, if not solely, on what they like and what they want. There is no real logical reason behind those choices – it is just what they prefer. These preferences might be tied to obvious factors such as a product that tastes better or looks better than another. In other cases, it might be a completely intangible factor: someone who likes the rain better than the sun, or who’d rather read a book than watch TV, or who prefers furniture that’s upholstered in fabric rather than in leather.

In the world of customer centricity, to neglect personal preference is to ignore a huge driver of human behavior. As humans, we often do things simply because we prefer them. Having said that, at times there may very well be a logical reason for the identified preferences.

Why do people buy one brand of handbag over another similarly priced one? It is not necessarily because it is better – they just want that brand. They prefer it. Nothing more, nothing less. It may be possible to deconstruct what drove that preference, but it is critical to understand that value is often based simply on personal preference, and is independent of everything else.

“I bought this phone because everyone I talked to who has one, and everything I read about it, says it is the best in every way.”

2. Reputation

Some customers tend to be heavily influenced by the reputation of a product or service. They look at reviews, they tally up the number of rating stars it gets, and they look back in time to see what kind of reputation the company has. If yours is a company that you know your customers are evaluating according to reputation, then you need to think about how you are communicating your reputation to your customers. Everyday buying decisions are made according to your company's reputation and, by extension, your company's products and services.

Picture owning a dentistry office...

You are aware of the fact that in this space customers place significant weight on internet reviews to help them decide which dentist is most worthy of their business. Consequently, you decide to hire a digital marketing agency to help you focus on the “reputation” star in the Value Constellation.

That marketing team is there to help you figure out how to get your current patients, who presumably think highly of you, to go the extra step and write a review, and give you a high online rating. The fascinating thing is that this type of influencing by reputation is not directly linked as much to what is happening in your dentistry office, as it is to how you are going to convince patients to leave a positive review. How do you make that task easy? Seamless? Effective? Is it a prompt sent via text? Email? Now we are talking about software design – a software design company is driving your reputation, which is in turn enhancing the perceived value of your services, which is important to a portion of your potential customer base. It's far more than simply how good a dentist you are.

“I bought this phone because of how it looks, the features it comes with, the after-purchase care, and the easy-to-access help line.”

3. Package

Many customers make a decision based on the total package (not to be confused with a product's packaging). The package is the product, the related service, the ancillary items included, the options available, and the way all of it is presented.

“The package” is what's included with the product or service being sold.

As an illustration...

The CEO of a large corporation wants a luxury company-car program that they can offer to their executives. After evaluating many of the luxury car brands, they select one in particular...because its package is unbeatable.

The salesperson delivers the car personally, directly to the individual's home or office, whichever they prefer. They bring with them an individual who knows and can explain every detail about the car and all its features. When the presentation is complete, they then provide the buyer with the name and personal cell phone number of the person to contact in the case of regular servicing needs, or if at any time there is a problem with the car. They also explain that a driver will come promptly to pick up the car either at their home or office, and leave a loaner for them to use whenever service is required.

For busy executives, it's clear why this package drives the purchase decision: it allows them additional time to focus on running the company.

“I bought this phone because it is the cheapest one available with the features I want.”

4. Price

Oftentimes, customers place value on price. It can be either high (most expensive) or low (least expensive) – but as you might assume, in this category most customers place value on low price points. If this is the case, then as an organization you need to be a low-cost producer. Your entire team must focus on taking costs out of the business and doing what they can to service the customers' value emphasis on price.

When customers go to a “bargain basement store,” they likely don't care deeply about the crispness of the clothes on the person behind the cash register. On the other hand, if they go to an upscale store in the same industry, they might very well expect to see crisp, clean, sharp-looking attire on all the employees. In the first case, the customer's primary value star is: low price. In the second scenario, customers are charged more money and, therefore, their expectations are higher in accordance with the price they're paying. Price has determined their expectation.

“I bought this phone because it has features none of the others have, and a product replacement plan unlike, and better than, all the other companies.”

5. Differentiation

The customer needs the product or service to be different. This can be seen in situations where there are two very comparable products. Think of airlines. If you are like most customers, you probably do not see any discernable difference between the airlines flying to your location of choice, so you merely choose the one that fits your schedule. In the case of airlines, the customer may not really be concerned with differentiation. In their mind, airlines may all essentially be the same, and they just want to get from Point A to Point B.

Alternatively, some aspect of the travel experience may be very important (e.g., legroom, or no flight cancellations) and airlines could choose to differentiate themselves in those areas.

There are industries in which differentiation plays a huge role. Take cosmetics, for example. Cosmetic lines differentiate themselves from one another in noticeable ways. One line emphasizes its use of only organic ingredients, another line focuses on the fact that it never tests on animals, another line manufactures all of its products in Canada exclusively, and so on. If you are a customer who cares deeply about the Canadian economy, you will buy the line that manufactures in Canada. If you are a lover of animals, you choose the line that differentiates itself on the premise that it never tests on animals. If you are a customer who wants to buy makeup but could not care less about differentiation, then you will probably choose whatever you see first.

When differentiation is important to customers, knowing how they differentiate becomes crucial.

“I bought this phone because it is the best made, never breaks, always works as promised, and is completely reliable, always.”

6. Quality

Quality is when a customer makes a purchasing decision based on the quality of a product. When you buy a top-rated cell phone, you might pay \$1,000 even though you can buy a different phone from the telecommunications store down the street for \$99. The quality of the first, however, is of the highest. Similarly, at the grocery store, when you buy a brand-name product off the shelf, you are assured of high quality.

When customers value quality, they are not focusing on price. Whether it is coffee, technology, or dinner out, they are looking for something they would tell others about, or that is visually appealing, or functional, or durable, or reliable – whatever their definition of “quality” may be.

In all of these cases, in a customer-centric organization, employees are engaged, caring, owning, and doing what they can to achieve the quality they know their customers value.

“I bought this phone because I want to be seen as trendy and ‘in fashion’.”

OR

“I bought this phone because it connects seamlessly to all my other devices and so enhances my productivity.”

7. Impact

This constellation star is a particularly intriguing one. It asks the question: “What is the impact I will get as a result of buying this specific product or service?”

You have a job interview next week and you want to know what impact you will make if you buy one power suit versus another. The impact you want to have is to make a great first impression.

Or, you are a woodworker in the market for a new saw. You buy the one with a very specific kind of blade that only needs to be sharpened every six months, as opposed to many other types of saws that require sharpening after just four to five passes. The impact you want to have by purchasing the saw is greater efficiency in your work, because you can get hundreds more cuts, which means less time spent sharpening.

Celebrity endorsement in big-brand marketing is a great example of the “impact” star in the Value Constellation: millions of consumers absolutely adore one particular movie star and want to be just like her, so when they see her endorsing a particular product, they choose to purchase the same thing. Having that product impacts their self-esteem or self-image.

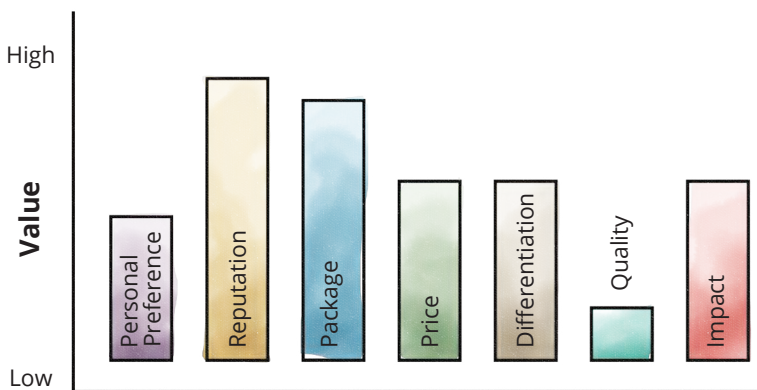
The Implications of the Value Constellation on Customer Centricity

When we think about the Value Constellation with regard to customer centricity, it then becomes clear what is needed to be successful: focus on what the customer values. Ignoring or overlooking this leaves the commitment to customer centricity without a clear vision to pursue, and so makes it extremely difficult to create a great customer experience every time.

About the Seven Stars in the Value Constellation

Clearly your customer may not simply value one particular star. They may value many, each to a different degree. If this is the case, identify the appropriate “blend” of impact made by the stars they do value, and work towards that vision. Further, this may change by product line within a single company, or by segmentation of your customer mix by age, demographic, income, etc.

Customer Value Constellation Profile



- The appropriate blend for each customer from the seven “stars”
- This may even differ for different products for a single customer

Lifetime Value

Every customer has a “lifetime value.” It is important to bear this in mind because it puts the real value of the customer to the organization in perspective; that is: “What is the potential revenue that a single customer could bring our company if they were to buy from us their entire life?”

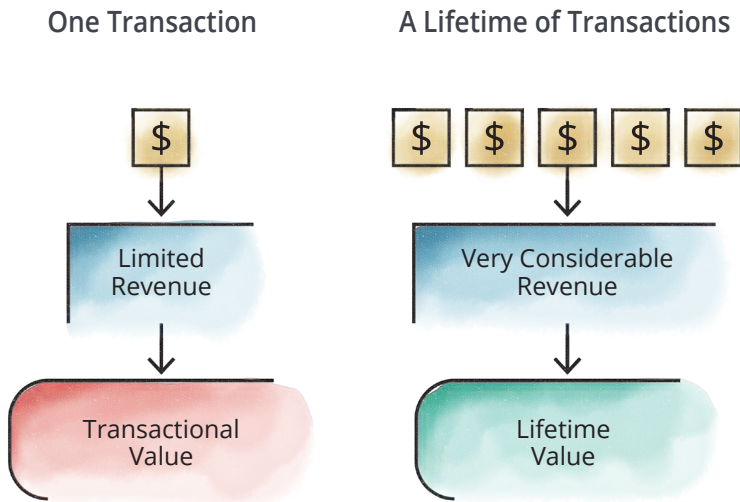
At the local grocery store...

A customer spends \$150 each week on groceries and lives in the area. They are consistently happy with the quality of the food, the friendly service, and the fast checkouts. If this customer shops at this grocery store every week for the next 20 years of their life, that equates to \$156,000 over the lifetime of the customer. This is their lifetime value.

If, on the other hand, the customer becomes disappointed with the poor fruit selection, for example, or the personal service they had come to expect, they may decide to try the grocery store three blocks away. They like it and decide to start buying from there. The first store did not just lose \$150 that week; it lost the lion's share of \$156,000 because it had the potential to keep this customer for life.

Organizations should not only focus on the experience the customer has today, but also on doing everything it can to make sure the customer comes back time and time again. When you start to think about customer centricity, you need to think beyond the single transactional moment. It is not just about one experience, but rather the potential for a lifetime of experiences that equate to a significant amount of revenue for the organization. This shift in thinking results in this essential truth:

Never lose a customer for a reason under your control.

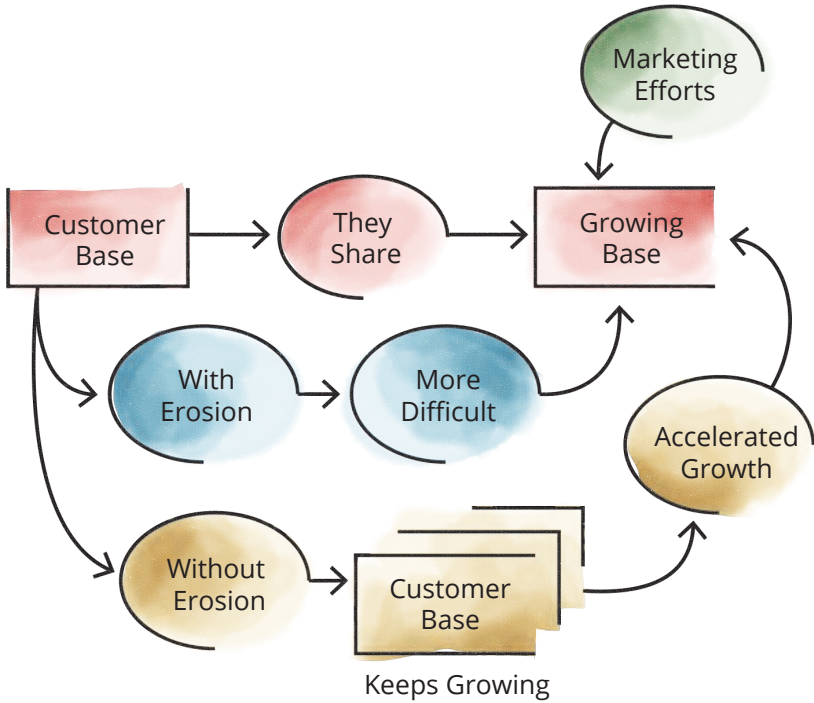


The goal is to ensure that every experience a customer has with your company is such that they wish every other company were like yours!

Two other truths that are worth bearing in mind within this context should also be considered.

1. It is generally much harder and more expensive to find, attract, and then engage new customers than it is to keep existing ones. However, organizations often take existing customers "for granted," and hence do not allocate enough focus on keeping them. Customer centricity addresses that and is a key force in optimizing lifetime value.
2. There is a very powerful "side effect" of following the strategy of "never lose a customer." That is, over time your customer base continues to grow, and will grow much faster, because not only is there limited "erosion" due to customers leaving you, but they also speak highly of you, in turn driving more business.

Given the powerful impact of social media on consumers in today's world, an ever-expanding group of very satisfied customers dramatically increases your reputation and presence as they share with others.



Chapter Three

The Customer's Experience and Expectations, and the Link to Customer Centricity

Breaking Down the Customer Experience

A customer's experience consists of numerous elements. Clearly, one of these elements is the transaction itself. For example, did you get the right coffee at the drive-thru window? Or were you able to fill your tank quickly at the gas station? The actual transaction is part of the overall experience and is typically related to some event actually occurring, or a specific activity that takes place.

However, while the transaction is important to the experience, the experience includes much more: it is comprised of emotions, judgments, critiques, and feelings. All of these elements combine to provide an overall experience – and the experience is where the magic happens. Providing a great customer experience is not only about getting the transaction right, but about getting everything related to it right.

You're at the mall shopping for shoes...

Today, you are looking for black dress shoes that you can wear to an important meeting you have next week. The first store you walk into has the exact shoes you want at a reasonable price. After you spot your shoes on the shelf, you gaze to the back of the store and see a salesperson, but they have their head down busy on their smartphone and do not notice you. Another

customer then walks in and makes a racket as they march to the back of the store and start complaining about a previous purchase. The salesperson puts down their phone and begins what becomes a lengthy interaction with that other customer, who is now served before you, even though you were there first. Feeling annoyed, you leave. The perfect shoes were there, but the experience kept you from buying.

You continue walking the mall and end up in a different store that just happens to catch your eye, even though you have never bought shoes there before. The moment you enter, a welcoming salesperson comes up to you and says, "Hi there, how are you today?" You answer and feel thankful that there are people out there who still care about customer service these days. Then the salesperson continues, "Is there something specific you are looking for?" As a matter of fact, there is, and you tell them what it is. They take you around the store and show you all the different options that relate to your description. Nothing quite fits the mark as perfectly as the pair you saw on the shelf of the other store, but this salesperson is certainly pleasant and accommodating.

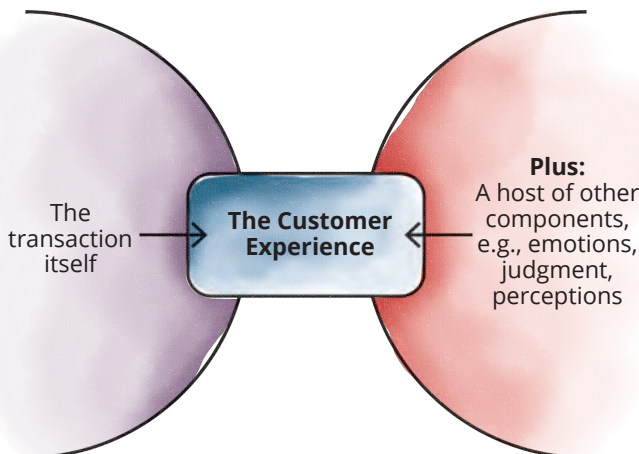
They take your shoe size, ask about your meeting, find out about the wardrobe you plan to wear with the shoes, talk fashion and take the time to figure out your personal style. Then they tell you to wait a second. When they reappear from the back, they have six boxes of shoes for you to try on. Each is a little different from the next and, unfortunately, none are precisely what you really had in mind. But once you get to box number five, you realize that, in fact, this pair could work for your meeting and for several other work purposes afterwards as well. You buy the shoes and leave feeling well taken care of, happy, and satisfied – even though you ended up buying a pair of shoes that were not what you originally intended.

You are probably not inclined to go back to the first store that had the perfect shoes, but you most certainly will go back to the second store that did not. The first store provided an overall negative experience whereas the second store was a positive one. The experience included more than the simple intended transaction.

In a customer-centric company, the focus is not solely on the transaction but also on the total experience. It is the experience that dictates what customers think about the service they receive, how they feel about it, whether or not they will go back, and if they will tell their friends about it.

In an organization where every single person is thinking about how they impact the end customer experience (including the people who train in-store salespeople to not be on their smartphones when customers are in the store!), you create a magical experience that leads to happier customers, more referrals, repeat clientele, and increased revenues.

This then leads naturally to the next section: how to provide the right experience.



What Experience Is Wanted When?

All customer experiences are not equal. All customer expectations are not equal.

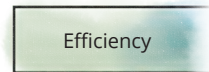
What is always consistent is that in order to deliver a great customer experience, you must meet a customer's expectation every time; that expectation differs according to factors such as the geographic location, the organization, the cost, the nature of the service or product provided, and the value equation.

As a customer, my expectation from a gas station is much different than what I would expect from a fine dining restaurant, or a five-star hotel.



Picture a spectrum that represents a customer's expectations. At the far-left end of the spectrum you want efficiency. As you move towards the middle you want quality. And finally, at the far-right end of the spectrum, you want differentiation.

At a gas station, above all else, customers want an efficient transaction.



They want to get in and get out. Selling low-interest gas cards at the pump in -20°C weather, when all your customer wants to do is get their gas, jump back in their heated car, and drive away, is perhaps not the best approach to take for a company that is really thinking about their customers' overall experience.

At a fine dining restaurant, customers are looking for quality service.

Quality

Was the host ready to help at the front? Did they take the customer to their table quickly? Was the server friendly, knowledgeable about the options, professional, and courteous? Was the timing of the meal delivery appropriate (not too fast and not too slow)? If one patron's meal is forgotten, or the server gets the wrong side dish, or the food is cold, or the server has not been trained properly to open a wine bottle tableside, the customer will be disgruntled. At a fast-food chain, however, the same forgotten side of fries may not create as much disappointment, simply because the customer's expectation is significantly higher at the fine dining restaurant than at the fast-food outlet.

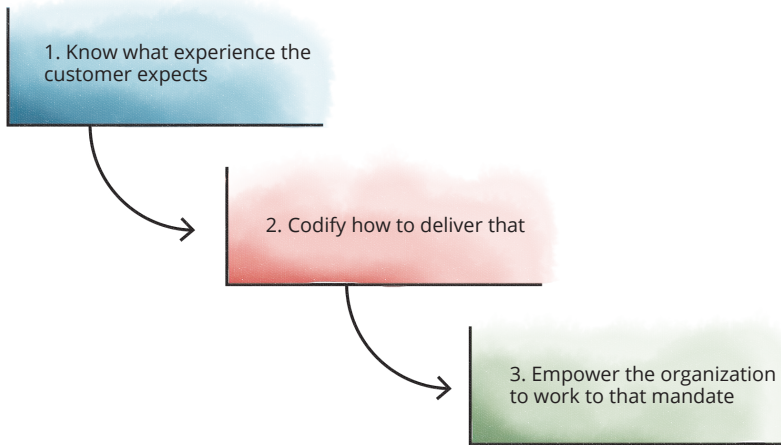
At a five-star hotel, customers expect a distinctive experience.

Differentiation

Customers want to be taken out of the norm, drawn into an elegant atmosphere, treated exceptionally well, and pampered in a way that they do not usually get; they are willing to pay a higher price for this experience. At this level of expectation, every single detail counts. There is no room for error. Anything less than an outstanding personal experience will lead to customer dissatisfaction.

In a customer-centric organizational environment, it is essential that each person works towards meeting and matching the customer's expectation consistent with the product or service delivered. This creates an experience that is also consistent with the brand, or business promise. Clearly knowing what that is and being able to articulate it is essential, both to ensuring a great customer experience and focusing the organization on the right customer-centricity mandate.

Customer Centricity in Action



The Shape of the Customer's Need

If you were to stop and think for a moment about the need of your customer, what would it look like? What “shape” would it be? A dot? A circle? A square? A diamond? Chances are that whatever shape you’re thinking of in your mind, it is different from the one that represents the actual shape of your customer’s need. And because every customer is different, there cannot be one identical shape to represent every customer. Customers’ needs are vast, varied, personal, and complex.

When a customer goes to make a purchase, there are numerous factors that determine whether or not they will actually buy something, and what their overall experience will be. When caring deeply about your customer, it is important to work hard to figure out as many of those purchase-driving factors as possible, beyond their expressed and unexpressed needs.

There are influencing elements that your customer is not even aware of. For example, almost subconsciously, your customer might be influenced by family perceptions, blogger viewpoints, information from friends, and past experiences or folklore. These elements may be in the very back of their minds, far away from their conscious decision-making criteria, but nevertheless they are there.

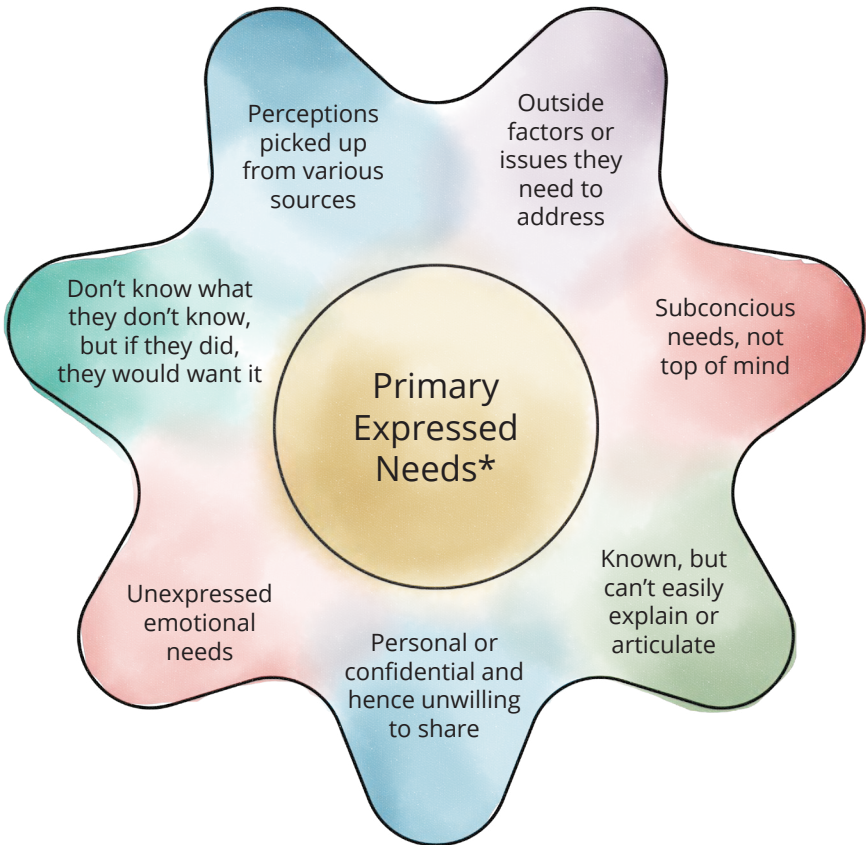
Then there are influencing elements that your customer is made aware of as a result of your company's marketing literature or sales team.

In search of a van...

A customer comes into the showroom wanting to purchase a new car. They say they are interested in a van, but then as a result of the dialogue that follows with the sales rep, they start to think about in-car entertainment, backup cameras, blind-spot avoidance, and infrared for dark roads. The customer came into the showroom with a specific need, but did not know all the factors influencing that need and their decision, until the discussion uncovered them.

Think back to the idea of the “shape” of a customer’s need. Considering that there are so many elements at play that are affecting the customer’s need, the shape of their need probably looks like the illustration on the following page.

It is a “blob,” a big, complex blob – and the better you understand it, the more effectively you can meet it, and then provide a great customer experience.



**If you were to respond to this, you would say the "shape" of their need was more or less "circular" when in fact, in this case, it's more of a "blob with points," of which the primary expressed need represents only a portion of the total need.*

The major space in the middle might be the smartphone itself. A space beside it might be the camera quality. A portion of the "blob" might be a story their friends told them about this brand of smartphone. In another corner, maybe they have personal bias against any other brand, and in a final section, how heavily they weigh customer reviews and online ratings.

Your customer's need is intricate and filled with all kinds of nooks and crannies. Gone are the days of thinking that a customer's need is a perfect square and that perfect square simply needs to be filled with a square-shaped peg. It is more complicated than that and it takes extensive probing to determine the precise shape of their need.

Give your customer-facing staff the initiative and ability to start a conversation, ask the right questions, dig deep, show patience, and listen carefully in order to engage each customer in a profound way that leads to the discovery of the shape of their need.

Then make it easy to pass that information back into the organization so they can do everything possible to ensure that the entire need can be met.

If you are aiming for a great customer experience, before any purchase option can be presented, the shape of the customer's need must be fully understood. This happens through the customer-facing person – but they are not in it alone. There is an entire organization behind them that is able to provide the information, education, background, tools, resources, and training they require to accurately identify and then meet the shape of each customer's need.

Recognizing the Degree to Which Expectation Influences the Customer Experience

Oftentimes, when we think about the customer experience, we think of it in absolute terms. We ask ourselves what we want it to be, how we can deliver it, and how we can organize our company to influence it. Essentially, we are describing the customer experience in a relatively predictable and linear way.

I think this is fundamentally an inadequate approach and here is why.

The expectation of the customer is a large influencer in the way they evaluate their experience.

Consider your stay at a five-star hotel...

Before you even walk through the doors, your expectations are high. You have paid top dollar to stay at this hotel, so you are expecting to be "wowed" and pampered at every moment. The lobby is spectacular, your check-in process is smooth, and the attendant who helps you take your luggage to your room is very courteous. So far, you are impressed. When you arrive in your room, there is a bottle of water waiting for you on the table by the window. "Perfect," you think to yourself, because you are feeling somewhat dehydrated after your travels on a particularly hot day. You pick up the bottle and in the blink of an eye you are disappointed.

The bottle of water is not chilled as it is not waiting for you in your mini fridge, so it is room temperature. Now, you are less happy with your overall experience because your expectation (cold water) was not met.

Alternatively, imagine that you do not stay at a five-star hotel, but rather a one-star hotel. You have a quick stopover in a remote city, and you decide to spend the night at an inexpensive place. In this scenario, you are not expecting much beyond clean and neat. Needless to say, you are certainly not expecting a bottle of water to be waiting for you in your room – warm or cold.

These two situations fall on opposite sides of the hotel industry spectrum. One hotel is a five-star and the other is a one-star. The customer expectation varies greatly for both, as does the way in which the customer rates their experiences at each. But as a customer, what are your expectations at a three-star hotel? Do you expect a bottle of water or not? Does the temperature of that bottle matter or is it irrelevant?

In all of these cases, your “customer experience” is driven by your expectation. The expectation of the customer plays a significant role in how they evaluate their experience and hence your organization.

Further, to compound matters, this expectation is not always predictable. (You may not expect that five-star hotel to have cold water waiting when there is a blizzard raging outside...but maybe something hot waiting in the lobby?)

How a customer rates or judges their experience is not only a function of what management has assumed about that customer experience, but also a function of the customer's expectations.

When you need a household item immediately...

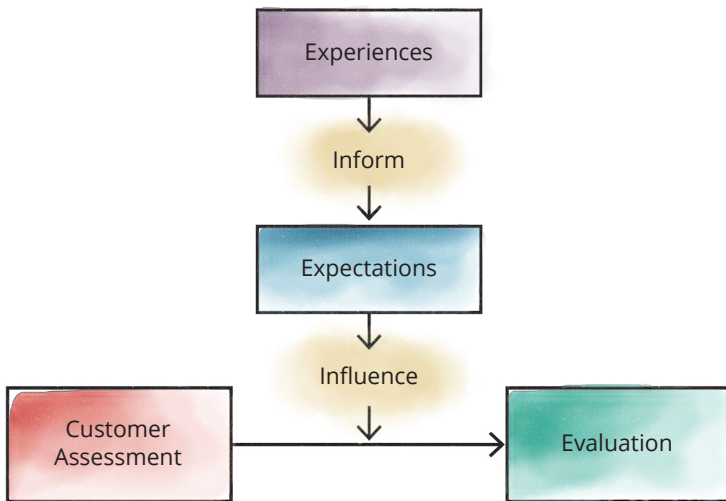
You know what you must purchase but you need help determining precisely which version of the product is best suited to your purpose, so you visit your local hardware store. It is large and busy, and you cannot find an employee to help you no matter how hard you try, so you decide to leave that store and try another in your area.

The second local hardware store you walk into is similar in size. The moment you enter, a friendly employee on the floor greets you and asks if you need help. You are thrilled! You tell them what you need, and they call a person from the appropriate department to assist you. Within five minutes, you have the correct product in your hands, it's paid for, and you are happily walking back to your car.

At the first store, you did not receive any personal assistance. At the second store, you did receive personal assistance in a kind, courteous, and efficient way, and you decide that you much prefer the second experience to the first. Now, whether you consciously realize it or not, going forward you have come to expect in-store help at hardware stores. Because you received that level of service at Store #2, now you expect it at Store #1. Meanwhile, Store #1 is not aware of your changed expectations. They are also not aware of the fact that this changing expectation may very well be occurring with other customers. Therefore, in order to stay competitive, Store #1 must have help on the floor, and if they do not, then their sales will suffer. It is not that Store #1 has done anything wrong, rather it is that Store #2 has served the customer better and has subsequently raised the customer expectations of what is possible at local hardware stores in terms of service.

This brings us to the issue of dealing with the reality of consumer expectations that are shaped by forces outside our industry, marketplace, geography, and brand, but which are nonetheless influencing how the customer experience we provide is judged.

In today's business world, we are seeing a migration towards an increased focus on a personalized customer experience. Irrespective of industry, organizations are rapidly trying to improve the experiences their customers have with their companies. For example, online retailers are analyzing, changing processes, and investing in new technologies to deliver their products to customers faster and faster – even that same day in some cases. In that industry, the organizations doing this successfully are inadvertently training consumers to expect instant access to products. Now, all of a sudden, the small, family furniture store up the street that takes three weeks to deliver a new coffee table is unacceptable. Again, it is not that they did anything incorrectly per se, it is that someone else did it better.



To be customer centric, you must not only pay attention to the customer experience but also your customer's expectation before they ever have that experience.

To effectively deliver to the expectation of your customer, again, look inward to find the solution. This includes the activities and decisions surrounding your entire organization, including brand positioning, pricing models, employee conduct, frontline workers (i.e., their uniforms, training, knowledge, personality), and so on. Every integral part of your organization has a contribution they can make to deliver to your customer's expectation.

**Four steps to follow to help address
"expectation."**

1. Stay in touch with evolving customer expectations, both within and outside your own industry.
2. Track these evolving expectations within your own company and determine how your customers rate you against them.
3. Communicate clearly to all employees what success looks like in this area and provide ongoing updates on the organization's current status at addressing them.
4. Equip employees with the mindset, tools, and empowering environment necessary for them to be able to contribute meaningfully as they work to ensure that customer expectations are consistently met.

Align Everything You Do against the Customer: Shaping the End-to-End Customer Experience



*Michelle leads
Marketing at
Eagle's Flight*

The Role and Importance of Marketing on This Journey

By Michelle Bennett

There is a mass disruption happening in organizations. Rapid digital innovation has launched a dramatic shift in customer expectations, and it is no longer enough to offer a great product or service. Customers are calling the shots and they are demanding simple, seamless experiences from the companies they engage with. The corporations that are winning in this new landscape are the ones taking a close look at every component of their business and then shifting their focus from the needs and wants of the organization, to the needs and wants of the customer.

Typically, business-to-consumer organizations lead the way in digital transformation, introducing new ways to deliver innovative products and services that

take advantage of the latest advances in technology, while business-to-business organizations often lag behind. Now, B2B customers are demanding the same experiences they enjoy as consumers when they make purchases for their organizations. These drastic technological advances have us all witnessing some industries change seemingly overnight.

How exactly are these digital transformations altering the customer experience?

Take the banking industry as an example. You can now conduct all your banking, whether personal or business, using your smartphone wherever you are. For the most part, you may never have to step into a physical bank again.

The personal ride service industry has been disrupted by apps that let you see who will pick you up and how much your trip will cost, and your credit card is automatically charged so you never need to worry about payment.

The retail industry has countless companies offering online purchases with fast, free delivery. This makes the buying process seamless, streamlined, and available from the comfort of your own home.

With rapid digital transformation and the resulting increase in customer expectations, organizations have no choice but to become more nimble and agile in their approach to doing business.

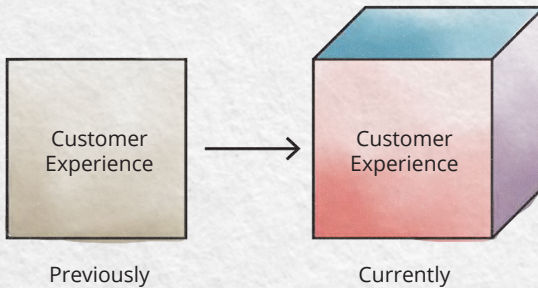
A personalized customer experience is the new standard, not the exception.

Now think of your email inbox...

When it comes to the emails you receive from businesses where you have made a purchase, you expect those messages to be personalized and relevant to you – whether the purchase was made online or off-line. How do you react when they are not?

How many times have you received an email that treats you in a different way than you expected? For example, you get a promotional email about a product or service you have already purchased. Or worse, you are prompted to pay an invoice you have paid previously because the company's systems are not aligned.

The value of an omni-channel personalized experience cannot be discounted. Customers expect organizations to know them and their preferences, and no matter the interaction – online or in person – they want to be communicated with in such a way that this knowledge is reflected. Winning organizations have a seamless experience across all customer interactions – if your systems, processes, and employee approach are not aligned across the full journey (service, billing, marketing, etc.), your success is limited. And it is a perpetual cycle. As companies keep innovating and pushing preconceived boundaries, customers have better and better experiences, which then become the new experiences customers demand no matter what or where they are buying.



Who within the Organization Should Be Best Equipped to Understand Every Facet of Your Customer?

It should be your marketing team who integrates all the data coming into your organization about the customer, whether from surveys, complaints, trend data, KPIs, NPS, or the front line.

Since marketers are the ones who have a finger on the pulse of your customers, including their behaviors, wants, and needs, it is often the marketing team that comes forward to indicate a problem or champion a customer-centric culture across an organization.

In the past, a Chief Marketing Officer had a clearly defined role at the top of the sales funnel, driving awareness and new leads throughout an organization. However, the role of CMO is now shifting to one that encompasses the responsibility to shape the end-to-end customer experience, expanding their influence beyond the walls of the marketing department and into the entire organization. In some cases, even their titles are changing – from Chief Marketing Officer to Chief Experience Officer.

This shift is happening due to the fact that these high-level executives see how profoundly important a positive customer experience really is. On the front line, they are in an ideal position to observe the rewards of great experiences such as positive reviews and media articles, as well as handling the fallout of negative ones, including poor ratings or outcries on social media. The customer experience is increasing in importance as a true competitive differentiator.

As job titles shift to reflect a greater focus on the customer experience, the customer is becoming central to every decision that is made within an organization. Companies need leaders who are mandated to work cross-functionally, to align everything they do with what their customers value, and in doing so, to make a significant impact on shareholder value.

Knowing Your Ideal Customer

Deeply understanding your customer is key to driving your marketing, sales, and service strategies. However, obtaining a holistic view of who your customer is, what they value, their

fears when making a purchase, and what they are trying to accomplish by engaging with your organization is no small feat. Begin by answering the following questions for your “ideal customer.” Keep in mind, you may have a number of profiles for the different types of customers you serve.

1. What are their personal demographics (i.e., age, location, education)?
2. In B2B, what is their role, industry, and company information?
3. What challenges do they face?
4. What are their goals?
5. How do they learn and consume information?
6. How do they like to interact with vendors?
7. How do they select a vendor?

As you seek to answer these pivotal questions, be aware of a common pitfall: your own assumptions and biases.

As business owners, executives, marketers, managers, and employees, we tend to become very close to our jobs and the industries in which we work. With that closeness comes an almost unconscious sense of “knowing.” Assumptions are deeply rooted in the psyche of the company, and upon reflection, we often find that we have a shallow view of the customer, which is based on what we think we know about them. This, however, is not always accurate.

The challenge is objectivity. It is easy to jump on a validation of our preconceived ideas of the customer based on the results we see, while simultaneously discounting the information gleaned that does not fit with our perceptions. Change is also a key factor at play. To think about your customer differently, you may need to change your viewpoint and go against what you have always thought – and naturally, there is a risk associated with doing this.

So how do we develop the correct customer profiles? Turn to qualitative (interviews, sales, and service teams' feedback) and quantitative (big data, analytics, and artificial intelligence) information.

A few ways you can better understand your customer may include the following:

1. Conduct Interviews and Focus Groups

Look outside your company. Conduct in-person and online surveys to collect information from your prospects and clients. It is important to include both your customers and lost prospects who purchased from your competitors wherever possible. In addition to interviews, another way to seek feedback is to determine who the influencers are in your industry and work collaboratively with them to learn about your customers. In this phase, it is often very useful to work with an agency to help you effectively survey your market to gain a deeper understanding.

2. Monitor Customer Activity

Continually monitor customer activity in your customer relationship management system to glean insights on what products or services are top sellers, the revenue generated, and the primary lead sources for these sales. Insights can also be found by mapping personal demographic information such as geographic region, company, industry, and role.

3. Keyword and Publication Research

What do your online visitors type in search engines to find information on you and your competitors? Where do they consume information? What types of information are they consuming? By identifying keyword phrases and the type of information they are interested in, you can develop your

strategy around those phrases and topics that are of most interest, providing your online visitors with valuable content that attracts and informs their buying decisions.

4. Observe Website Interactions

When a visitor lands on your website, what do they do next? Where do they go? What are they engaging with? Use heat maps to determine how visitors are traveling through your website. Learn the most popular pages, discover the content that generates the most conversions, and identify bottlenecks that need to be eliminated.

5. Ask Your Client-Facing Teams in Sales and Service

Turn to your employees who are in the field, interacting with customers every day. Request that they obtain feedback and get insightful information about prospect and customer goals, problems, opinions, and desires.

6. Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Analytics

Collect data in your customer relationship management software from all areas of your company and embed tools that allow predictive analytics to inform you on where you are excelling and where you are falling short. Predictive analytics and artificial intelligence help you identify who your ideal customers are and where you should focus your time for best results.

As you begin to make changes in your organization to incorporate this newfound knowledge of your ideal customer, it is important that you continually review and monitor the data and insights. This will help you find new opportunities and identify where challenges may lie in your current strategy.

Create Alignment throughout Your Organization

Once you have discovered what your customer cares about, it is time to take those insights and apply them across the organization.

Consider not only what your customers care about but also how those insights impact their entire journey.

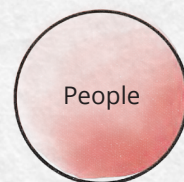
As you map and track that journey, remember that regardless of employees' individual functions and roles, alignment must occur across departments, sectors, and functions within your organization. From initial contact through to final purchase, and on to building advocates for your organization, you must design the journey and every corresponding process for the customer as well as remove any points of friction along the way.

Aligning the organization to the needs of your customer requires changing the way people do their jobs, the processes they follow to complete tasks, and the tools they use.

People, processes, and tools, discussed in greater detail in chapter 9, are three equal elements that must be accounted for as you build out your customer experience strategy.

People

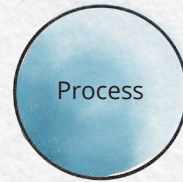
Often, when leaders think about the required changes to their team or across the organization to drive a great customer experience, they are also considering how to implement a new strategy, and how they will get to the desired outcome through new processes and tools. However, there is a critical factor that is often an afterthought, and that is how these changes will impact the way people do their jobs.



It is the employees in your organization who will execute the new customer experience strategy in their day-to-day lives at work. Changing the way people work and the behaviors needed for an excellent customer experience is anything but easy, because it requires a shift in how individuals think about the customer and perform their jobs. A change of this magnitude will almost always require training plans in order to ensure that employees acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to meet new performance expectations, follow new processes, and utilize new tools.

Processes

Outdated processes can put the organization at risk of falling behind or becoming irrelevant in the eyes of the customer. New processes must be developed to drive a positive customer experience and one that is a seamless journey throughout the various departments in your organization. To develop new processes and map the customer journey, use cross-functional teams to address important elements, including:



- The transition points to different departments throughout the journey
- Reducing possible friction points in the customer journey and experience
- Knowledge management and a central point of truth on the customer where all information is tracked
- Understanding communication channels to ensure that every touchpoint with the customer is aligned across the organization

These processes that align the organization and every employee around the customer experience are critical for success.

Optimizing sales effectiveness...

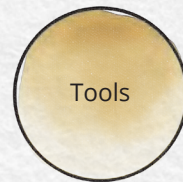
A company sells branded welcome mats to storefront, retail businesses in a large metropolitan city. There are eight sales representatives on staff, each of whom sells to and manages their own designated territory, except for the downtown core, which has two sales representatives assigned to it due to the high volume of storefronts. While this is inefficient for all the territories, it causes the most issues in the downtown area. The two representatives who share this territory do not follow a common process to enter data in a customer relationship management system, nor do they work collaboratively or strategize together because they are committed to and focused on hitting their personal targets. This results in constant errors with customers. On a regular basis, new prospects are contacted by both sales representatives – often within a very short period of time. Potential customers are frustrated, and the sales representatives are embarrassed. The welcome mat company does not have internal alignment around its sales process, and this is hurting its reputation, sales, and customer experience.

Tools

Software is a must in order to develop a central point for customer knowledge management and to leverage information that ensures personalization and relevance.

However, it is not the be-all and end-all. Digital tools can only do so much if people are not using them effectively. You must have correct behaviors and skills instilled in your employees to capture and utilize the data, as well as processes that are followed to ensure that the information is used in the right way, at the right time.

Transforming the customer experience requires more than an investment in new digital tools and processes; it also requires a deliberate focus on changing the mindset and behavior of



employees at every level of the organization. When employees understand the vision for the customer experience, and have support from leaders and opportunities to learn new behaviors, you can develop an organization poised to succeed by capitalizing on an exceptional customer experience.

When to Ignore the Customer

“If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”

– *Henry Ford*

If you rely solely on the input of your customers, you run the risk of stifling your innovation and creativity – or worse, missing an opportunity to create the next big thing in your marketplace. The truth is, customers do not know what is possible until it’s available. Think of the invention of the telephone, the automobile, the airplane, the internet, and the smartphone. These inventions created new market categories. They changed the way people live – they changed the world. Had any of these inventors or business owners asked their customers what they wanted, do you think those customers would have answered in a way that spawned that new development?

Understanding your customer is one thing. Listening to and applying their every comment is another. The customer is not always right. They are, however, deserving of an exceptional experience.

Know your organizational strengths and use them appropriately to ensure your competitiveness and growth in your marketplace.

Leverage your expertise, support your innovation, and continually grow your creativity in order to shape a market need that was not there before.

A customer-centric organization is one that is fully aligned with the customer experience. The foundation of a strong customer experience is understanding your different customers, creating alignment across the organization, and making a commitment to put the customer at the core of what the company does. The hallmark of success is when every decision that every employee makes is considered through the eyes of the customer and their experience.

Chapter Four

Creating a Culture of Customer Centricity

Culture Is Defined as the Sum Total of the Behaviors of All the Employees

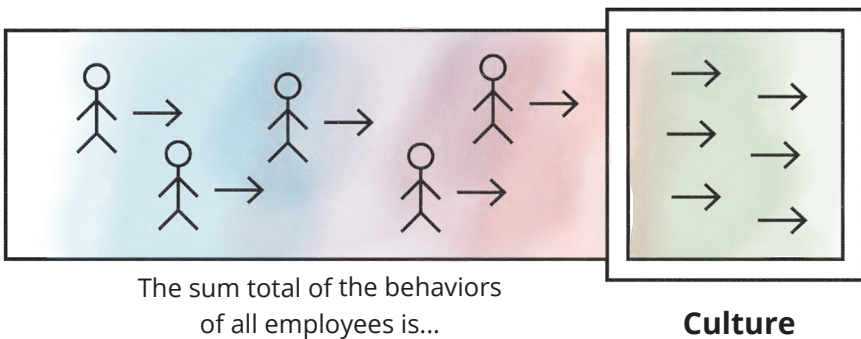
An organization's culture is not what management says it is, or what is displayed on the wall, or what is written in corporate binders – it is the sum total of what everyone in the company actually does. If employees are afraid to speak to their leaders, the culture is one of intimidation. If suggestions and ideas for improvement bubble up constantly from all levels, and the relevant ones are actioned, then the culture is one of true innovation. If leaders are instructed not to spend money on the acquisition of new tools within their departments to improve the customer experience, despite being told to always consider the customer, the true culture is one in which strategy is not supported by tactics.

Are employees focused on the customer when no one is watching? Do they always think about the customer, or do they only do so when explicitly prompted to do so?

In a culture of customer centricity, everyone understands why the focus on the customer is a priority and how important it is to the organization's long-term success. Considering the customer is part of everyone's thinking and decision-making process.

The ultimate goal is to raise the awareness level so high that every employee lives and breathes a customer-centric culture, whether someone is watching or not. This can be achieved by giving constant feedback, providing insightful data, communicating key marketplace information, addressing competitive pressures, providing training, and codifying best practices. In other words, it is essential to invest in the people so they know precisely what to do, as opposed to simply aspiring to do it. Then, even once they know what to do, it must be taken a step further to ensure that they know how to do it, so they get results from their aspirations. Give people what they need to translate their desire into action. Harness their potential, and the desired culture will emerge.

Success has occurred when the leader initiating the focus on the customer leaves, but the focus remains a priority for everyone.



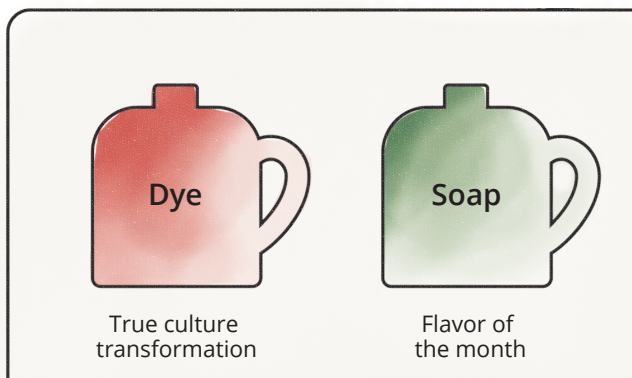
The Culture of Customer Centricity

If the organization is committed to customer centricity, then that focus must be imbedded in the culture.

A load of clothes goes into the washing machine...

You put a load of clothes inside and then accidentally add the red dye used yesterday to dye your son's Spiderman Halloween costume instead of soap. Unfortunately, you don't notice your mistake until you close the door and press start on the machine. It is then too late, and you know it. The dye has its effect and the outcome is permanent. In this illustration, your organizational culture is the water in the machine. Your people are the clothes. The soap and the dye are the changes you implement in an effort to make your culture and people more customer centric.

Soap represents all those non-permanent changes such as new posters on the walls, the establishment of a new department or chief customer officer, a customer-centricity manual and so on. These changes may have an impact, or they may not, but chances are you eventually wind up with dirty clothes that again must go back into the washing machine. Dye, on the other hand, represents permanent changes that make a lasting difference in your organization. If dye enters that machine, you know the changes to your clothes are there forever.



There are six things you can do to make “dye level” cultural changes in your company.

1. Ensure that the initiative is led, and is seen to be led, by senior management.
2. Create relevance for the people at every level of the organization, in a context they understand and identify with.
3. Effectively address any roadblocks related to the organization’s people, processes, and tools that hinder becoming truly customer centric.
4. Realize that there is a need to sustain the initial customer-centricity focus for two to three years. Keep the pressure on for an extended period of time to make sure it is permanent.
5. Have a robust communications strategy in place (i.e., why you are doing this, how you are doing this, and how results compare against those expected) so that there is always a dialogue around customer centricity.
6. Track what your customers and employees are saying. Turning to these two important groups to gather information puts the organization in a position to address small issues before they become big problems. This in turn keeps the customer-centricity initiative on course.

A Customer-Centric Mindset

If you were to ask your employees what they think about your customers, how do you believe they might answer? In most organizations, employees say they are aware of the customer and concerned about the customer’s experience, but it stops there. In practice, this does not migrate into proactive action beyond the normal responsibilities of the job. They do not

translate their awareness of the customer into personal initiative to benefit the customer. Employees do not see the correlation between their awareness of the customer, and their belief that they can actually do something to impact the experience of that customer.

Being aware is not enough. Just because an employee is aware of the customer and is thinking about the customer, does not mean they are customer centric. Customer centricity is reflected in the willingness to take action when there is an opportunity or need to do so.

There is a key distinction to be made between the awareness of the customer and proactively taking actions that improve the customer experience.

At the receptionist's desk...

If you ask the receptionist what their job is, and their answer is something like, "I greet people in the lobby, answer the phones, and transfer calls to the appropriate departments," they are not customer centric and could be readily replaced by a (usually annoying!) "automated attendant."

On the other hand, if their mindset and conviction were to be: "My job is to make sure our potential and existing customers feel as though they're looked after, cared for, and attended to. The phone, or the initial first impression at the desk that I create, are some of the vehicles we have at our disposal to make our customers feel great right from the outset." If they have this mindset, then they might answer each call like this: "Good morning, this is Jim. Thanks very much for calling ABC Company; what can I do to help you today?" They are committed to impacting the customer experience positively, looking for an opportunity to be of genuine assistance and make the customer feel valued. Definitely not something "... press 4 for our directory..." can accomplish.

When a customer's experience is shaped, formed, and impacted at every level of an organization, even small touches can contribute positively to the overall impact.

At Eagle's Flight we've had customers call in, only to pause en route to having their call transferred just to have a brief chat with a warm and cheerful receptionist.

In a customer-centric organization, you need both the mindset and the conviction in every employee that not only are the customer and their needs paramount, but also that each individual can do something to impact the customer.

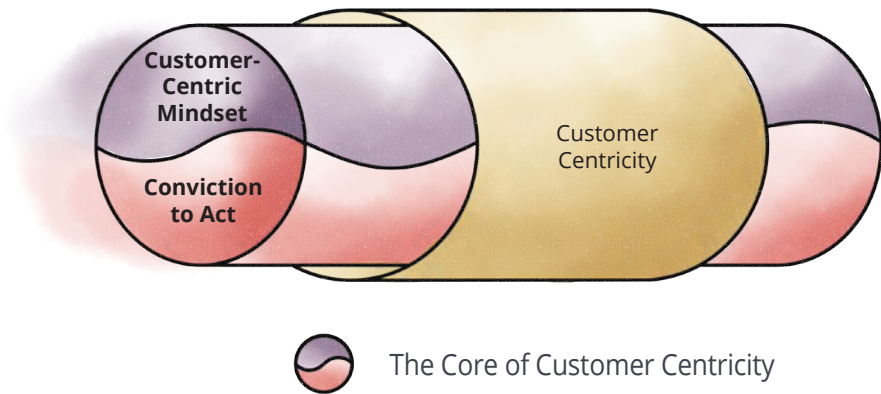
It sounds simple in theory but, especially for those who are not in front-facing positions, quite often employees feel as though there is simply nothing they can do – or they do not understand well enough what to do to make that impact. If you ask them if they are concerned about the customer, they say “yes”; yet in reality, they do not know how to translate that awareness and desire into action.

You may hold regular meetings to discuss your team's attitude towards the customer and promote the fact that everyone can make a difference in the customer's experience. During the session, everyone nods their head and agrees that the customer is of paramount importance and that they should do what they can to help the customer. The meeting is adjourned, and staff members go back to their offices to continue performing their functional jobs. Within moments, they forget about that notion that they can impact the customer's experience and they go back to worrying again about their own job and their own accountabilities, essentially putting the thought of directly impacting the customer “on hold.”

In order to be customer centric, you must move the mindset of your organization from “I am aware and concerned about the customer” to “I believe I have the ability to make a difference in the customer’s experience.”

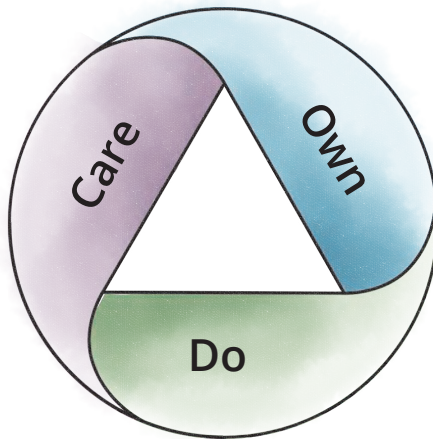
Once you accomplish this, you have employees with both the conviction and the desire to do something – to take an action – that makes an impact on the end customer.

The question then becomes...how?



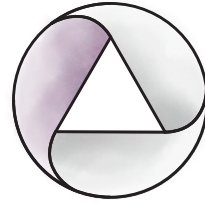
A Model for Bringing the Customer-Centric Mindset to Life

The following model defines the key elements of a customer-centric approach, and one that results in individuals making a difference to the customer's experience.



CARE

The first component is “Care,” which addresses the mindset and approach necessary to reflect a truly customer-centric culture.



You must genuinely care about both the expressed and unexpressed needs of the customer.

The customer always has an expressed and transparent need.

Just as it sounds, the expressed need is the one that the customer communicates. An expressed need is there for all to see. In other words, the customer does not hide it. They interact with a company because they want or need a product or service.

Clear needs...

When you go to a hospital, you need help. When you sit down at a restaurant, you want something to eat or drink. When you enter a car dealership, you are in the market for a new car.

An employee who is customer centric genuinely cares about each customer’s expressed need. What this means is that the employee first confirms what the need is. They care enough to pause and gather information to know exactly what to deliver.

But there is another side to the customer’s needs – the unexpressed ones.

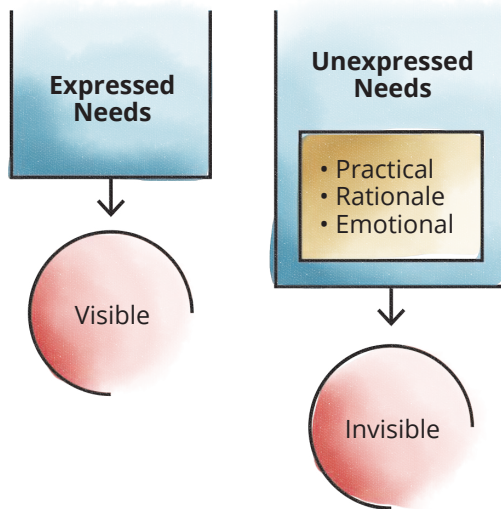
Unexpressed needs can be very practical and closely linked to expressed needs. For example, in the hospital an expressed need may be treatment for an injury and an unexpressed need might be clarity on the severity of the injury.

Unexpressed needs may also be tied to the reason for the expressed need. In a restaurant, a guest may request that their meal come quickly and the unexpressed rationale behind that

request is because they have tickets to a play right after the meal and they feel worried about being late.

And thirdly, **unexpressed needs** may be emotional. The expressed need is for a store clerk to exchange a customer's defective purchase, and the unexpressed need is an apology for the added inconvenience that a return trip to the store has caused the customer.

Customer centricity means caring about both the customer's expressed and unexpressed needs.



Regardless of where you sit in an organization – customer facing or in a functional support role – caring about both the customer's expressed and unexpressed needs can lead to decisions and actions that have the capacity to improve each customer's experience dramatically.

Caring about a need is when you try to understand both “the what” and “the why” behind the customer's needs. You step past the tangible and into the less obvious reason behind the request.

In the showroom of the local car dealership...

On this fine, sunny Saturday afternoon, a middle-aged couple walks in. The showroom greeter assigns the couple to you and introduces them. They tell you they are interested in a new sedan. This is a couple here to buy a car (that is their expressed need) and it is your job to sell one to them. You do not ask any more questions since they have told you they want to look at the sedans on the floor. As you take them around the showroom, you impress them with your knowledge of all the features unique to each car – at least that is what you think you are doing. In actual fact, the couple's eyes are glazing over, they are not really listening to you, and they could not care less about any of the features you are babbling on about. The truth is, the only thing that matters to them is whether or not they can buy a car within their budget today and are then able to drive it off the lot tomorrow, because their present car broke down yesterday, and they are headed south for a road trip in two days.

The customers walked in with an expressed need: to buy a sedan. This you knew – but you did not know about the problems with their other car, or their requirement for a fast purchase and delivery. This was their unexpressed need and the real motivation behind their decision. Had you known and cared about that need, you might have offered them a cup of coffee, sat them down in your office, and then gone immediately to speak with your sales manager to see which, if any, cars could be sold and driven off the lot tomorrow.

When you care about both expressed and unexpressed needs, you can do much more to influence the customer's experience.

Identifying a customer's unexpressed need is a by product of truly caring about the customer's experience.

You have just endured 24 hours of travel...

After a flight delay and a booking error at the car rental place,

it is 8:00 p.m. and even though you were supposed to arrive at your destination several hours earlier, you are relieved finally to be pulling up to your hotel. Needless to say, you are exhausted and starving. You spot a restaurant to the left of the hotel entrance and you run in for a quick bite before checking in. All that is going through your mind is, "Please let this be a fast meal of decent quality so I can get to the hotel and rest."

You walk in and the server pouring a beverage at the back bar calls a warm welcome and tells you to have a seat wherever you like. Plunking down at a booth by the window you grab the menu already on the table. Before you have had a chance to take a look, the server comes to your table and, after a quick glance at your luggage beside you, says, "Hi, how are you? Long day of travel? You look as though you need a quick burger and a draft beer so you can get out of here as soon as possible. Am I right?"

You are instantly impressed with the intuitiveness of your server and answer, "Exactly. That sounds perfect, thank you very much."

Then you sit back and relax. The server brings your beer and tells you your burger will be out in just five minutes. Two minutes later, an elderly couple walks in. The same server walks over to them and slowly escorts them to a table off in the corner. He asks the couple how they are doing tonight and what brings them to this particular restaurant. The three of them engage in friendly small talk about what the couple did that day, why they are out late, the restaurant specialties, the weather that night, and the events going on in the city on the weekend. Then the couple says they might just like a hot cup of tea and a dessert menu. The server says, "No problem at all. Here is our dessert menu. You sit back and relax, and I will be back in just a moment with your tea. Take as long as you like."

A service totally dissimilar from what you'd just been offered! Even though both you and the elderly couple will walk out of

the restaurant having had food and a beverage, you have each received an entirely different service.

By entering the restaurant and opening the menu, your expressed need, and that of the elderly couple, is that you want something to eat or drink. In your case, your unexpressed (and emotional) need was for the service to be fast and easy because you are exhausted. The elderly couple's unexpressed need was to pause at the end of the day, have a relaxing cup of tea, and spend a little time at a new restaurant in the area. Had the server not been paying enough attention to notice your luggage or to take a second to read your facial expression and see your state of exhaustion, then they would not have known your unexpressed need at all. They might have come to your table, told you about the specials, listed off all the beers on tap and told you they would be back with a glass of water before you placed your order. Had they not cared enough to read the body language of the elderly couple and talk to them for a moment, they would not have known to offer slow, relaxed, and accommodating service. Instead, it is evident that this server genuinely cared about every customer and their needs that night. Even more so, they cared about the total experience, not just the transaction (getting the food and beverages to the tables). They paid attention to things that extended beyond the immediate and expressed needs of the patrons.

Is it just an accident that this server cares about both the expressed and unexpressed needs of the customers who walk through the door, or does the entire restaurant organization care about the customers who come in? Think about the Human Resources department for a second. If HR truly cares about the customer, then they are intentionally recruiting servers who have an appreciation for the differences in people and their individual needs, and who care about what customers

truly need (both expressed and unexpressed). This goes far beyond a person's table-waiting skills. If this qualification is on the HR recruiter's checklist, then this confirms that they too care about each customer's needs.

Then think about the Finance department at the restaurant... HR goes to Finance and suggests paying servers a higher hourly wage than the going rate in order to allow for the recruitment of the right servers with the right personality and character traits to genuinely care about the customers. If the head of Finance does not care about the needs of the customers, they will answer with a straight "no," arguing something to the effect of a lack of budget to accommodate such a request. If, however, the head of Finance does care about the needs of the customers, they will listen to HR and put in the deserved thought, analysis, and due diligence to determine the feasibility of a higher hourly wage. They will do the math from a different perspective, and review the positive impact of providing a consistently enviable customer experience.

Caring is always thinking about how your decisions and actions impact the customer, not just meeting their expressed needs.

Now put yourself in the customer's shoes for a moment. The great thing about feeling truly cared for is that when you believe the person serving you genuinely cares, you are more willing to forgive them if they "mess up." If unintentional missteps are driven by care as opposed to incompetence or thoughtlessness, a flaw in the customer experience will be overlooked.

So with regard to the customer...

*You do not just need to be efficient,
you need to be caring.*

*You do not just need to be transactional,
you need to be thoughtful.*

*You do not just need to be practical,
you need to be emotional, personal,
and engaging.*

In a customer-centric organization, your role does not stop at the list of job-performance criteria. It extends beyond your day-to-day responsibilities. It becomes all about the customer's experience and how you impact it. Unfortunately, whenever we are presented with the idea that an employee is impacting a customer's experience, we automatically think exclusively about the people at the front line. We leave out the rest of the organization. Yet if everyone is involved in caring about the customer, then naturally everything about the company changes: it is designed differently, it is structured differently, it works differently, it makes policies differently, it hires differently, it operates differently.

Providing rental cars...

A customer-service representative at the front desk of a car-rental company inside the local international airport puts in an unexpected request to the purchasing department for 10 cases of bottled water. After weeks of serving travelers, the rep has learned how dehydrating and exhausting air travel can be, and they notice that when customers come to pick up their rental cars they look as though they could really use a bottle of water; the rep would like to raise their customer's experience above what all the other similar companies in the airport are doing. They care.

Within the purchasing department...

*The purchaser at a hotel chain is asked to buy 10,000 pens with the hotel logo on the side. They contact several suppliers, test out 20 different types of pens, and do 15 sample logo prints because they think long and hard about exactly what type of pen with what size of logo design the guests would really enjoy. Is it a ballpoint pen? Marker pen? Rollerball pen? Gel pen? Thin? Thick? Orange? Blue? Red? The price of the pen is not the only consideration. The guest's experience with the pen, and the fact that the guest may take the pen home as a reminder of the hotel, is also top of mind. **They care.***

This caring can be very powerful when you identify why a customer is there, what they need and how you can make their experience better. However, it cannot be done if you put the responsibility solely on the shoulders of the customer-facing staff – you need the organization behind those people thinking and acting in exactly the same way. Somebody above the rep on the desk has to approve the purchase of the water. When this happens, everyone in the organization asks themselves what they can do to impact the customer's experience because they care about it.

In other words, everyone comes to the realization that: “I can make a difference in the customer's experience.”

OWN

Once you truly care about the customer and their needs, you are ready to take the next step: “Ownership.”

To take ownership in relation to the customer means to take personal responsibility for their experience.



Instead of uttering phrases such as, “That is not my fault,” or “I could not do anything about it,” or “I am not responsible,” you start to think and act from another perspective.

Think of the customer experience as a large mosaic...

It is a 5x5 grid consisting of 25 bright and colorful tiles. The front-facing employee is only responsible for a fraction of those tiles in the customer experience mosaic. The rest of the members of the company are responsible for the remainder of the tiles. When you say, “It is not my responsibility,” this assumes that you think only about the way in which the interaction occurred at the actual time and place of the transaction. You may perhaps not be responsible for the transaction itself, but you are responsible for at least one or two of those mosaic tiles that influenced the experience surrounding that transaction. There’s no doubt that the person in charge of the transaction definitely carries considerable influence – but not all of it. The mosaic represents the compilation of everyone’s impact on the final experience of each customer.

The overall customer experience is a blend of many details including:

- The quality of service or product
- The policies in place to support the transaction or influence it
- The price, availability, and ease of purchase
- The character, values, and social contributions of the organization providing it

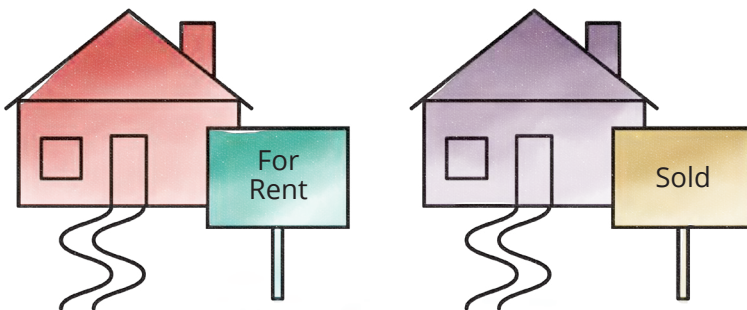
“Ownership” means constantly taking initiative related to the customer experience.

If you own something, you jump in. You immerse yourself. You initiate specific actions that will impact what you own.

Do you rent or own...

You currently rent a house in a quaint and friendly neighborhood. You come home from work and notice that the roof is leaking. You say to yourself, "No problem. I will phone my landlord right away." It is not your house because you do not own it and, therefore, this is not your problem.

On the other hand, if you own that charming house, even though you have just put in a 12-hour day at the office, you respond entirely differently to the same scenario because it is your house and you do own it. You have two choices: 1) climb up the ladder and go fix the roof yourself, or 2) call a roofer to come and fix the leak. Whatever you decide, the point is the issue rests on your shoulders. You are not in a position to pawn off the responsibility to someone else. You own it. Yes, you may delegate it to a roofing company, but if, for example, the roofer fails to fix the problem, you still own the need to do something.



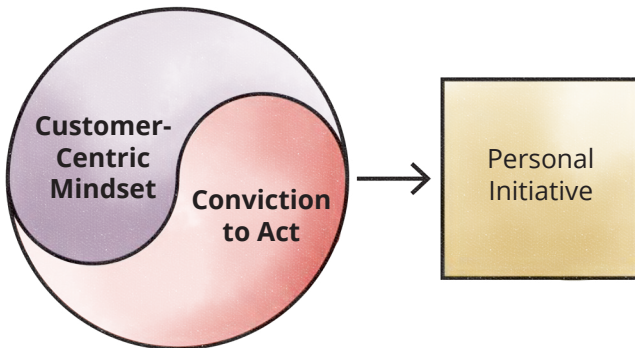
**Renter...It's YOUR problem
Owner...It's MY problem**

Own the Customer Experience!

In an organization, the difference between taking personal ownership or not, is the same as the difference between being an owner or a renter. When I rent, it is not my problem. When I own, it is my problem. You cannot treat the customer's experience like a rental experience! You must own it.

And when you do own it, you take the initiative to impact it. Without that initiative, you are merely an observer who is not actively doing anything about the customer experience. If you care about the customer experience but you do not take personal ownership for it, your caring is irrelevant because you are not acting on it.

This concept of ownership is powerful because it transcends functional lines, structures, and boundaries within an organization. When you own the customer experience, you own the whole experience, not just the experience as it relates to your specific function.



In the lobby...

At a high-end nautical-themed resort, there is a cast member standing in the lobby dressed in a captain's uniform with a hat, blue blazer, and white trousers. That is his role. As you enter, you think to yourself, "This is a really neat experience. The lobby is nautical themed, there is a yacht club look and feel, and wow, there is a captain standing right there!" If you are a grandmother and you are waiting to have the kids check in, you wander over to the captain to chat about the weather, the history, and the flowers. If you are a busy mom of three, you walk over to the captain as your kids are running around and ask about kid-centered activities and where you can catch the bus. If you are a child, you walk over to the captain and you see that he is wearing a lanyard for pin trading, and ask him if you can trade pins with him.

This "captain," who is a customer-facing employee, is interacting with a wide array of customers, but this one role involves many employees within the organization.

- HR has to figure out what the profile of the captain should be
- Those providing the "uniforms" have to decide about the right look, making sure it looks sharp and fits the person well
- Laundry has to make sure that the uniform is clean, pressed, and crisp
- Merchandising has to make the decision about which pins to give him

The employees in all these other functions are not customer facing, but meaningfully impact the guest experience.

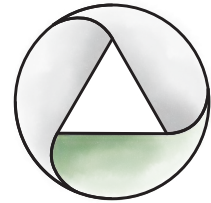
As a customer, your impression is that this is an organization that has thought about every detail – big and small – so that your experience is nothing short of outstanding.

Employees are clearly aware of the fact that they can personally make a difference in the customer’s experience...and they take the necessary action to make that difference.

This brings us to the next and final component of the model.

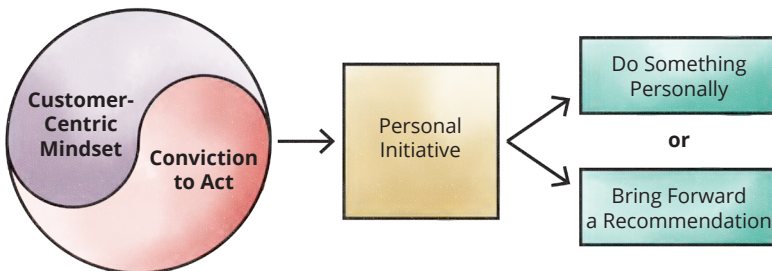
DO

If you care about the expressed and unexpressed needs of the customer, and if you care enough to take the initiative to own your role in the customer’s experience, then you must “Do” something to make results happen.



Taking initiative can happen in one of two ways:

1. **Action.** You physically go and do something with your own brain, hands, and body.
2. **Suggestion or Recommendation.** You see an opportunity that lies outside your area of responsibility, so you initiate a conversation with your superior in an effort to make something happen.



If the company enables and encourages all employees to speak up about anything that has the potential to impact the customer experience, then, if you are the one who is approached by a colleague to make a change, your first response will be to engage, not to feel offended and get defensive. You know the framework and mindset your colleague is coming from: you are all trying to improve the customer experience.

However, in an organization where everyone is not equally focused on the customer experience, the same scenario will likely evoke feelings of anger and resentment, or words to the effect of, "Hey, you do your job, I will do mine," or "It is not my responsibility."

When it comes to the customer experience, "doing" means doing what is right for the customer, and appropriate for the company.

You might argue that in order to do what is right for the customer, you must tell your employees to do whatever it takes to give the customer the best possible experience. This sounds nice in theory but is not correct because there are many other priorities a company also has: make money, pay good salaries, operate in an environmentally responsible way, be inclusive, invest in the future...the list is long. So then, instead of the direction being "Do whatever it takes to give the customer the best possible experience," it should be:

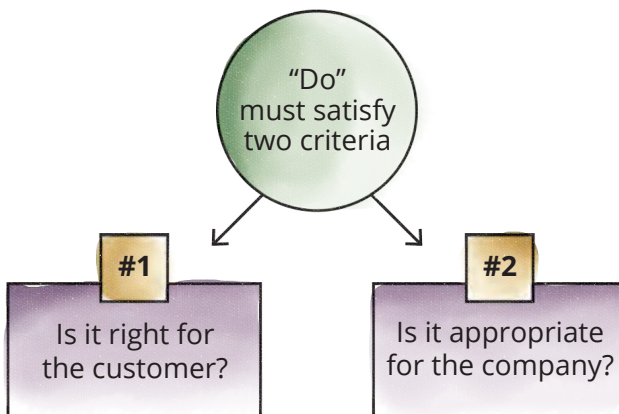
"Deliver the best possible experience to the customer in a way that is suitable, reasonable, and appropriate."

This is critical, because to miss out on the notion of "appropriate" is to make customer centricity impractical. Appropriate actions are well thought-out within the entire context of all the things an organization must take into consideration.

If everyone in the company follows the customer-centric model of Care-Own-Do and they want to do what is right for the customer, the question is, “How do I know what is right and what is appropriate?” The answer is twofold: first deliver to the expressed and unexpressed needs of each individual. Even though two different customers have come to the same company for the same expressed need, their unexpressed needs might be very different. As a result, the end product might be the same but the service through which it is delivered differs greatly.

Secondly, take the other factors that influence a company’s success beyond customers into consideration. These include things like: the way profit is generated, constraints on the supply chain, company values, strategic priorities, commitment to safety, quality, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and available resources.

In any given scenario, you must figure out what is right and what is appropriate.



Appropriate

To better understand this concept of “appropriate,” think of a coffee producer that sells its coffee to restaurants... One of the key components of success is to provide the freshest ground coffee beans to its customers. If this is the only thing that is important, then that company will have employees standing at the end of the production line, grabbing bagged coffee as soon as the bags are sealed, hopping in Ubers and taxis immediately, and then delivering the coffee within minutes to local customers.

Sure, the coffee producer’s customers would get the best, freshest coffee on the market, but offering such a service would put the coffee producer out of business in a week given the high delivery costs incurred. The action is not appropriate within the larger context. It does not make sense financially. Instead, coffee producers ensure that their customers get the freshest possible coffee through a distribution process that is within the boundaries of also being able to make money, which is “appropriate.”

In the “Do” phase of the model for customer centricity, the doing revolves around what is right for the customer and what is appropriate for the company.

Within this, there are two options available to every employee:

1. Do something personally.
2. Identify what needs to be done and move it up the organizational hierarchical chain.

**Option 1:
An Employee Can Do Something Personally**

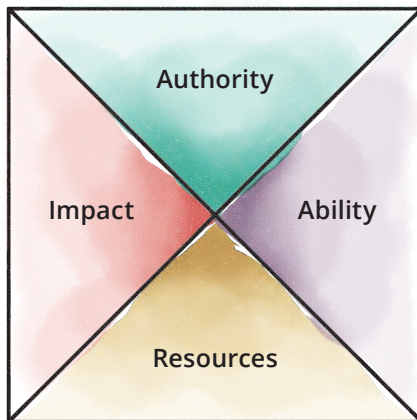
The knowledge needed to determine when to do something personally, and when to move it up, is made possible through the establishment of the “framework” that defines each person’s job.

Picture this framework as a box that every employee has. The box tells you what is appropriate and inappropriate, when it comes to the responsibilities and actions associated with your specific job and individual skill set, relative to customer-related issues. For example, can you fulfill a refund? Exchange a product? Upgrade a room? Give a free meal? Write a letter of apology? Change a process? Rewrite a policy?

Every employee framework, or “box,” has four sides, and each side represents an important element with respect to what they can and cannot do themselves.

When you take the initiative to do something personally in relation to the customer experience, it is because you do not need permission to do it, since it falls within your framework.

Each side of the framework represents an element of what they can and cannot do.



The four sides of the box, or framework, are:

1. Ability

Do you have the ability to do it (i.e., the knowledge, skills, physical strength, or mental capacity to complete the task)?

2. Resources

Do you have the resources to do it (i.e., the technology, budget, tools, or team to properly execute the initiative)?

3. Impact

Do you understand the impact it might make if you do it or do not do it (i.e., the possible repercussions on customers or fellow employees)?

4. Authority

Do you have the authority to do it (i.e., the right and permission to take personal action)?

Imagine you are the architectural designer for a large coffeehouse chain...

It is time to redesign the interior space. You start by thinking about the people coming to the coffeehouse. What are their clear needs? They want something to drink. Maybe a small snack as well. Depending on who they are with and what day it is, they might be looking for a comfy lounge area to spend an hour or two catching up with a friend, or a small table and chair in the back corner where they can get some quick work done before their next appointment.

Once you review the necessary considerations, and you have an idea of how you would like to design the coffee shop interior, it is time to figure out how far you can go with the initiative.

So, you ask four questions:

Do I have the ability to redesign the coffeehouse?

Yes, being a certified architect and interior designer with years of experience designing in the retail field.

Do I have the resources to do it?

Yes, my company has given me a reasonable budget to work within and has assigned a team of people for me to delegate in order to execute the project.

Do I understand the impact it will make?

Yes. According to my research and analysis, the redesign will attract more customers to the shop, and will have a direct and positive impact on how long those customers stay and what they buy.

Do I have the authority to do it?

Yes, having been assigned to lead this project.

You have the ability, the resources, the understanding, and the authority to redesign the coffeehouse. So that is exactly what you do. If, on the other hand, you do not have all four framework elements in place, then you may not be able to take action on some aspect of the initiative.

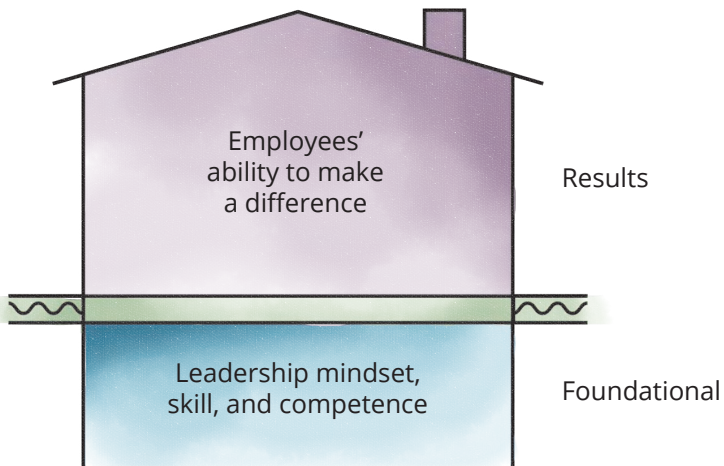
Where does an employee get the information they need to effectively and accurately determine the scope of these four elements for themselves in any given situation?

They go to their leaders for insight.

The Role of Leaders with Respect to the Framework

The success of any customer-centricity effort is linked more to the leaders of an organization than the employees.

Let's say your organization is ready to become customer centric and you decide to focus on your employees. Great, but then you actually need to focus on your leaders more than your employees, because your leaders are the ones who help the employees understand their framework and how to operate within that framework. However, before they can do that, your leaders must first understand their role and the significance of that role within the entire customer-centricity initiative.



As a starting point, leaders must recognize that employees are not “static.” They are living, breathing, growing human beings who are constantly evolving. As they learn, develop, and gain experience, an employee’s framework should not stay static – it should change with them. If their personal capabilities grow,

then they are simultaneously accumulating greater ability, resources, authority, and appreciation of the impact they are making.

If a leader does not adjust an employee's framework to coincide with the growth of that employee, then they are limiting the very ability of that employee to improve the customer experience. On the other hand, if a leader sees that an employee's framework is too large, it is critical that they shrink it down to an appropriate size.

Every framework must be designed and deployed according to each individual and each situation. It is not a one-size-fits-all equation. Regardless of title or job description, an employee's framework is a direct reflection of their personal capabilities.

And it does not end there.

It is not enough for a leader simply to set and adjust their employees' frameworks. Leaders must also coach employees on the application of their respective frameworks. For example, "Here is how you can exercise your ability to..." or "You missed the mark slightly on this task and here is how to improve..." or "You did an exceptional job and here is how we can translate that success into future projects..." It is an ongoing job. The coaching, guiding, supporting, and helping never ends. Clearly, leaders have a great responsibility resting upon their shoulders to enable employees to effectively operate within their frameworks.

One of the most important components of focusing on customer centricity: it is not only about having the right culture and empowering your workforce – you need capable leaders to equip employees with the tools they need to make a positive impact on the customer, and provide them with ongoing coaching in the use of those tools.

Option 2: An Employee Can Identify What Needs to Be Done and Move It Up the Organization

What happens if you are an employee who wants to take the initiative to impact the customer's experience, but the area does not fall within the framework of your responsibility and expertise?

An idea worth considering...

Imagine you are an employee who has an idea for a new beverage at a smoothie stand, after talking with customers who say there are not enough strawberry options on the menu. You know that before you can take action, you must ask yourself the four key questions that will tell you whether or not this task falls within your framework:

Do I have the ability to make the new smoothie?

Yes. I have been well trained to make just about any type of smoothie beverage.

Do I have the resources to do it?

Yes, I think I have all the ingredients.

Do I understand the impact it will make?

Yes. I believe strongly that customers will thoroughly enjoy the new strawberry option on the menu and buy more based on the volume of requests coming in.

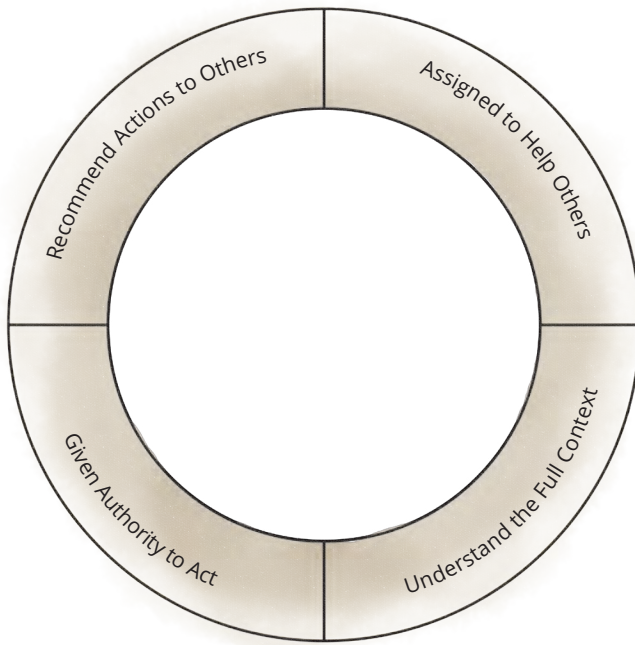
Do I have the authority to do it?

No. Developing new smoothie formulations is not in my job description and is not something I am permitted to do.

You answered "yes" to three of the questions but in order to do something personally, you must also answer "yes" to the fourth component of the framework. In this case, you realize that making the beverage is within your framework but not its formulation, so you cannot take action yourself.

What Now?

It is time to use “the Gateway” to escalate your idea or, in other words, go to your immediate supervisor and raise it up a level.



The “gatekeeper” of the Gateway is the employee’s immediate superior and, therefore, a leader in the organization. Simply put, the gatekeeper is someone who stands at the door of the framework and decides what stays in and what goes out. Given this, it reinforces again how truly important is the role of the leader.

So, as a gatekeeper, you have just been presented with a well thought-out idea from a customer-facing employee to create and add a new strawberry smoothie to the menu. It’s been taken up a level...how do you respond?

The Gateway

Whatever your decision, you want to make sure that you acknowledge your employee's idea and keep them motivated and engaged in the end customer's experience. You need structure and practicality – a solution that works well for your employee but that also makes sense for your company.

When you are approached as a gatekeeper, you choose one of four possible responses:

Give the required authority
Assign the employee to work with others
Assign a different employee or team to the implementation
Say “No,” but with a complete explanation to maintain employee engagement

1. Give the Required Authority

“That sounds great. I give you the authority to go ahead and do it yourself.”

This requires thought because there are many implications that come along with this permission. Can the authority just simply be given? Do you need to train the employee, so they use the authority properly? Do they need additional resources? Does the employee need to be monitored? By only giving authority and then taking a step back you are not guaranteeing the success of the employee. As the leader, in order for you to effectively grant authority, you may need to step up and also provide coaching, guidance, support, and teaching around how the employee needs to manage that authority.

As the gatekeeper and leader, you cannot simply give authority and then wash your hands of the matter. You must make sure that your employee does not misuse the authority and that they act appropriately. Think through the implications of giving someone more authority and do whatever is necessary to ensure that they use it appropriately and effectively.

2. Assign the Employee to Work with Others

“That sounds great, but you cannot do this on your own because there are dedicated formulation experts who handle the development of new smoothie recipes. So, I am going to arrange for you to spend time with the formulation experts to help implement this.”

In this case, as the gatekeeper, you agree to pursue the employee’s idea but with the help of additional team members. Similar to giving authority, you cannot simply send the employee to work with this new team. Maybe the employee is junior to everyone else and does not understand the implications of being on such a team. Perhaps they do not know how to communicate their idea effectively so that everyone understands precisely what needs to be done. It is your job as the gatekeeper to ensure the success of the employee when they are assigned to the team, and you need to confirm that the idea is properly implemented. There is always the risk of a great idea that gets poorly executed – not because the idea is bad, but because the employee assigned to the team does not yet have the communication skills to present the idea in a way that the rest of the team can act upon.

As the leader, it is your job to coach your employee and provide the ongoing support they need.

3. Assign a Different Employee or Team to the Implementation

“That sounds great. There are formulation experts in our company who can bring this new smoothie idea of yours to the development phase. I will pass this on to the appropriate people since it is really outside our roles here at the stand.”

As the gatekeeper, you have decided that this idea is just too far outside the employee’s purview for them to do anything on their own. The employee is a smoothie-maker at the front line, whereas the actions required to develop a new smoothie lie with the formulations team, who ultimately must put it into action. In this case, you send the idea to that team for review and action.

The employee can meet with the formulations team and share their ideas about the new recipe and why they think it should be developed, but others take it from there.

In this scenario, as the leader, you are the conduit between the employee and the operating body (the formulations team). You facilitate the communication between the employee with the idea and the group that must take action to make it happen. You are there to make the employee feel valued, and at the same time, make sure the idea comes to the right group to be considered. You might decide that this facilitation happens by helping the employee prepare their presentation, joining the employee in the room when the presentation is made, or helping to answer questions from colleagues afterwards.

4. Say “No,” but with a Complete Explanation to Maintain Employee Engagement

“That sounds great. However, we will not implement this change right now because our smoothie development team just recently conducted a thorough analysis of its menu. After surveying customers over the last six months, it was

actually determined that many of our old strawberry options were not selling well. Of course, that is not to say our target audience has not shifted again since that analysis took place, and there is always room for improvement. Please keep monitoring the situation and report your findings back to me in another two months.”

As the gatekeeper, you decide that the idea will not be executed. There may be many reasons for this: it was recently tried elsewhere and failed, consequences for failure are too high, it will take too long to implement, the recent analysis makes it unlikely to succeed, etc. As the leader you have insight that your employee does not. You know with absolute certainty that this should not be done.

Two things must be communicated: 1) the answer is “no,” and 2) here is the reason why. If the full context is not explained clearly, as the gatekeeper you will disempower your employee.

No matter which of the four answers a gatekeeper gives in response to an employee’s request, the role of any leader in an organization is to ensure the sustained engagement of the employee who came to them.

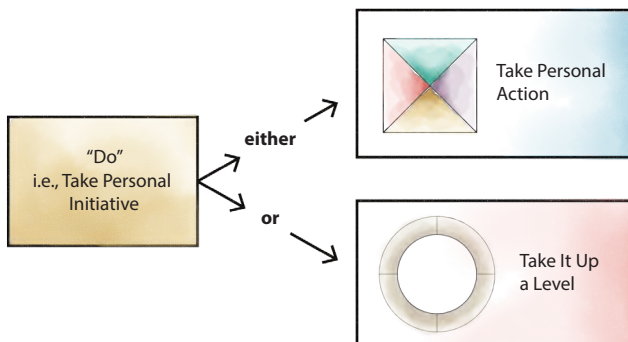
As a leader, it is critical that you give your response carefully. No matter which of the four approaches you choose, you must communicate the fact that we remain customer centric and that you value your employee being customer centric. It is common for leaders to feel as though they must implement every new idea that comes their way. On the other hand, sometimes leaders think their role is to make sure nothing changes at all. In reality, sometimes the answer is to implement, and other times it is not. Therefore, it is essential that the leader understands their role in the Gateway. If they do, then they also understand the fact that the employee’s desire to improve the customer experience is precious, and some response must occur.

The employee too must understand the concept of the Gateway as well as the framework. They need to know what is appropriate and expected within their own framework, and then also know that if they cannot get something done on their own, they have the gatekeeper to go to. Employees must also know what to expect when they go to their gatekeeper – in other words, the four possible responses they might receive. This is vital because if they do, it is easier for the leader to respond in the most appropriate fashion. Leaders will know that their employees are already aware of the fact that the response will be one of the four options.

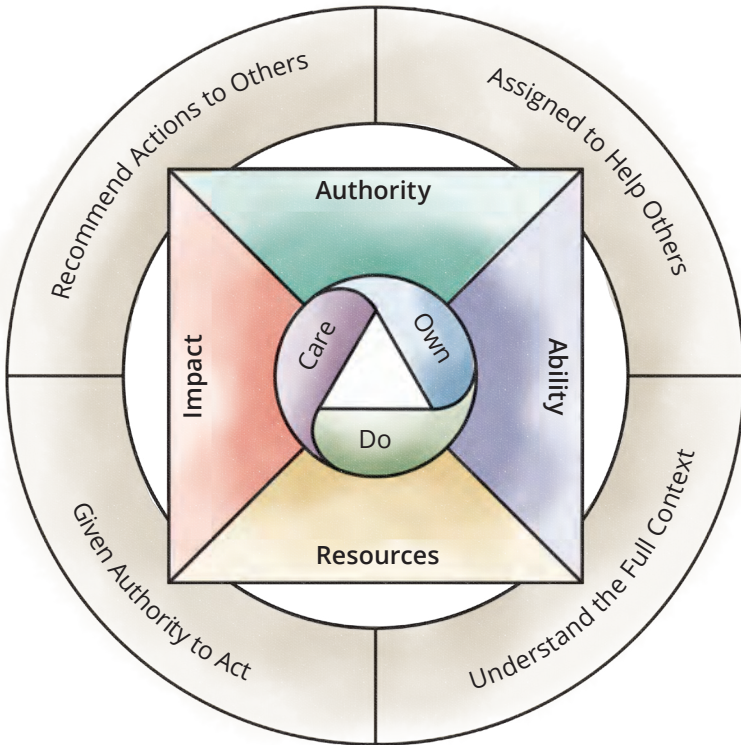
Part of your organization’s culture around customer centricity must be to communicate what you expect from your employees, i.e., Care-Own-Do. Under “Do,” employees are free to act within their framework, or be aware of and go to the Gateway.

Using these two tools, your employee believes, “I can make a difference in the customer’s experience because I can either do it myself or identify what needs to be done and use the Gateway to raise it up a level.”

These two tools are combined and summarized in the following model.

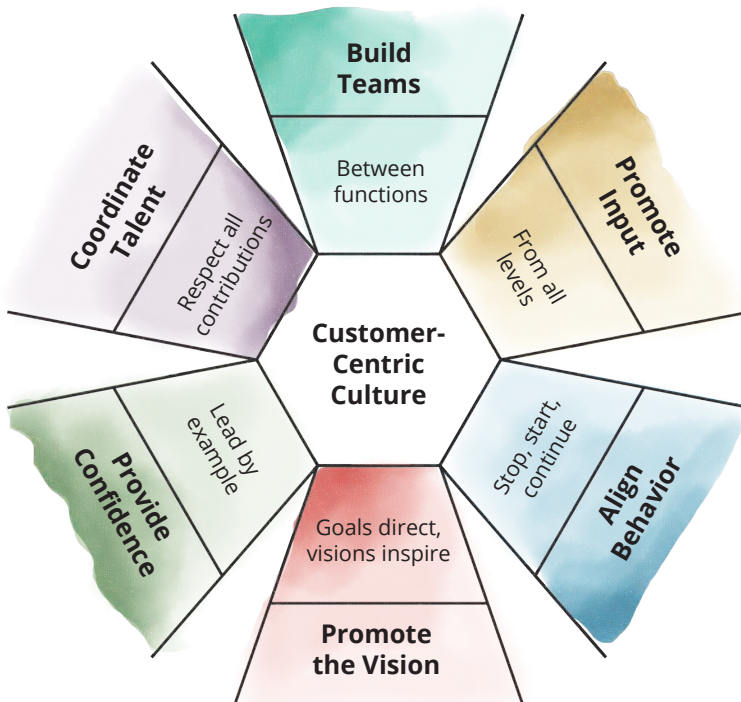


When you establish and live by this approach, you give your organization a way to truly benefit from a customer-centric culture. It is not enough simply to think in a customer-centric way, you need to operate in this fashion. The magic behind this simple two-step system is that there is always a solution. No matter who they are or what they do, everyone in the organization can always do something. Even when they cannot do it themselves because it is not within their framework, they can use the Gateway to move it forward.



Six Focal Points to Bear in Mind in the Creation of a Customer-Centric Culture

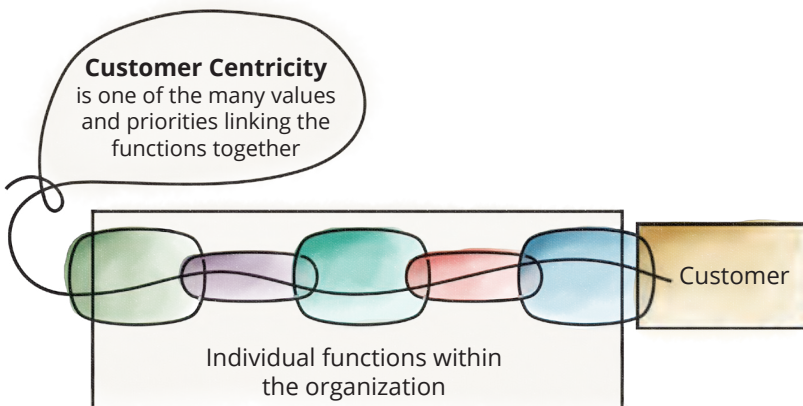
Developing and fostering a true customer-centric culture is a deep and comprehensive process. Here are six areas of focus to consider.



1. Build Teams

When you address the concept of customer centricity, you must think about the interrelationship between functions.

Visualize a chain with many links. The chain is the organization. The links represent the functions within the company, with the customer at the end of the chain.



When each function is successfully linked together, you are best able to serve the customer effectively. However, every link must be both strong in its individual performance, and in its links to other functions in terms of thinking about the customer. In a scenario where one function helps the next, it is important that each determines how to ensure strong links between one another. It is a team effort.

There is a distinct difference between a “team” and a “group of individuals.” A group of individuals is several people who are each independent, whereas a team is interrelated and interdependent.

Imagine you are in the IT department of a restaurant... It is your job to create software for the staff on the floor. In your role, you must think about the customer, but you must also think about the people using the software: the hosts and hostesses. In any given function within a company, everyone needs to think about the people they work with and the end customer. Each function must work collaboratively with the others in the achievement of a common purpose. Interactions take place in the fulfillment of a shared goal: an exceptional customer experience.

Each functional area should ask itself:

*How do we influence the customer collectively as a team?
And therefore...how good are our team skills?*

If your answer to the latter question indicates a lack of skill, then there will likely be a problem, because the end result for your customer depends on the strength of the teams inside your organization. The priority is to never let a teammate fail and, to take it a step further, each function should be asking the question: "How can we help the other people in this 'chain' be successful?" If each function only thinks about the customer, they will not get very far – they must also think about the rest of the people inside the organization, how those people also impact the customer experience, and then how they can help them with that priority.

When this is not happening inside an organization, what occurs is rework, waste, error, and delay, all of which impact the Value Constellation in some fashion. Further, these issues most often do not occur inside a particular function but rather at the border crossing between two functions; that is where friction and problems typically arise.

Hiring a new marketer...

The HR department must collaborate with the marketing department of an organization to hire a new individual. Both functions know that the end goal is to hire a new person, but where potential frictions can occur is in the details, such as who to hire, when to hire them, how long it will take, how much they will be paid, and so on. Visualize the gears of a machine for a moment. Think of how they connect and move together. The integrity of any given gear is one thing, but how smoothly and effectively it integrates with the next gear is an entirely separate issue. Not only must every gear (function) be strong, but also the meshing in between them (teamwork).

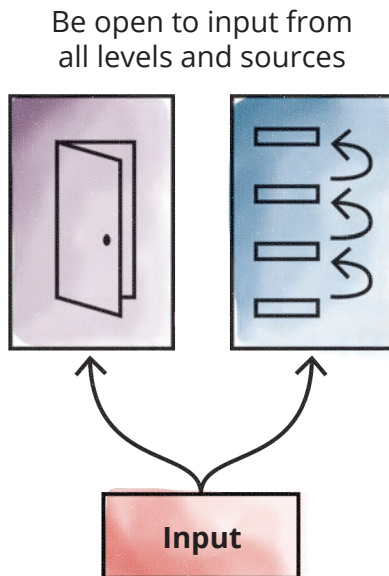
2. Promote Input

Thoughts are as valuable as actions. Everyone involved in a specific process or system has an idea of how they might be able to enhance the customer's experience. As individuals, we have individual perspectives; everyone's perspective must be respected, even though it may be different from another's. For example, in many cases people do not value a new opinion because they already have their own personal beliefs on the subject. Input is rejected because it is coming from a different viewpoint. It is not necessarily that the people rejecting it are trying to be rude or unfair, it is that they merely think the other viewpoint is irrelevant.

In a customer-centric business culture, you have the potential to acquire input from hundreds, even thousands, of people, both internally and externally. Everyone can have a point of view. While other people's input is easy to reject (too junior, too unimportant, too seemingly irrelevant, etc.), every time you dismiss a comment, observation, or suggestion, you run the risk of missing an opportunity to potentially enhance the customer experience from the point of view of the person giving the input. Having said that, you certainly cannot accept

every piece of input you receive. Instead, make a committed effort to hear everything brought to your attention – then make a judicious decision which input to act on.

Deciding to be open to input is only half the task. The other half is that soliciting input must also be actively promoted. Obtain input from both employees and customers. Do not lose sight of the fact that oftentimes the person who is face to face with your customer is also the person who is the most junior within the organization. As a result, the inclination may be to more readily reject their input; and yet, is this wise, knowing that this is the person most engaged with your customer? There is another factor at play here as well: the most junior people in the organization, your frontline workers, may also be the most reticent to share their point of view. So it is essential that input from every level is promoted and encouraged and, in particular, from the customer-facing level.

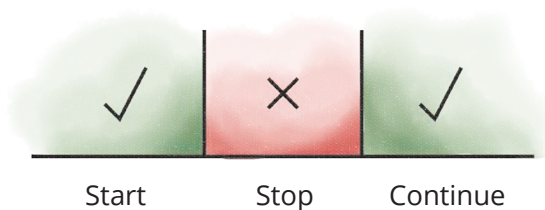


3. Align Behavior

Once you make the decision to be a customer-centric organization, there are new questions that loom ahead: What exactly does “being customer centric” mean for us?

What needs to be done in order to achieve this, and more importantly, what needs to be done differently?

The desire to be customer centric must be translated into specific actionables. Initially, it is simply identifying the issue and training the workforce to think in a customer-centric manner. Follow this by teaching them the Care-Own-Do model, then explaining the framework and Gateway. Once all of this is in place, it is critical that everyone in the organization hears the same information consistently. For example, share data every week on how the company is performing in the area of customer service. Relevant metrics can be shared with each department, manager, and employee. Everyone in the entire company must know the current status and effectiveness of the customer-centric priority so they can align their behaviors to improve them.



Ensure that everyone in the company is not only thinking about alignment but is also intentionally working to achieve that alignment. In the creation of a customer-centric culture, there

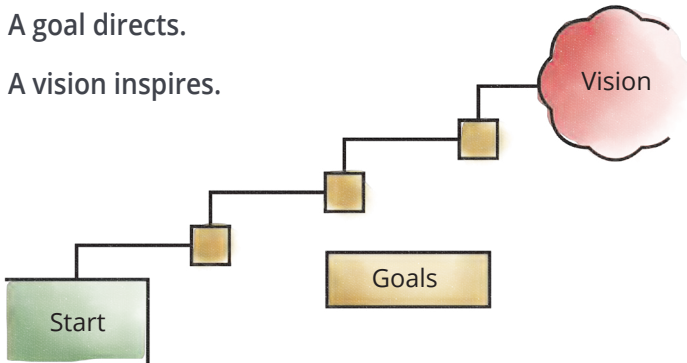
will be specific actions and activities that people will need to keep doing, activities you want them to stop doing, and activities they need to start doing. It is critical that you align everyone on precisely what to do and how to do it. By doing so, you align behavior throughout your organization.

4. Promote the Vision

There is a key distinction to be made between a goal and a vision.

A goal directs.

A vision inspires.



Reordering a personal library...

Consider an initiative to reorganize the books on the shelves of a private library in an exclusive private home. The goal to perform this task is communicated as follows: On each shelf, organize the books according to color. The vision for the task is communicated like this: We want to create the trendiest, most visually appealing library possible, and one of the ways we will make this happen is by sorting our books by color on every shelf.

In both cases, the task at hand is the same. When you hear the vision, however, what you have is the greater context, and as a result, you feel more enthusiastic and motivated to execute the task and can bring your initiative to bear (if, of course, sorting books by color is your thing!).

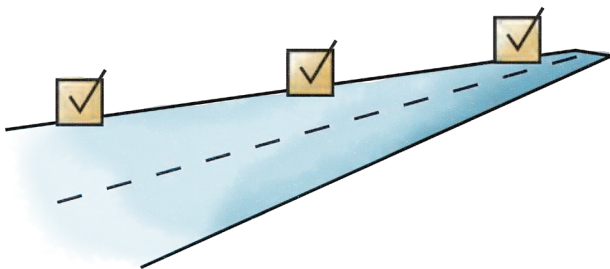
Think of climbing a mountain...

The goal is to arrive at the top and see the most astounding view of the surrounding area. The vision is to climb the mountain and then be able to look back down and reflect on what you just achieved: making it to the top despite the hurdles, difficulties, challenges, and harsh elements you faced along the way – an accomplishment you will carry with you throughout your entire life and which will give you confidence to overcome other major challenges. Goals direct; visions inspire.

When it comes to customer centricity, you cannot focus solely on goals. Goals are clearly an essential part of the process and they do get the tasks done – but they are not usually inspiring. Customer centricity requires the inspiration behind the goal. From the start of your customer-centricity initiative, and regularly and consistently going forward, you must continually demonstrate and share the vision. Without the vision top of mind, it is far too easy to forget the goals vital to its achievement. The vision you choose to communicate acts as the driving force behind feeling and doing what is necessary in order to be truly customer centric. The vision gives the why, the goals the next step to take.

5. Provide Confidence

Picture that your organization is moving in a positive direction.



Your customer-centricity initiative is underway and the potential for improvement is great; however, the company does not have the confidence to do what you are asking of it, nor is it confident that the initiative will work. Confidence does not simply come from the statements you make verbally.

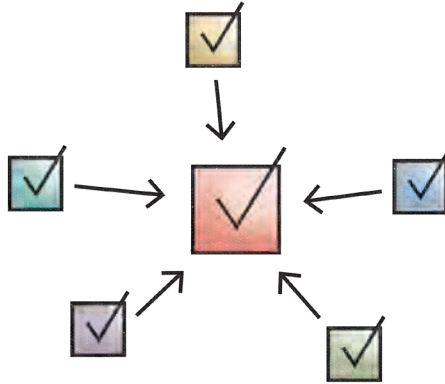
An acquaintance enters into a weight-loss program...

The program leader tells the new participant that they can lose 50 pounds by walking 5 miles per day for 8 months. The thought process in the mind of the new participant is disbelief and wonderment, because they do not see how they can lose 50 pounds by following this regimen. Then the program leader puts the participant in contact with 10 other people who have followed this precise regimen and who lost 50 pounds successfully in 8 months. This changes the participant's point of view. The program leader has provided the new participant with confidence.

Within an organization, a good leader must provide ongoing customer-centricity-related coaching to their team, model the behavior they want to see, communicate the importance of the new mandate, and demonstrate that employees are safe and supported as they navigate their way through the new process and mindset. They need to instill confidence in the approach, and its ultimate successful outcome.

Help employees through their customer-centricity journey. It is important that they know there is support beneath them when they falter. Instead of criticizing, offer learning experiences. Make a point of focusing on positivity, not negativity in order to foster and grow confidence.

6. Coordinate Talent



The server at an upscale restaurant prepares Caesar salads tableside. Each of the ingredients is in its own individual bowl: garlic, anchovy filets, lemon juice, red wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, raw egg yolk, Worcestershire sauce, olive oil, salt, pepper, romaine lettuce, Parmesan cheese, and croutons. For most people, at least a few of these ingredients do not sound (nor look) very appetizing taken by themselves, and yet once they are mixed and blended together in their proper order in a separate bowl to become the final salad, the appearance and taste are spectacular!

*Think of the completed salad as your organization...
...and all the individual ingredients as the many different functions within it. Each function has its own definition, role, and responsibility, but when the functions are integrated appropriately, the end result is spectacular. Each function must be strong on its own but also coordinated throughout the organization to achieve the desired result.*

It begins by respecting every individual, acknowledging and welcoming different backgrounds and points of view, and valuing the worth of each human being. Only once this happens can you start to think about the aggregate: delivering an exceptional customer experience.

This is the magic: the ability to coordinate all the talents within the organization in such a way that they collectively deliver the experience your customer will claim is spectacular.

*In order to arrive at this result,
you must have **great teams***

*To have **great teams**, you must **promote input***

*When you **promote input**, you need to **align everyone's behavior***

*For **behavior alignment**, you must **promote the vision***

*When you **promote the vision**, you then need to **provide the confidence** to fulfill that vision*

*And once you have the **confidence**,
coordinate all the functions within your
organization so the end result is truly
unlike any other in the eyes of the customer*

Is There Such a Thing as “Internal Customer Service”?

Many organizations are under the impression that there are both external customers (end users) and internal customers (colleagues) that need to be satisfied.

There is, however, only one customer in the service chain, and that is the end user who brings cash into the organization to pay for a product or service.

The external customer is on the outside making a purchase and receiving a particular product or service. The internal customer is a colleague working together with others in the organization to deliver those products or services.

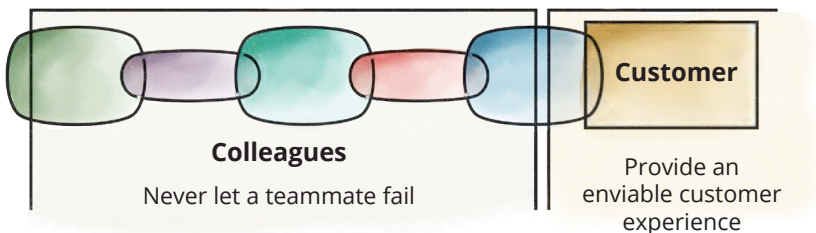
If an organization introduces the concept of an internal customer and starts thinking about internal customers the same way it thinks about external customers, then it dilutes the focus on the external (the real) customer's wants and needs. Focusing on a fellow colleague as if they were a “customer” may shift the emphasis away from what is best for the external customer to what is best for that internal colleague or function. Then, because the organization is concentrating on serving people who are colleagues, under the guise of internal service, the end customer may unintentionally suffer.

Every transaction throughout an organization should have the end customer in mind – the one paying you for your product or service. You might then ask yourself: “But what about all my internal colleagues? Shouldn’t I be concerned about their requests too?”

The answer is yes, but not in the same way you think about the needs of actual customers.

The notion of serving each other as “internal customers” should be replaced by: Never let a teammate fail.

If I see you, my colleague, as a teammate, and together our team is dedicated to the end customer’s experience, then I am no longer thinking of you as another customer I need to please, but rather as a team member whom I am trying to ensure the success of. If, in turn, you are measuring your own success against whether or not the end customer is happy, then we strike upon the perfect formula. Together, we are a single team harnessed together for the purpose of maximizing the customer’s experience, while simultaneously optimizing the impact of our interactions and relationship as colleagues for the benefit of the paying customer.



Excellent Service Happens when an Entire Team Works Together



*John is the
Head of our
Leadership
Practice at
Eagle's Flight*

By John Wright

Imagine for a minute...

You are a sales representative for a large software company. You sell numerous software applications that help organizations run their businesses more effectively. For every sale, you make a commitment to deliver the customized software on a specific date, integrate it into the company's existing systems, and provide training to their employees.

On one particular account, you are scheduled to meet with your client to deliver their new software within the next week. You have not yet received the final product from your internal software customization team, so you follow up. When you walk in and start inquiring, they become frantic and frustrated, telling you they are extremely backed up and that there are several other "higher priority" accounts ahead of yours. They say you have

no choice but to wait, tell the customer there is a delay, and that you should focus on doing your job and let them do theirs.

You walk away feeling frustrated, let down, and highly concerned that you must now contact your client and explain that you cannot deliver what you promised when you promised it. From the customer's perspective, the end result is a broken promise and terrible service.

Now picture the same scenario, except this time you do not need to follow up with your software customization team, because not only do they send you a design schedule at the onset of the project, but also two weeks prior to the delivery date on your account, they reach out to you to discuss their concerns over a potential delivery delay. Here is the conversation that takes place:

"Hi there, we are contacting you at this point in time because we are in a bit of a bind. Our department is so overloaded and we cannot figure out how to deliver your software on the committed date. Can we sit down together and try to come up with a solution?"

"Wow, sorry to hear that. Certainly, let's sit down and figure this out."

You and the software customization team then identify ways to revise the schedule, and you offer to help and spend extra resource hours in their department to take over the administrative tasks (which are relatively simple but time-consuming), while they focus all of their time on the customizations. The end result is a full collaboration rooted in a commitment to deliver superb customer service.

In scenario #1, each person is focused solely on their individual job and does not appear to care deeply about the customer nor the service provided to them. The software customization team is only thinking about their job, not their role in the larger process of delivering a world-class solution to the customer. And you, the sales representative, did not think to engage with the team to develop an innovative solution that would get the customer's need met on time as committed.

In scenario #2, everyone is aligned on the fact that the top priority is to deliver what the customer needs according to what was promised. You and the software customization team speak up, work together, make sacrifices, and do what is required to give every customer an exceptional experience.

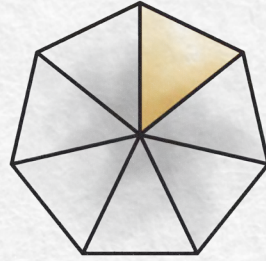
So then, what does it take to make the latter of the two scenarios the reality in your organization?

Great External Service Is a Result of Great Internal Teamwork

There are seven factors that are necessary to have an organizational culture with a focus on internal collaboration – in other words, a customer-centric culture committed to drive external service in an exceptional way. Internal teamwork makes brilliant external service possible.

1. Common Goal

When an organization understands that everyone is working in a united way towards the achievement of a common goal, the work is very different than that of an organization focused only on its individual functions.



Every organization exists to bring a product or service to market. In order to realize genuine and lasting success, every organization must deliver that product or service in the best way possible. Every employee must know and feel that the harder they work towards delivering the best possible customer experience, the better the company will perform. The better the company performs, the more money it will make. The more money the company makes, the more it can do for its employees. The more the company can do for its employees, the happier and more satisfied its people will be. And so on, and so on. The most important aspect of this factor is that employees understand the common goal and then commit to it wholeheartedly. When it is clearly understood that everyone is working towards the same objective, each employee engages more fully in the process of supporting one another so that they can, in turn, serve the external customer better.

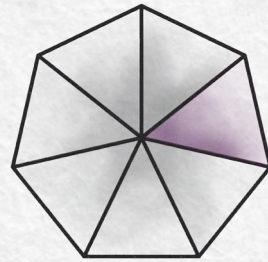
At Eagle's Flight, we run a program called Promises, Promises!™. The context for this program is the "United League of Nations." Within this, there are three goals: 1) meet the needs of your citizens, 2) fulfill your campaign promises, and 3) become a truly united league of nations. Within the context of this experience, many people do not even take note of the third goal because they become so focused and preoccupied with attempting to satisfy the first two.

However, to successfully achieve the first two goals, you first need to be aligned as an organization – in other words, be a truly united league of nations. By the end of the experience, this is what is realized and understood. So within an organization, the goal of being united, or aligned, is critical to achieving the other goals around customer centricity.

Before external service can excel, organizations must help their employees understand that everyone really does share the same goal, and then strive to unite everyone together internally to achieve that common goal.

2. Trust

Think of the oil in a machine. This is what keeps the mechanisms moving smoothly and performing well. Similarly, it is the trust inside an organization that fuels productive collaborations and smooth processes.



If you trust your colleagues, naturally you respond to those colleagues with more trust. When there is trust, there is no question of what is being asked or of the truth behind a particular matter – this is taken as given. There may be clarifying questions to ensure understanding; however, there are not trust-based questions.

There are four critical drivers of trust in an organization:

Be consistent

If an employee continually embellishes the truth or states certain points with their own personal bias, trust is at risk of being compromised. So then, when such an employee comes forward with the truth and has a legitimate problem, chances are their colleagues will not believe it.

Alternatively, an employee who consistently performs their job well, follows protocol, and is always open and honest is bound to be taken seriously and responded to from a place of trust.

Represent the customer's interests truthfully

Whatever the situation, be authentic and straightforward. Keep your customer's best interests in mind at all times and do not misrepresent the scenario in an effort to obtain what you want. This will only create mistrust and doubt within your organization.

Be mindful of the possible consequences

If you approach a fellow employee because you need support, assistance on a particular project, or help with a new account, you may be putting extra pressure on that employee in terms of their other commitments. Be sensitive to the consequences of their willingness to help; show that you understand their position and that you appreciate the added pressure you are causing them.

Show appreciation when people go above and beyond

This is a continuation of the point above. When your teammates act in a way that clearly addresses your needs and goes above and beyond the normal expectations, acknowledge it. Tell them you see what they have done and show them how much you appreciate their effort.

Regardless of how much you may show your appreciation for extra effort, it is also important that you do not always expect this. Do not live in a constant expectation for people to go above and beyond.

By following process and being consistent in your day-to-day actions, you show people they can trust you.

3. Share Resources

If your organization is aligned around a common goal and has a culture of trust, then people will be more willing to share resources.



These resources may be tangible, such as money, staff, space, or product. There was a time at Eagle's Flight when our sales department felt strongly that the hire of a new sales representative would be very beneficial. The new hire would be able to take on some of the heavy workloads from the other team members to generate more sales, to continue the level of growth the company was committed to, and to allow everyone to work smarter and more efficiently. The problem was, the sales department did not have the budget to hire a new person. The predicament was expressed and our marketing department offered to lend its budget to sales so they could make the hire in the interim. This was only possible because everyone within our organization knows we are all working towards a common goal and we have an unwavering trust for one another. These two important elements pave the way for us to share resources to help each other and, ultimately, achieve greater organizational success.

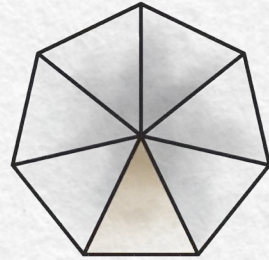
Resources can also be intangible, such as innovative ideas, communication, empathy, support, or experience. Picture a situation in which a fairly new project manager at a company is struggling on a particular task. If the corporate mentality is "everyone for themselves" then no one will offer their help. If on the other hand, the corporate mentality is focused on the customer, and if everyone knows that ultimately they are working towards the same goal, then any number of more senior employees may step forward to give advice, support, and specific guidelines for how the new project manager can get their task back on track quickly.

We must realize that no single individual has everything they need to be great. In a customer-centric organization, everyone is consistently asking the question:

What can I do to personally help serve the customer, or help another to do so?

4. Communicate

In a customer-centric organization, good communication is essential. Good communication has three components:



Timeliness

Imagine that your organization must develop a new advertisement for one of your major clients. In order to give your team the time it needs to create the most innovative and effective ad concepts to present, you must notify them of the new project on the table. By being swift in your communications as soon as you know about the requirement, your team has a chance to respond in a quality manner. Waiting until the last minute will only lessen the chances of delivering an exceptional customer experience.

Clarity

Be precise in your requests as well as the rationale behind them. Speak simply and accurately. Make sure that your ask is absolutely clear to everyone involved so that there are no discrepancies or risk of misunderstanding. Articulate to your team exactly what you are asking of them, when you need the request fulfilled, and why you are asking for it.

Sensitive tone of voice

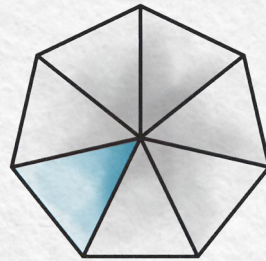
How you speak is just as important as what you say. It is not always solely the words you must be concerned with. The way you are delivering those words matters immensely. Be sensitive. Be courteous. Be approachable.

Picture a franchise organization with a Franchise Advisory Committee (FAC)...

Each franchisee is its own entity, so if the franchisor wants to create a mandate for the franchisees, they can decide to present the new mandate through the FAC, which acts as an advisor to each franchisee. The first important aspect of this scenario is that the franchisor speaks to and treats the FAC as a respected partner. Then the FAC does the same with the franchisee. From a legal point of view, a franchisor cannot technically impose a new mandate on its franchisees. However, by working in partnership with the FAC and by demonstrating timeliness, clarity, and a sensitive tone of voice in all of its communications, the franchisor is in a good position to “sell” its new ideas and gain the support of its franchisees.

5. Leadership

In an organization, each employee looks to the person senior to them for information about how they should behave. Imagine you are on the floor of a retail shop. You look to your store supervisor for insight regarding appropriate actions, behaviors, and responses. Does your supervisor live the culture you were trained on when you were hired? How do they model what they were taught? Whatever you see in your direct superior becomes your norm.



If this is the case, the next question becomes: What is modeled at every level of the organization? Does each supervisor, manager, and executive model a culture that focuses on the customer? Do they set an example of how those on their teams should act?

In a situation where someone is not abiding by the culture of the organization, it is the job of the leader to approach that person, notify them of the improper act, and supportively

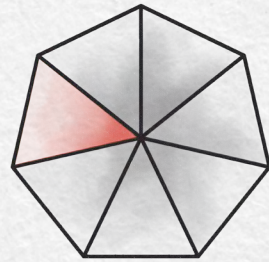
guide them in the right direction. Leaders must constantly be guiding, coaching, encouraging, teaching, educating, and supporting their teams in their efforts to truly live the corporate culture.

It is not enough simply to say, “Here is what you need to do.” Leaders must take it a step further and also communicate, “Here is how you need to do it.”

In order to foster and maintain a customer-centric culture, everyone in the organization must be “all in.” There cannot be some who live the culture and others who do not. Those who need support must be helped and steered in the right direction. Those who do not have the drive and commitment to be concerned about how their actions and decisions impact the customer experience must be coached. For a service culture to work effectively, 100% buy-in from all is essential, and getting people there is the role of their leader.

6. Culture

Every organization has a culture – but is it the one you want or did it simply emerge? Either way, culture is a powerful influencer of individual behavior.



I played football in university and our team was among the top in the league, reaching championship status multiple times. A highly competitive, talented, and serious team, there were many cultural expectations including the type of socks you were required to wear, arriving fifteen minutes early to each game, showing respect for teammates and coaches, having a strong work ethic, and giving your all on the field. These expectations were primarily enforced by the players, not the

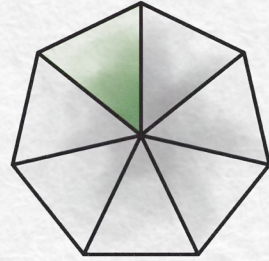
coaches, because this was indeed a culture. I recall my very first year as a freshman player. Of course, I was not yet fully aware of the culture, or of precisely what was expected of me. It did not take long, however, for me to become apprised of the rules and regulations on the team. Everything was reinforced in a fun but also serious way so that every rookie clearly understood the culture and became part of the cultural support process.

When it comes to corporate culture, it is essential that you get to the point where the entire organization naturally lives and breathes the culture you have created. There is a journey you take to arrive at this point. First, the culture is made clear and codified. Then it is trained so that everyone knows what it is. Leaders are then taught to model, coach, and require it until it is the fabric of everyone in your organization. Once you arrive at this phase, your culture will positively reinforce itself day after day, just like my varsity football team.

In a company with an ingrained corporate culture, at every level of the organization, executives, managers, and employees are modeling the behavior of the culture they live. This means that new hires do not need to wonder how to act. They do not need to question whether or not the culture they were trained on is the one that exists in reality because they see it all around them. As a result, a customer-centric culture is modeled, encouraged, promoted, and enforced down from the top, and up from the front line.

7. Initiative

Initiative is when all the individuals in an organization make a choice to take it upon themselves to act in a way that is consistent with internal values and culture. In one organization, this might mean correcting an employee's behavior with respect to a process, because if you do not it poses a safety risk, and a key value of the company is safety. In another organization it might mean having deep and meaningful conversations with customers, because this is how you determine precisely what product or service they need and your company's culture focuses on customer needs. While the type of initiative an employee takes differs from organization to organization, the critical aspect is that the initiative is taken in the first place.



At Eagle's Flight, we have something called the "Eagle's Flight Feathers" and each feather outlines a particular cultural expectation. *One of the "feathers" is: Leave things better than you found them.* In its simplest form, this refers to tucking in chairs at the kitchen island in the lunchroom or making sure every meeting room is in perfect order at all times. It also goes further to include a scenario where one of us might hear another person say something to the effect of, "Wow, I have no idea how I'm going to get this done." Instead of walking by and keeping to ourselves, we approach the person and offer to help. Or if an employee is still struggling with a specific discussion point from a meeting, we do not just end the meeting because there is something else we need to do; we stay, work with that employee, and explore different approaches until the concept is clear and the employee feels confident.

When each employee feels that they can take the initiative to do what is necessary to ensure that they provide the best internal support to their colleagues, this naturally flows to the external part of the organization. All employees then take it upon themselves to look for ways to serve the customer well, and to act in a manner where each customer is provided with the best service possible!

Providing excellent service is not an individual feat. It is the result of the integral collaborations of a complete team. When an entire organization is working together to be truly customer centric, there is a synergy that emerges. That internal synergy, inclusive of the seven elements outlined above, is what enables the delivery of truly incredible external service.



Chapter Five

The Importance of Empowerment

Customer Centricity Requires Empowerment

Customer centricity without empowerment is like a power-generating dam without water – to get the desired results you need both.

Empowerment taps into the potential of a human being to do more than what is typically defined by their job description. Empowerment allows that individual to take initiative, to show courage and initiative, to speak up, and to make things better. Empowerment treats a workforce as if they were adults, not machines on a prescribed path.

When an organization is empowered, it can adapt, flourish, respond immediately to outside forces, and identify key factors it would never have known about, before they become problems or issues. This type of company allows its people to focus on the customer experience in a way you cannot achieve with policies and procedures. Customers, like all of us, are individuals: idiosyncratic and unpredictable. They must be treated like individuals in order to give them the best possible experience, and to do so requires that those influencing that experience are led in such a way as to allow them to contribute to their full potential, i.e., in an empowering environment.

We can often predict the outcome of a group of people but never the outcome of a single individual's behavior.

The hockey game is starting shortly...

There is a large group of people standing outside the gates of a hockey stadium. It is safe to predict that the moment the gates open, they will enter the stadium, go to their seats, and watch the hockey game. However, if you were to single out any one individual in that crowd and try to predict with the same level of certainty what that particular person will do within the next 20 minutes, it is impossible. That person might leave the stadium after an emergency phone call, or walk inside and go to the washroom, or buy a pretzel on their way in, or decide to pause and speak with a friend, etc. The group will watch the hockey game, but the individual is unpredictable.

An empowered workforce does not only focus on the general group of customers, but can also focus on each individual customer; because of this, it is better able to provide a great experience for those customers, every time.

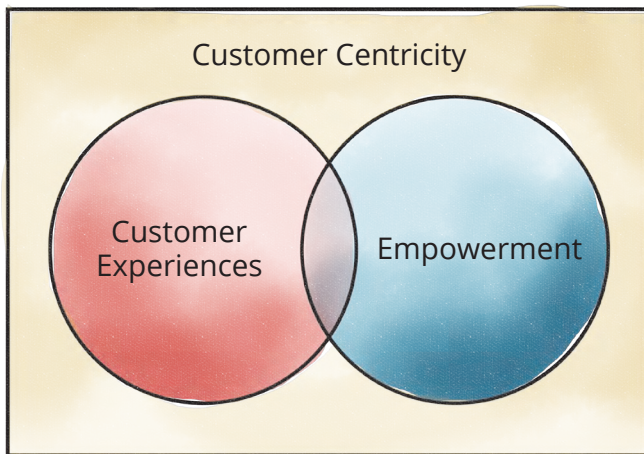
In business today we are moving towards an increasing amount of personalization. To achieve personalization of the customer experience in an organization, begin by empowering your workforce to respond in a way that lets them do what they know they should do – care about the customer experience, own the customer experience and, where appropriate, do something to impact that customer experience. Then train your leaders to manage that empowerment. If you use only a command and control approach, telling your employees precisely what to do and how to do it, you can only get so far.

In order to tap into the individualization of customer service and the customer experience, you need empowerment. If you empower your people, you release their potential, which earns you results far greater than those you will achieve if you simply instruct them in any given scenario.

A point to note:

Building an empowering culture is an initiative in itself, and needs to be treated as such, not just as an “addition” to building a customer-centric culture.

Eagle’s Flight practices this blend of empowerment and customer-centric focus. Following are some stories from a few of the company’s employees, which illustrate the application of this approach from their own perspectives.



An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



Susie Parks,
*Instructional
Designer*

Never Let a Teammate Fail

"I was originally hired by Eagle's Flight as an instructional designer to help create a very specific and large-scale project. At the time, it was our company's largest rollout of a customized leadership training program for 15,000 participants across the country in the quick service restaurant industry.

I helped to design and develop training for all 15,000 participants, and 30 facilitators were hired to deploy the experiential training across Canada. The mandate for each facilitator was to deliver the experience in a precise way so that the leadership training was consistent.

One particular aspect of the program involved an exercise that used translucent acetate sheets with images of different-colored circles and rings, which were then overlaid with one another in order to create pictures.

Early in the morning, prior to the delivery of one particular session in Northern Ontario, Eagle's Flight received a phone call from its facilitator. He was in a state of panic because as he was preparing for his session, he realized he was missing the correct number of acetate sheets with the rings and circles; he did not have all the components needed to run this activity. The art and design team at Eagle's Flight headquarters put their heads together to figure out a solution.

Together, we brainstormed and identified that sticky dots and reinforcement rings could work! We phoned the Kinkos in Northern Ontario that was closest to our facilitator. After spending a significant amount of time on the phone with them to explain the situation, the urgent nature of our request, and precisely what we needed to make this work, Kinkos jumped on board and went above and beyond to help us. Not only did they compile all of the required products quickly, but they also spent time coloring in each of the sticky dots and reinforcement rings to match the color scheme so critical to our activity.

While Kinkos worked quickly on our behalf, the art and design team, as well as a lead facilitator at Eagle's Flight, were on the phone with the facilitator in Northern Ontario, coaching him through the new plan, how it would work, what he would be picking up from Kinkos, and the steps he needed to take in his preparation in order for the activity to be successful.

A short time later, the facilitator walked in on time to the start of his session with the new solution in hand. He delivered a brilliant session, his participants were highly engaged throughout, and no one had any idea that the activity wasn't precisely what it was supposed to be.

As a new employee of Eagle's Flight, I was astonished at the level of commitment and support everyone demonstrated – even from Kinkos up in Northern Ontario! Specific to Eagle's Flight, it was instantly apparent to me that I was now part of a company whose culture was exceptionally strong, and that if I ever needed help at some future moment, they would be there for me too."

Key Insights

1. When employees live by the commitment to *“never let a teammate fail,”* everyone feels comfortable enough to speak up and communicate any issue they encounter, knowing with full confidence that they will receive the support they need to deliver the customer experience.
2. A truly customer-centric organization is not rigid in its delivery, but rather always asks the question, *“How can we meet the need of the customer in the moment?”* and then adapts and adjusts accordingly.
3. Customer centricity can take on the form of innovation, creativity, flexibility, teamwork, and unwavering commitment in order to deliver an exceptional experience no matter what.

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



Scott Wyler,
Senior Facilitator

The Other Side of the Table

"Long before I became a facilitator for Eagle's Flight, I was a client. Our company contracted for a program to be delivered in Puerto Rico and the technical equipment required to put on the event was hung up in customs. I distinctly remember the Eagle's Flight team informing me of the issue but at the same time, presenting it in such a way that I never panicked. I was assured that the equipment would arrive on time one way or another and that there was a viable Plan B in place, should it come to that.

Today, I am a Session Facilitator for Eagle's Flight and I now realize that, at the time the team spoke to me prior to my event in Puerto Rico, it's highly unlikely that they knew for certain my equipment would definitely arrive when it needed to. What they did know, however, is that they would do anything and everything to make sure that it came. No ifs, ands, or buts. Sure enough, it arrived on time and the event was a huge success.

Little did I know that behind the scenes, Eagle's Flight moved mountains to get that equipment to Puerto Rico, and yet this was never known to me, because the countless phone calls to get to the bottom of the situation, the overtime hours worked to figure out a solution, and the extra plane tickets to deliver the equipment were all simply included under the work scope umbrella of Eagle's Flight. It's just 'what we do.'

As a client, I felt well taken care of – not only in the physical sense when it came to materials, shipments, staff, and presentation, but also from a mental standpoint because I was comfortable, at ease, and fully confident in the capability of Eagle’s Flight from the moment I made initial contact with the company, right through to the moment my event was complete. And this is a big deal because I know firsthand that, as a client, when you put on an event to the magnitude of an Eagle’s Flight session, there are so many moving parts to manage and a countless number of responsibilities that fall on your shoulders – not to mention the fact that the success of the event is riding on you, which brings a whole host of stressors and apprehensions to the table.

In my role as a facilitator today, I am informed, educated, and humbled by my experience on the other side of the table. I use this knowledge to dictate how I act as a facilitator on my projects with new clients, always keeping myself intimately aware of what my clients are experiencing and feeling at any given moment throughout the life cycle of their event.

I put the needs of my clients first – always.

I never lose sight of the fact that the session is just one aspect of the client’s bigger world.

I make a point of identifying who the key stakeholder is and what their internal conversations likely are in regard to the session itself. This information dictates what I do before the session (for example, the questions I ask to learn the specific outcomes and goals of the event), and what I do during the session (for example, keeping the important to-do list in check on my end and under my full responsibility so that I’m not bothering the client with every little detail, and to ensure that I’m never, ever causing undue stress).

The end result is an Eagle's Flight client who feels exactly as I did: in the hands of knowledgeable, professional, and helpful experts (in other words, the best), without question."

Key Insights

1. *How the client feels* at any and every point in time is a *critical part of the overall client experience*.
2. A *customer-centric company communicates, acts, and performs* in such a way that the client feels well taken care of and confident in its ability to deliver.

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



**Mike
DeQuetteville,**
*Senior Associate of
Culture and Global
Performance*

True Customer Centricity Is Not Demonstrated in a Single Story, but Rather Many

“At Eagle’s Flight, customer centricity is a value I have witnessed and been part of a countless number of times. This vital core principle is lived and breathed day in and day out. And it is an integral part of what makes us who we are.

In one Toronto workshop that took place many years ago, the participants were complimentary guests who were given the opportunity to experience one of our programs firsthand at no charge; but the takeaway kits that were supposed to be distributed to each attendee never made it to the event. Even though the participants had zero expectations and absolutely no idea they were supposed to leave with takeaways that day, every Eagle’s Flight employee who was somehow involved in the program stepped up to take ownership of the situation. There was no finger-pointing or blame placed on others. On the contrary, each of us faulted ourselves! Quite frankly, had we not taken any action to correct the error, no one would have been the wiser. But as word spread to head office, a team of 10+ people reformatted their schedules to put all new kits together. Another person volunteered to drive them to Toronto. All of this happened in just a few hours and well ahead of the time they were needed.

In another instance about 15 years ago, a shipment was stuck in customs. There was a program scheduled to run in Harrisburg, PA the following morning with an executive group at a large retail organization. While our production team (fondly known as Reality) was re-creating the materials for the session, I found myself available to make the trip. We made the drive through the night from Guelph, ON to Harrisburg, PA to deliver newly assembled kits for the program to be executed the next day. I was accompanied by the brother of Eagle's Flight's USA CEO. Given the late-night, eight-hour drive, I was glad to have the company – and a relief driver if needed. When we arrived, the program's facilitators had given up one of their hotel rooms so we could get some sleep before heading back to Guelph.

Eagle's Flight is also an active participant in various charitable initiatives. Every year through the Adopt-a-Family program, we 'adopt' several families who are nominated for assistance by local agencies. We raise the necessary funds and perform all the shopping required to deliver each family's required items prior to the holidays to make sure they have a brighter Christmas. Another big part of Eagle's Flight's fundraising efforts is our internal email auction. Team members offer items and services for auction including extravagant dinners, paintings, babysitting services, landscaping, days off work, etc. The camaraderie this generates within the company is quite extraordinary.

And finally, throughout any given year we also conduct many programs for free or at a greatly reduced cost for charities and nonprofit organizations in order to help them realize their training goals at a price they can afford.

For us, the result is far more important than the sale. If we have a client who is set on the purchase of a particular Eagle's Flight experience but our teams do not feel as though it

stands to provide the greatest value, we tell them. Sometimes, that open and honest dialogue says that our offering simply does not align with what they want to achieve. Other times, it says that although they really want one particular experience, in consideration of their specific goals, there are others we have that are better suited to their needs. At the end of the day, whatever the client ultimately decides, Eagle's Flight is wholeheartedly committed to making it great no matter what."

Key Insights

1. *Being truly customer centric means* you are fanatical about *never missing a promised result* or any of the details that go along with it.
2. Customer centricity is not just one moment or one circumstance. *True customer centricity encompasses the way you think, the way you behave, and the way you work every day.*

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



**Lorraine
McCrossan,**
Senior Facilitator

Customer Centricity – A Twofold Benefit

“Several years ago, I facilitated a pilot session for a company. According to my instructions, Eagle’s Flight was to conduct our Gold of the Desert Kings™ session and the 25 or so attendees would provide their feedback to the company regarding the possible facilitation of future sessions. Pads of paper were on each table for the participants to write down their thoughts throughout the experience. Little did I know I was about to begin a session for a group of people who had no interest in being there!

My audience was downright angry that they had to be at this pilot. They wanted no part of it, were irritated with their managers, and did not want to participate. At first, I tried to invite them into the wonderful journey of Gold of the Desert Kings, but I quickly realized the group was not receptive. As I walked around and glanced at what many of the participants were frantically writing on their note pads, I saw numerous negative comments – not about the session but about their unhappiness with the job and their requirement to be there.

It was time to change course and focus on what this group of people was feeling. I stopped the session, turned off the PowerPoint and began a candid conversation: ‘I’m getting a strong feeling from all of you here that what I am doing is making you angry. I’d like to shift the focus onto what you really need.’

Some participants chimed in to say that they felt as though they worked too hard, were paid too little, and were annoyed by the fact that they had to volunteer their time to give feedback on a pilot experience they knew nothing about. I began to move the conversation in a new direction, reminding each of them that they had decided to work at the company for a reason.

One woman volunteered her story. It was a very personal, emotional, and touching story that involved her and her family's connection with the company long before she became an employee. The company had demonstrated kindness, compassion, and a tremendous level of service, which became a source of inspiration and motivation for her choice of career, and more importantly, her drive to obtain a position specifically with this company. The story moved the participants and completely changed the mood in the room. It allowed us all to move on, share other stories, and ultimately in the end, engage in the session."

Key Insights

1. When a situation does not go the way you planned, *adapt, change, and adjust in favor of your customer*. It is always possible to take a different path in order to make sure you still achieve the best possible customer experience.
2. Customer centricity can take on many forms, and it is not only corporate and serious. *Acting in a customer-centric manner can also be innovative, fun, compassionate, and kind.*

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



Kim Smith,
Project Manager

Extra Gestures Go a Long Way

"Over the last few years, Eagle's Flight has partnered with an organization to execute one of our largest Safe by Choice™ rollouts across the globe.

Working collectively as partners was extremely important to the success of the initiative, delivering the program in 11 languages for over 20,000 participants across 50+ corporate sites. We established clear channels of communication, a great rapport with open and honest dialogue, and a mutually agreed-upon objective to foster a true partnership. We spent countless hours as a project team and developed a unique working relationship.

Part of the fun of establishing such a long-term relationship with a client team is the unique requests that can arise along the way.

One day, a primary contact from our client's company phoned Eagle's Flight to make a special request. The client was scheduled to host a "safety day" coinciding with the Safe by Choice program and to promote a general awareness, highlight the importance of safety, and to celebrate the success of the safety initiative. The event was planned to include all employees and their families. Our contact, also the proud owner of a lovable basset hound, asked if there was any way Eagle's Flight could deck him out with some Safe by Choice merchandise. We were up to the task.

As a company that relishes any opportunity to bring our programs to life in unique ways, Eagle's Flight happily jumped on board. Our purchaser bought the basset hound a safety vest and matching bandana, which we then embroidered with the Safe by Choice logo. This beloved basset hound spent two whole days as the company's exclusive Safe by Choice mascot. He was an absolute hit and adored by all.

We received nothing but positive feedback and our client was so thankful that we helped bring their special request to life. While it was certainly not part of the project nor were there any preconceived expectations, it was something we were more than happy to be part of. We weren't in it for the money. It was an opportunity to enhance our client's experience, while continuing to build the relationship – and, quite frankly, it was a lot of fun!"

Key Insights

1. In the world of customer centricity, *you must address both the "project part"* (the tools, processes, technologies, roles, results, etc.) *and the "relationship part"* (everything you do to foster and maintain an excellent client relationship).
2. It is an appreciated gesture to send a happy anniversary card to a client, give flowers to a contact who just went through surgery, or dress up a dog for a special corporate event. More importantly, all of these actions are also what make your job more enjoyable because they enable you to *build personal relationships and connect with others on a deeper level.*
3. *Customer centricity is fueled by the organization.* It is personally very rewarding to work for a company that allows for and encourages the execution of these types of "extra details" in an effort to optimize client relationships and experiences.

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



Mike Torrie,
*VP of Learning
Solutions*

Going Above and Beyond Is a Regular Occurrence at Eagle's Flight

"Several years ago, I traveled to New Haven, Connecticut to deliver a program. I planned to fly out of Toronto, with one connection in Newark. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the airport there was bad weather in Newark and my connection to New Haven was in serious jeopardy. I decided I would be better off flying to Hartford, Connecticut and then driving to New Haven. So I switched flights and arrived in Hartford at 8:00 p.m. the night before the start of my program. Assuming my checked bag would also be changed to fly to Hartford, I was shocked to discover that this did not happen. Instead, my checked bag (with all the materials I needed to deliver my session) had gone on my original flight and was now stuck at Newark Airport in New Jersey. It was now 8:45 p.m. on Sunday evening, I was without my program materials, and a 2-hour drive from New Haven. I had to figure out a solution to retrieve my materials – and fast.

I phoned my boss.

After explaining the situation, we instantly came up with a plan. My boss notified me of an exclusive Eagle's Flight distributor in Stamford, Connecticut (which was actually farther from Hartford than

New Haven). We phoned them and asked if we could borrow the session kits we needed. The distributor then rounded up the required materials, put them inside the front foyer of their home, and notified me that they would leave their front door unlocked so I could pick up the materials around 1:00 a.m., which is when I was anticipating my arrival, given the length of the drive from Hartford. Following this call, I also phoned my client to notify my contact of what was happening, because at that point in time, it was very likely that I would not deliver the session dressed in a full tuxedo (which was the costume for this particular program).

I then rented a car and drove from Hartford to Stamford. Just as the distributor had promised, everything was in the front foyer – plus a clean, pressed men’s white shirt. It was unexpected and unnecessary, yet I appreciated that added gesture immensely, given my current state. From Stamford, I drove to New Haven, arrived around 3:00 a.m., and began sorting through the materials from our distributor to organize everything for the session.

After about two hours of rest, it was time for me to shower and meet my client at 7:00 a.m. prior to the session’s commencement. When the client arrived, she wasn’t empty-handed – she had her husband’s tuxedo for me!

That was that. The program was executed without a glitch.”

Key Insights

1. True customer centricity starts from the inside of an organization. *Treat employees and colleagues the same way you treat customers* and never let a teammate fail. You can't let a colleague down the same way you can't let a client down.
2. A customer-centric mentality says that no matter what, the show must go on. A big part of this is taking full responsibility for the situation and finding a solution. *You cannot control outside factors, but you can control how you respond.*
3. A strong internal corporate culture and mentality to do whatever is humanly possible to correct an error or improve the end result stems from an *unwavering commitment to the customer and the experience they have by working with you.*

An Eagle's Flight Example of Empowerment and Customer Centricity in Action



Chad Fenwick,
*Production
Manager*

Taking Personal Ownership

"It was Thursday when we heard from our shipping partner that our shipment of Leaders-as-Teachers kits hadn't yet been delivered to our client in Philadelphia. I was surprised, since shipments of this type usually only take one business day, but for some reason this one was caught in customs for an extended period of time and I wasn't getting clear answers as to why exactly the shipment was 'stuck in the holding cage.' We didn't have much time, since the client's Customer Centricity Train-the-Trainer experience was scheduled to begin on Monday afternoon, three days from now – two of which were weekend days!

I was concerned, but helpless at the moment. While I searched and prodded for more information, on Friday I was relieved to hear that the shipment had arrived – but that relief only lasted a moment because then my contact told me that many of the kits were damaged and appeared to have some kind of 'sticky orange substance' on them. After more searching and prodding, I finally figured out that our shipment had been paired with a shipment of orange soda pop (go figure!) on the airplane to Philadelphia and, as a result of atmospheric pressure, the cans exploded...all over our kits.

So now I knew what had happened, but that didn't help me any. I did, however, have the confidence to take complete ownership of the situation. Now I had to figure out what to do next. I started by calling Mark, Procurement Manager at Eagle's Flight, who also runs our print shop. Together, we made a plan to meet at Eagle's Flight that Sunday to reproduce and repackage the kits. We knew we needed more than two sets of hands so we also phoned four colleagues to help, all of whom gave up their relaxing Sundays for eight hours of hard work to get everything done. And we did!

In the meantime, Nicola, the Eagle's Flight Facilitator onsite in Philadelphia, handled the client's expectations and reassured them that the kits would arrive on time for their training. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, our Project Manager, Cynthia, booked me a plane ticket to Philadelphia for first thing Monday morning.

My earlier sense of helplessness was now replaced by a sense of empowerment. We were going to deliver exactly what we promised the client - no doubt about it. Whatever it took.

I arrived in Philadelphia at 8:00 a.m., rented a car and hand-delivered the session materials to our facilitator in time for their use at the event that afternoon. Our client was thrilled, which is exactly the reaction our Eagle's Flight team had been committed to achieving the whole time.

Looking back, it's clear that our solution wasn't the most financially desirable - but that was not the issue. We held ourselves fully accountable to ensuring our client's experience was what they expected from Eagle's Flight. For us, it's not only about making money, it's also very much about delivering an impact and building long-term partnerships. We refused to sit back and do nothing. We took ownership and did what needed to be done to give our client the best possible experience."

Key Insights

1. The client experience is, or can be, *radically impacted by those* in departments or functions *far from the front lines*.
2. Knowing with absolute clarity and confidence the company's commitments to its customers is a prerequisite for *making the theory of empowerment a tangible reality*.

Chapter Six

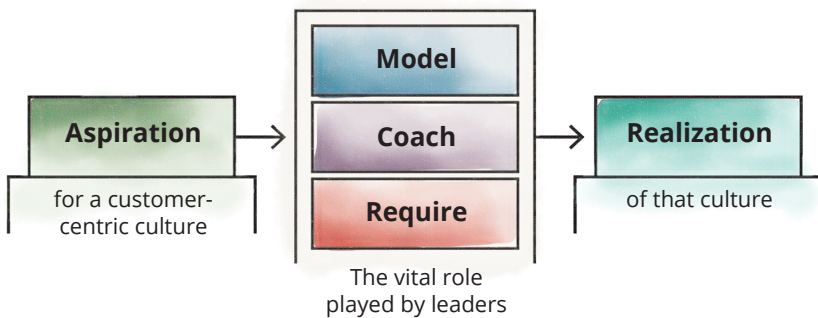
The Role of the Leader in a Customer-Centric Culture

The Leader's Involvement Is Essential

For an organization to achieve customer centricity, the role of each leader is crucial and falls into one of three categories:

- What they do
- What they manage
- What they encourage

Each category represents a direct component of living, supporting, and continuously growing a customer-centric culture.



What a Leader Does

In the “DO” category, there are three things a leader must do:

1. Model
2. Coach
3. Require

Model



Model

The leader must be a living example of what they want every other employee in the organization to do and to be. In other words, they must walk the talk. The body follows the head. It does not matter what the organization says or puts on its signs in the office or teaches in a classroom training session if, at the end of the day, when employees look to their leaders to determine how to behave, they do not see those behaviors modeled.

It is a common misconception to think that organizational objectives (particularly one as fundamental and deeply rooted as customer centricity) require only leadership by the CEO and executives. They do play a key role, but much more is required.

Picture yourself as an employee who works in the warehouse of a manufacturing company...

You show up every day at 4:00 a.m. to start your shift, entering through the back door, which is secured by an access code, and you leave the same way at 4:00 p.m. when your 12-hour shift is over. Your leader is not the CEO with the window-view, fifth-floor office inside the completely separate administrative building. It is the warehouse supervisor who happens to be just three years older than you and who had your very same job for one year longer before they were promoted a few months ago. In reality, this is your leader and role model, and the one whose role is vital if a shift in culture and behavior is to occur.

To say that a leader must exemplify the desired behavior is to say that, if you are a leader responsible for other individuals, then you must be a model for what the company wants. This means that the majority of the influence happens at the lowest levels of the company, not the highest. To be clear, the most significant impact happens at the top, but the majority of the influence is at the bottom.

When you think about the leaders of any organization, pay attention to those frontline shift leads, supervisors, and young junior managers to whom the bulk of a company reports. These are the people who must be equipped with the necessary tools and skills in order to lead properly and to know what it means to truly model the culture of an organization.

Now picture yourself as the employee. It is likely that you are well aware of the fact that at the executive level they make decisions and create policies that drive behavior, but in practice this has little impact on you. To understand what is expected, you look to your immediate leader. Do they really care about the customer? Do they really own the issues of service and do something about them? Can they articulate to you that this is, in fact, what they are doing? Do they support you doing the same? If so, then as an employee you can see and feel that you are working in a customer-centric organization.

The role of the leader is to model desired behaviors, but the role of the organization is to make sure every leader at every level is equipped to model those behaviors.

Coach



Coach

Imagine that you are an employee working in a company...

Your leader very effectively demonstrates and models a customer-centric culture. You have also been trained on what it means to be customer centric. Great in practice, but you will probably not “get it right” immediately. Realistically, you do not necessarily have the ability to take the training and the encouragement from your organization to “go and truly be customer centric” right from the get-go. It is more likely that you do not yet fully understand your framework, the Gateway, taking initiative, or how to take your ideas from concept to implementation.


So how do you “get it right”?

You turn to your leader who must then be able to coach you, guide you, support you, and motivate you.

It is essential that a leader recognizes the fact that their employees may have the will and the drive to be customer centric, but that they may not yet know how to be customer centric in their respective roles. The leader does know how to be customer centric because they have been trained, and personally see it modeled every day. They now need to help their people figure it out and make it work. In other words, they must help employees who want to be like them to become like them.

The leader’s modeling helps employees understand and visualize customer centricity, and the coaching helps them do it for themselves in their everyday jobs.

Require



Require

This is where the leader has the corporate obligation to step in and ensure that customer centricity actually occurs. If an employee is not fully on board with the culture, it is the leader's responsibility to make it known that at the company this is a core value, and the employee must either figure out a way to become fully engaged in the initiative or find somewhere else to work that better fits their personal value system.

Something as important as customer centricity is not optional.

Employees cannot pick and choose. They cannot like one aspect but not another. They are all in or else it does not work. It is the leader's job to require this from each and every employee in the organization.

The proportional breakdown of what a leader does in terms of model, coach, and require is critical:

- 20% of the leader's focus is on model
- 70% is on coach
- 10% on require

It is common, however, for managers to think their number one priority is to require, and that is where they put 70% of their effort, with perhaps 20% of their effort on coaching and only 10% on modeling and setting an example. In this scenario, the leader tells their employees what to do, expects them to do it, and then gets upset when their employees do not do it. This is simply poor leadership. "Require" should be the last line of defense – not the first. It is a fallback position, not a starting one.

What a Leader Manages

A leader must manage the implementation of the culture, which introduces the important concept of accountability. The leader is accountable to see that the culture occurs as is intended. Let's say an organization is not yet customer centric but wants to be. In this case, customer centricity becomes as great an accountability as making sales, upholding product quality, or creating accurate financial reports. It is just another responsibility that a leader takes under their wing.

Being accountable is not the same as trying hard and doing your best. It is about delivering on the agreed task. For a leader to accept a tangible deliverable is straightforward, for example, hitting monthly sales numbers or the completion of a project on time and on budget. But what about intangible deliverables such as company values or customer centricity? Even though it is much more difficult to measure a deliverable such as acting ethically or always thinking about the customer experience, that does not mean that a leader is any less accountable for those initiatives. They are equally as important as those that are quantifiable and easy to measure.

The following five-step process is a great way to drive a culture for which you are accountable.

Step 1:

Bring it up as a regular agenda item at meetings.

Put the customer-centricity culture on your agenda. Raise the topic at staff meetings. How new this culture initiative is dictates how often you should discuss it with your team. If the culture journey has only just begun, it should be raised weekly or even daily. If it has been in place for some time already, then raising the topic monthly is more appropriate. Keep in mind that the newer it is, the more often it should be brought up; but even something well-established needs structured, planned, and scheduled reinforcement.

Step 2:

Demonstrate personal commitment.

In discussion, or at meetings, use an example, anecdote, or illustration that reinforces the desired behavior; or, ask a question that shows your team you are modeling a customer-centric approach every day. Your team needs to know that you are all in.

Step 3:

Ask your team what they are hearing from their team.

When you execute this step, you must be sure that all of your direct reports are telling you precisely what is happening in the organization when it comes to a customer-centric culture. It is both important and helpful that employees speak up and communicate what they see and hear around them relative to meeting customer expectations, and the customer experience. How your direct reports know to gather this information and communicate it accurately is discussed below, using the Accountable Leader Loop.

Step 4:

Based on what you hear, decide if action must be taken.

Acknowledge an employee who has done a great job. Provide training to an employee who does not know how to act. Review available resources based on identified needs. Change a policy where necessary. Revise a process. Hear from your team and take the appropriate action.

Step 5:

Follow up on what you did in Step 4.

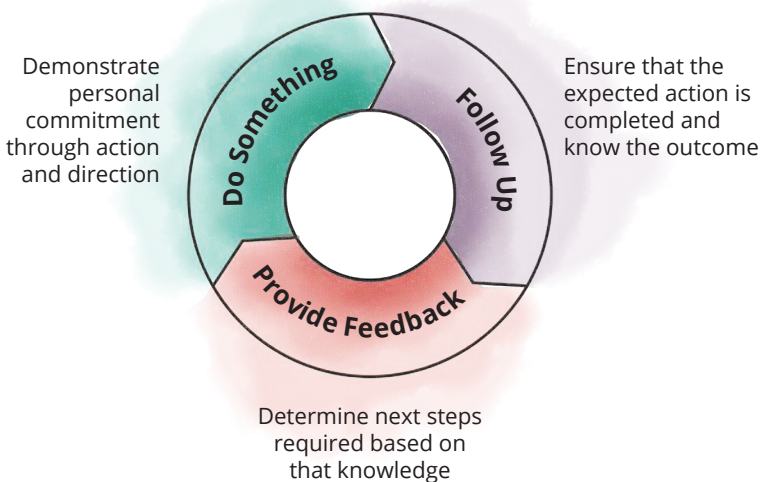
At your next meeting, make a point of checking in on committed-to decisions from earlier meetings. Evaluate the results of what happened after you took a specific action in response to what your team told you about customer-centricity culture observations within the organization. Follow up consistently until the desired outcome is achieved.

As a leader, you repeat this five-step process every time you meet with your team. This simple yet effective method is what enables you to commit to the culture with complete follow-through from concept to action. Following this process provides an example to your team of walking the talk, and shows them precisely what to do. If you then require that each member of your team does the same thing with their own team, then that team does it with their team, and so on and so on, all the way down to the front line of the organization, you achieve the desired customer-centric culture and related behaviors.

Referring back to Step 3 of this process, when we discussed how your direct reports are to know how to gather information from their people and then report it accurately, this is how: by performing the exact same five-step process with their own team.

This process is followed at every level of the organization, from top to bottom. Then there is a sustained focus on a customer-centric culture, and a mechanism to ensure ongoing action in support of that culture.

This five-step process is called the Accountable Leader Loop.



What a Leader Encourages

There are four areas in which a leader must encourage their people.

1. Recognition

Are the employees who live and breathe a customer-centric culture recognized for their efforts? If someone is doing an excellent job, it is vital that you make sure they are acknowledged so others can see what they are doing and learn from their successful actions.

As the leader, you do not always need to be the one providing the recognition. There are many tools you can use to recognize employees. For example, a “shout-out” session in meetings where peers speak up about one another is an excellent way to promote public recognition by fellow colleagues.

Other times, recognition may come from a higher level. A manager or executive might be told about someone who has done an excellent job on a particular task and then be asked to give them a congratulatory phone call or note. In this case, the recognition is not given directly by you, but rather by someone more senior in the organization.

As a leader, you must recognize employees, but also help recognition to occur and not necessarily always be the provider of it.

2. Best Practices

When you see an employee doing anything that represents living a customer-centric culture, and that you think should be replicated, capture it and make it a best practice. Doing this accomplishes three things:

- It is a form of recognition (which is always good)
- It allows others to understand how they are to live the Care-Own-Do model; by creating best practices, you explicitly show employees how they should act and what they should do if they want to be customer centric
- It shows the positive impact of focusing on customer centricity

These best practices are behaviors demonstrated by individuals within the company who are living the culture as you envision it, regardless of position or level.

Having said that, best practices do not necessarily have to come only from within your own company. They can come from other companies and sources as well. As a leader, encourage your team to reach out, research, and be resourceful in order to identify potential best practices happening elsewhere that are successful – then replicate them. For example, mimic a competitor’s exceptional return policy, implement another organization’s successful meeting structure, or create great customer experiences the way the world’s best hospitality organizations do.

More about best practices and benchmarking, in chapter 9.

3. Expedite Implementation

When one of your team members comes to you with an idea or suggestion to improve the customer experience, help them to expedite the implementation. You do not need to execute it personally, but you can be the one who helps it move along so that it gets done sooner rather than later. This is possible because, as a leader, you have greater influence than does your employee.

4. Brilliant Communication

You can encourage a customer-centric culture by communicating brilliantly. **There are five things to communicate.**

Successful activities undertaken

Identify customer-centricity actions that were good and successful, so employees know to do more of them.

Initiatives that failed

Isolate customer-centricity initiatives that may have been admirable, but the unforeseen consequences were negative. On the one hand, it may have appeared to be a great idea but after careful analysis, it became clear that it was, in fact, not a wise way to move forward. Encourage learning from experience.

The rationale for the focus on customer centricity

You must continuously reinforce the “why” behind customer centricity. Talk about how important it is and the reasons behind that importance. Remind your employees that it is a cultural value. It is common for employees to lose sight of the rationale behind customer centricity and if they do, they also lose motivation and momentum. It is up to you to ensure that does not happen.

Status updates on what is going on in the organization relative to customer centricity

Senior leaders and executive staff members must supply the rest of the leaders (supervisors, line managers, etc.) throughout the organization with detailed metrics and status reports about the current state of customer centricity in the organization. Every leader must feel “in the know” throughout the company. In this way, no matter the organizational level at which an individual operates, they are given continuous and detailed information about the customer-centric culture so they can then in turn communicate it to their team.

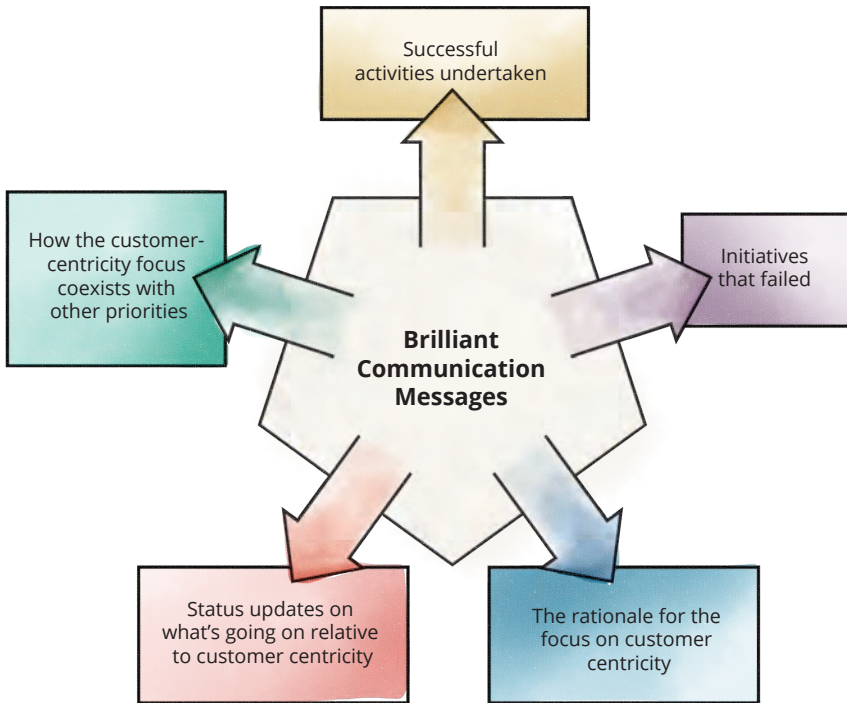
How the focus on customer centricity coexists with other priorities

This is likely the most difficult piece to communicate. An organization has many priorities that it must fulfill on a daily basis: make sales, reduce their carbon footprint, innovate, provide great customer service, research and develop new products and services, stay safe, etc. How do all of these important priorities coexist with a customer-centric culture and with other core values?

As a leader, it is your job to effectively communicate how customer centricity fits into this larger framework. While every organization has important priorities to fulfill, think of customer centricity as one of the guiding principles that is a key influencer on every other priority. Bringing customer centricity to life will differ according to where you are in the organization, your level, your department, and your job with its day-to-day duties.

Deciding to become customer centric seems relatively simple, the same way deciding to paint your room initially appears to be an easy task. But as you get started, you begin to see how difficult it is because there are numerous additional jobs that must be completed over and above the actual action of painting. You need to remove all the pictures from the wall, patch holes, take off the old wallpaper, move the furniture to the middle of the room, cover everything in plastic, tape the floor, trim, and baseboards, decide on a color, select the paint, buy the paint, and be sure to get the right primer.

Choosing to be customer centric is like choosing to paint your room. It involves many specific actions, processes, initiatives, and methods to make sure the outcome is not only what is intended, but also expected, in order to make a real difference to the overall success of your organization. It is the role of each leader to help their people do what is necessary to bring customer centricity to life, within the broader context of many other equally crucial and demanding activities.



Chapter Seven

A Metaphor to Bring Customer Centricity in Action to Life



Rattlesnake Canyon™

An Eagle's Flight Experience

In the late 1800s, the Wild West was a place of rapid expansion and untapped opportunities. In the heart of the West lies the town of Rattlesnake Canyon.

There are two main groups that make up the population of that fine town: the settlers and the merchants. Sheriff Flynn runs the town, Mayor Flynn is the mayor, and Barber Flynn is the barber (it is not a very big town). The settlers live around the town and the merchants live inside of it.

Many years ago, Sheriff/Mayor/Barber Flynn worked in the great big city of New York. He was a young worker on the railroad when he met Jackson Standish. They worked together side by side on the railroad and after a few years, Flynn went west, while Standish stayed and continued to be promoted until he became the Chairman of the Eagle Bend Railroad, a large railroad that linked much of the country at the time.

Standish and Flynn always kept in contact, and one day Standish telegraphed Flynn with a message: "I am building a railroad all the way to the West Coast and I would like it to go right through your town of Rattlesnake Canyon. What do you think?"

Flynn responded immediately, "That is a great idea, because if the railroad goes through the town, then it will bring new business and my town will flourish as a result. Let's do it."

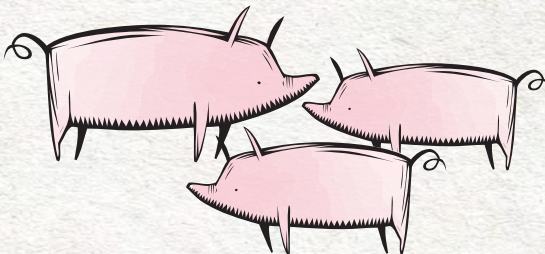
Standish responded, "Wonderful to hear. Here is the process. I need raw materials to build the railroad, and if your citizens can provide them, I will build the railroad."

Flynn held a meeting with his settlers and merchants and told them the news, and right down to the town pooch, they were all very excited to get started immediately.

This is the setting for "Rattlesnake Canyon," an Eagle's Flight experience used in training sessions to help organizations create a culture of Customer Centricity.

As a participant, you are either a settler or a merchant who is going to help build the railroad. If you succeed, everyone prospers.

Settlers acquire raw materials from wagon trains, steamboats, and mule trains. They buy various supplies including pigs, horses, blankets, hammers, spikes, lanterns - all kinds of items. Settlers and merchants then interact as the settlers sell these materials to the merchants for a small profit.



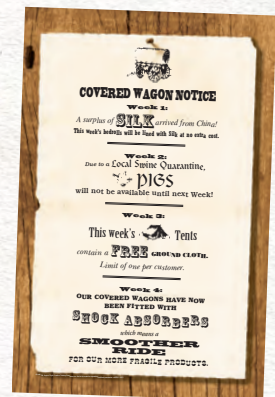
Merchants then sell those supplies to the railroad depot set up in town. But the railroad does not want “pigs,” “horses,” and “hammers” – they want “kits.” For example, 500 “livestock kits” to include 100 pigs, 100 horses, 100 cows, and so forth. They want 1,000 “railroad kits” each to include 4,000 lanterns, 500 spikes, 1,000 hammers, etc. So as a merchant, you need to take the raw materials from the settlers and package all of those items into bundles that make sense for the railroad (or, in business terms, add value in the supply chain).

The schedule is tight and there are only four “weeks” to get all the supplies the railroad needs. In the experience, each “week” takes just over 20 minutes, so the entire experience is completed in about an hour and a half.

There are several phases the participants find themselves going through when they participate in this experience.

Initially, the settlers think, “I can buy a pig for \$1 and sell it to a merchant for \$2 and make a dollar each.” So they end up spending an exorbitant amount of time and energy haggling with the merchants over the price of a pig.

Imagine there are 1,000 people playing the game. 600 are settlers, organized into “families” (teams) of five, for a total of 120 families, and there are 400 merchants organized into “families” of five, for a total of 80 families. So, there are more settler teams (suppliers) than merchant teams (buyers). The same ratio applies regardless of overall size, as the experience can be run with anywhere from 20 to 5,000 total participants.



In the first “week” of the game, the settlers spend a lot of time trying to make money negotiating over each individual item. Picture a room of people shouting and haggling and making deals trying to earn a dollar here and a dollar there on every single transaction.

After the first week, the game is paused, and the participants are showed a visual representation of what they've accomplished in terms of getting the supplies the railroad needs. In most cases, it is less than 1% of what is required in the 20% of the available time that has passed.

This is a very inauspicious start! Everyone is focusing on one pig, one hammer, one spike, one blanket...and trying to make money that way.

But the railroad needs thousands of these items! The problem is that the settlers are trying to make money on every single transaction, with no real focus on the actual needs of the true customer – the railroad.

In the second week, some teams figure out that trying to work this way definitely does not make sense. Merchants are only willing to pay so much for a single pig and yet, when the railroad gets dozens of livestock kits, they pay the merchants thousands of dollars. So then, the money to be made is not in the transaction between the settlers and merchants, it is in the transaction between the merchants and the railroad. Instead of haggling over single transactions, some settler and merchant teams decide to partner and pool their money together. The settler then goes to buy enough supplies to give the merchant several full kits of exactly what they need or, in other words, exactly what the railroad needs. The merchant team then sells those completed kits to the railroad, and now the newly formed partnership has a lot more money to work with.

The railroad values kits. They do not calculate the price per item but rather per kit, and they want a lot of them! So the settlers

and the merchants begin to realize it is a good move to form partnerships. They begin working together to figure out the raw material cost and what the customer (railroad) will pay, and then determine how to optimize that. Trust is required in this partnership because the money must flow freely between merchant and settler, with the real profit coming from serving the railroad, not selling to each other.

By the time participants get to week three, the group has typically now provided about 25% of what the railroad wants. Better, but the percentage is still too low, because only about 20% of the room of participants has figured out that “the better way” is to form partnerships around meeting the customer’s need (the railroad). The teams who have not yet figured it out start to look around and see other people making significantly more money than they are. They notice that others have formed partnerships and decide to follow suit. Now the room is humming with energy to form partnerships and earn more money! Week three is usually frantic, fast-paced, and loud!



By the beginning of the fourth week, usually 60% of the railroad is complete with one week to go; but now the participants are moving very fast, and need to respond quickly because the railroad has only needed and wanted a fixed number of each type of kit, and those needs are rapidly being met! The “customer’s” needs are evolving and now more partnerships are trying to effectively meet them.

Once the entire room has figured out that partnership-driven throughput is the best way to make money, kits are made and sold very quickly. If teams are not careful and astute, they will wind up with a lot of excess inventory that they cannot do

anything with, since the railroad no longer needs kits of that type. So, it quickly becomes apparent that the best course of action is to be physically close to the railroad and continually ask them what supplies they still require. That is, they need to know the customer's need in the moment, in a rapidly changing environment.

There is an evolving dynamic in this experience:

First, it is about each transaction.

Then, it is about partnership and throughput.

Thirdly, it is about service speed against what the railroad needs. Their needs are constantly changing as their current needs become fulfilled.

Finally, it is about speed to meet the opportunities that still remain when it is known that some needs have already been met.

All of this happens over the course of about 90 minutes.

At the end of the experience, the debrief follows...

“What did you learn?”



There are five key takeaways in the Rattlesnake Canyon Experience, represented by a “Sheriff’s Star.”



1. Everything Hinges on the Customer and You Must Know Current Customer Needs

Participants should have been thinking about the customer first, rather than not until halfway through. Had they done so, they would have realized that their behavior was not aligned with the customer’s real need (i.e., not a single pig at a time, but rather a kit of livestock, including pigs). Further, it is not enough to discover the customer’s need at only a single point in time, because their needs are constantly changing. The total number of kits the railroad needs is available but must be requested (in other words, an unexpressed need), which few do early on. In essence, they start out worrying about their

own need, and only later realize it is actually the customer's needs that really matter. Typically, it is not until the third or fourth week that someone thinks to find out the total number of required kits. Then, as more kits are sold to the railroad with every passing minute, team members become and stay in close communication with the customer physically right by their side, so they always know precisely how many and which kits still remain to be purchased by the railroad.

In a customer-centric organization, everyone is always thinking about the customer.

That means constantly staying in touch and determining customer needs at every given moment.

2. Demonstrate Quick and Clear Communication

In Rattlesnake Canyon, the customer has a clear need: 10,000 kits in total, of various types, within four weeks, if they are to build the railroad. If participants do not know that number and its breakdown, they do not have relevant information. If they do not stay intimate with the customer to know how many of which kits have been fulfilled and how many are still needed, then they do not have a quick enough flow of information to meet the real need and so optimize their profit.

There must be a quick and clear flow of information from the customer into the company.

If the company acquires the information quickly but does not know precisely what to do to satisfy the customer's need, then speed is of no use. If the company gets information from the customer that is clear and concise so they know what to do but that information came far too slowly, then again, the information cannot be put to good use - the customer has already gone elsewhere. Communication must be quick, clear, and acted upon.

3. Chase Maximum Profit Potential

In Rattlesnake Canyon, the money to be made was clearly in the throughput to the railroad: from mule train to settler as items, to merchants to railroad as kits. In order to succeed, the participants must come to this conclusion before it is too late. The true value, and hence profit, lies in servicing and selling to the customer, not within the process chain.

In a customer-centric organization, the goal is to get as much money from the customer as is available, by being best able to meet all their needs, expressed and unexpressed. The point of customer centrality is not altruism – you want to optimize your profit potential.

You must ensure that the organization is aligned around both what is possible and how to harness that potential.

4. Initiate Efficient Processes

As a participant, how long did it take to get the customer the finished kits they wanted? If it took too long, someone had already been there to meet their need.

In Rattlesnake Canyon, each participant must have an efficient way to communicate what the railroad needs to the settlers, who then go to the mule train, the wagon train, and the steamboat to acquire the materials and bring those back to the merchants, who in turn assemble the kits and sell them to the railroad. If your process is slower than the team next to you, by the time you are finished – even though you have done the right thing – the team next to you will win. Even if you are fast, they win if they were faster.

Customer service is what happens at the front line, but the processes that occur to support the customer experience at the front line do not occur there. Think of production, policy development, receivables, legal, etc., all of which play a part

in meeting the customer's needs. If you do not have extremely efficient processes around those things, driven by a customer-centric mindset, many of the unique needs of the customer may go unresolved. Those processes involve more than the customer-facing employees.

Rattlesnake Canyon illustrates a perfect example of long internal chain. The settlers never see a customer and yet they are vital to meeting the customer's needs. The settlers are as concerned about the needs of the customer as the merchants because they play such an important role in getting the merchants what they need to supply the railroad with what it needs.

Plus, the process is not a simple one. Yes, it involves the railroad, the merchants, and the settlers, but it also involves several other team members in each of those groups - those who are handling the money, sourcing the supplies, assembling the kits, delivering the kits, keeping track of the railroad's current needs, and so on. To go from railroad to mule train, the process is actually extremely complicated. There are many people involved in the transaction. If the processes are not simple, clear, and quick, by the time you realize that process efficiency is critical, the opportunity is gone.

Everyone involved in the process chain must be intensely customer focused, and then develop their portion of the final solution from that perspective.

5. Build True Partnerships

The teams who win in the Rattlesnake Canyon experience are those who realize early on that their success relies on the relationship they create and maintain with their customer (the railroad). When they stay close, remain intimate, continually check in and communicate, and ask about the current need right at that moment, they manage their processes and actions accordingly in order to realize the greatest success.

A customer-centric organization has a genuine partnership with their customers. This is when we see real customer centricity, and optimal profit.

You have just purchased a car from a dealership...

Do you feel as though you're on your own now that your purchase is complete, and you have brought your car home? Or have you bought from a dealer that is fully equipped with a customer service and support team that is always there to help you through any questions you might have or difficulties you encounter over the lifetime of your car? If you feel deserted, then you have bought from a company that does not create partnerships with its customers. If you feel well taken care of, then you have bought a car from a business that values you and develops an in-depth partnership with you to make sure your experience is outstanding for as long as you have the car; their profits are maximized as a result.

Rattlesnake Canyon paints a clear picture – in action – of the customer-centricity concept. As participants move around the room, work with (and against) one another, analyze, think, change, execute, and compete to earn the most money as they collaborate on the massive railroad construction project, the five points of the Sheriff's Star become undeniably clear.

Customer centricity is about identifying what the customer needs at any given moment.

From here the willingness to Care-Own-Do then leads to quick and clear communication at all times. By doing this, the organization then discovers how to chase their maximum

profit potential by developing efficient processes and building a true partnership between the company and the customer. In other words, responding to the needs of the customer is what drives organizational change in the achievement of a customer-centric culture.

Chapter Eight

The Practicalities at the Front Line

The Role of Service Standards

I believe there is a gap in people's understanding about what's required to deliver enviable customer service. It is not simply the hiring of an individual whom you then instruct to "be nice" and "do their job." In many cases, this employee is never trained on what exactly their job is nor the standards of service that apply to their role. When a customer receives poor service, the employee is blamed for that failure, and yet the poor service may have nothing whatsoever to do with that particular employee.

An organization committed to providing a great customer experience must first address three questions:

1. What do you want the customer experience to be?
2. How will the organization do what is necessary to provide that experience (in other words, be truly customer centric)?
3. How will the organization respond internally when the service experienced by the customer is not what is desired, so that it is in the future?

Based on the answers to those questions, staff can be trained on a set of service standards. Then, the effective demonstration of those standards at the front line is customer service.

Service Standards

Your data tells you what your customer wants, and serves as a guide to determine what you need to do inside your organization in order to produce a product or service in accordance with your customer's desires. Your service standards define how you will deliver this on a consistent basis.

Everything at the customer-service interface begins with service standards.


For an e-commerce store, for example, friendliness is not a service standard because customers are not dealing directly with employees. On the other hand, speed might be an appropriate service standard in that type of business. Conversely, in a barber shop or hairdressing salon, friendliness is very likely a service standard, whereas speed may be less important.

There is a "formula" of sorts to help determine what to include as service standards.

The Service-Standard Formula

The following is a service-standard formula that serves as a foundation, recognizing that each organization must then develop its own customized version to suit its precise business operation.

The service-standard "formula" has four components:



Four Service Standards

1. Accuracy
2. Ease
3. Speed
4. Predictability

Not only are the components in the formula important (they are all needed), but also the order in which they appear is important (they occur in a priority order). For example, no matter the nature of your organization or its offering, accuracy should always be at the top of your priority list. This is true because without accuracy, all else fails. A company may have been easy to work with, but if it does not deliver what the customer thought they were obtaining, then the ease of the transaction is irrelevant.

Similarly, a service must be easy before it is fast. If a transaction is overly complicated and only confuses and frustrates the customer, then the speed to deliver that frustrating complexity does not matter. Speed, in turn, is more important than predictability. I want it when I expect it, not at some distant point in the future. Waiting too long at the restaurant is annoying, even if the meal is good when it finally arrives.

Accuracy, then ease, then speed, then predictability: the customer wants all four, but in that order.

1. Accuracy

Accuracy is almost always at the top of any service-standard list. Did the customer receive precisely what they ordered?

A customer visiting the website of an e-commerce health food store...

They search for the type of noodles they want, type in a quantity of "5" into the appropriate text box, click "add to cart" and then check out. When they receive the confirmation receipt via email moments later, the quantity says only "1."

The customer is frustrated because this is not what they typed in. Somewhere along the way, an error occurred and now the customer must figure out how to rectify the situation. Clearly, they do not want to pay shipping costs for just one package of noodles. In this case, accuracy failed because the customer

was precise in what they selected but the organization was not precise in what it delivered.

If you order coffee with only cream, you don't want it to come black with sugar.

2. Ease

In today's world, customers demand that the products and services in which they are interested be simple to acquire. Did it make sense? Were the steps clear? Was the product easy to buy?

An evening out at a fine dining restaurant...

Let us say it features Italian cuisine and the entire menu is written in Italian. The meal titles and descriptions are also written in English, but the text is tiny, and the font is a faint grey color, so it is extremely difficult to read. While the Italian menu certainly portrays an air of authenticity and contributes to the ambiance and overall theme of the restaurant, it also creates a cumbersome experience for all non-Italian-speaking patrons.

Upon consideration of the elements that play a factor in your organization's service standards, ease and simplicity ought to be second on the list.

3. Speed

Be quick. Be efficient. Make the process as fast as possible for your customers – without sacrificing accuracy and ease. If the transaction is speedy but incorrect, then it is useless. If the transaction is quick but difficult, it fails the customer.

Today, we live in a world that revolves around instant gratification. People are not willing to wait. Faster = better.

While this is true, and it is wise for organizations to revisit their processes to increase efficiency, it is not the only standard of importance, which is why it is #3 and not #1. Be quick but not at the expense of accuracy or ease.

Also, bear in mind that “fast” is relative to the customer expectations; it is “seconds” for an online transaction, and “timely” at that relaxing Italian restaurant.

4. Predictability

Customers want predictability when they make purchases. They want to enter a transactional process knowing for certain what they will acquire when it is complete.

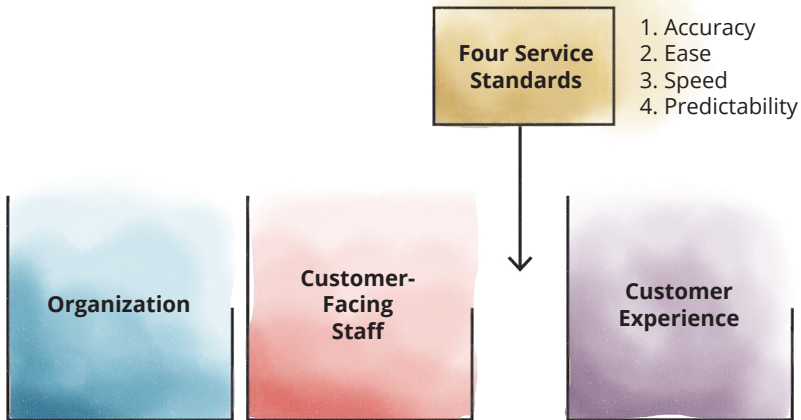
Planning an important birthday party...

Do you gravitate immediately to booking the event at a venue you have never used before in the hopes that the ambiance, service, food, and entertainment will be up to your expectations? Or do you attempt to reserve a location at which you have hosted several prior events and where you know for certain what it will deliver on the big night?

Think of your morning routine before work...

You always visit one coffee shop in particular. It is one block from your office, the barista knows you by name, the taste of the espresso is always consistent, and you know it never takes more than five minutes to be served. Then, one morning before work, you decide to try a new coffee shop that just opened because it is a little closer to work. In this case, you do not know with absolute certainty what your experience will be, but you feel courageous. As it turns out, the espresso is not as tasty, it is served warm and not hot, the server at the cash register is curt with you, and the coffee shop is so busy that it takes you 15 minutes to make it back out the door. The proximity definitely did not justify the loss of predictability in your mind.

Whatever product or service your organization provides, you want your customers to know that your offering is predictable and dependable.



Application of the Standards to Your Organization

There are two considerations to bear in mind.

1. Meaning

Each of these four will mean different things depending on the nature of the business to which they are applied, and you will need to determine how best to define them within your own context.

Speed is relative...

"Fast" at a drive-thru restaurant is measured in seconds, whereas at a five-star restaurant, it is measured differently at each phase of the experience. Speed in terms of how you are greeted, seated, and offered a beverage is different from how it is measured in wait time for the meal itself, and different again for the time of the meal where the bill is presented after coffee.

Similarly, “predictable” may include being greeted by name with a friendly smile at your local meat market, or it may mean always having the item you want, and ready to ship, when you purchase online.

Knowing how to define each of these standards in terms of your customer’s expectations, needs, and desired overall experience is crucial.

2. Relevance

It may be that one or more of these standards is not truly relevant in your business; in this case, replace it with one that is.

For example, you may feel “easy” should be “friendly,” or “predictable” should be “desire to return.” The critical elements to keep in mind as you decide on your standards is to ensure that they are:

- Delivering the desired outcome in terms of your customers
- Such that their meaning can be made clear to all employees
- Easy and simple to remember
- Unambiguous in their application

I would recommend you try to limit them to a maximum of four, for ease of use and recall; consider that much of their power lies in the fact that they are in priority order. This helps people apply them effectively to guarantee delivery of the desired result, which is especially important in an empowering environment.

Service Repair and Recovery

Service standards define the experience your customer receives, but they also provide insight on how to address a situation effectively when a customer fails to obtain what they desired. In a customer-centric organization, the identification of the root cause of the failure is a priority, followed by addressing the changes to be made, regardless of where in the overall service chain the breakdown occurred. It may be at the employee-customer interface, but it may just as well not be.

In order to deliver your service standards, your entire organization must be aligned. For example, if your top service standard is accuracy but your internal shipping controls are poor, you may very well not be consistently delivering what was actually ordered. The same applies to each of the other standards.

You cannot deliver customer-service standards consistently without a customer-centric organization committed at every level to those standards.

You can have standards, aspire to standards, want standards, teach standards...but you cannot truly deliver customer-service standards without an internally customer-centric organization to support them. It is not enough simply to impose service standards on the organization at the front line. You must build a company-wide infrastructure that facilitates the delivery of those standards.

Your car is in need of repair...

You take it to an automotive service shop and the technician takes time to inspect the vehicle. They identify the issue, repair the broken part, and then you are on the road again.

The customer has experienced a transaction where the problem

was diagnosed accurately, the issue clearly explained, and then repaired quickly and completely. This is frontline service to standard. But behind that are many processes: mechanic training, parts ordering, communication systems, and accurate scheduling all had to be in place to deliver that experience, and deliver it to standard.

Failure to Deliver to Standard

In the unfortunate case when an organization must enter either service recovery or repair mode, the first questions should be: Why was the customer not happy? Which service standard failed? Once this has been identified, steps can be taken to address it and ensure that the problem or issue does not reoccur, by looking at each step in the service process chain to see why delivery of that standard fell short of customer expectation. In this case, the service standards are a basis for diagnosing what went wrong, and therefore providing a significant first step towards addressing the cause of the poor service delivery.

Service Repair

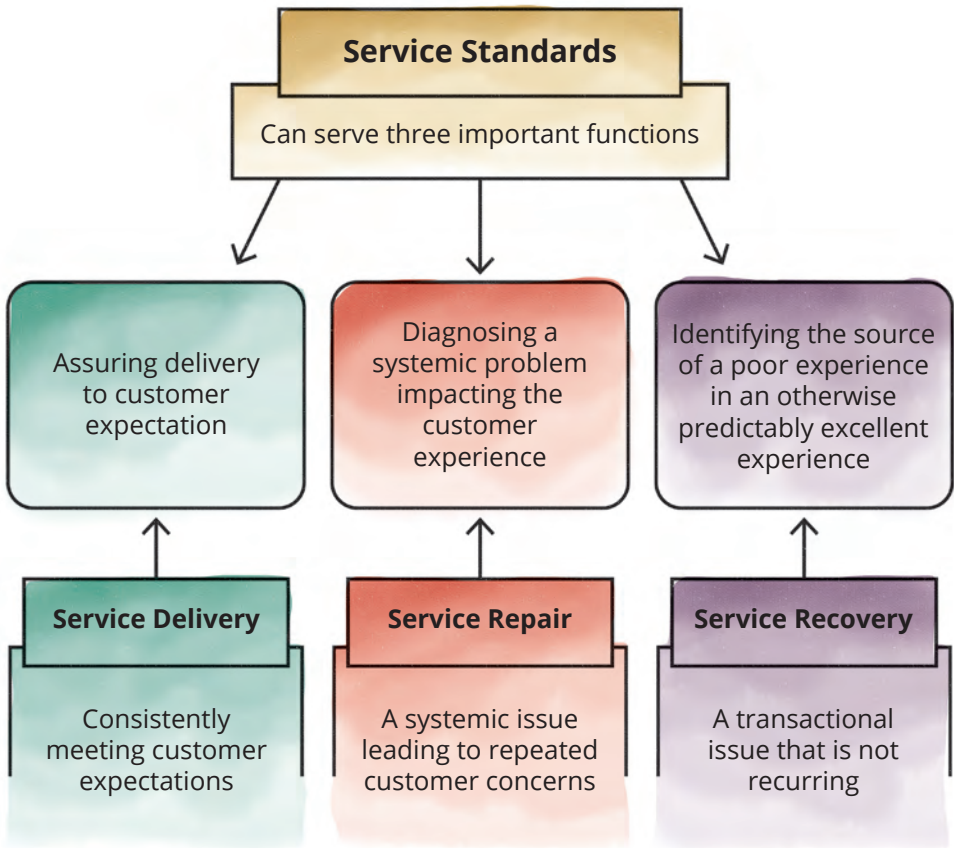
This is required when service standards are consistently missed, either as the result of an issue within the organization, or at the frontline interface with the customer. Customers are consistently unhappy about some aspect of their experience.

Service Recovery

This is typically required when a single customer is unhappy because their experience fell below standard. Depending on the nature of the business (e.g., online vs. face to face), the cause may lie either within the service chain or at the front line.

Employee training, communication, and process improvement are three powerful tools at an organization's disposal to address both service repair and service recovery needs.

When service standards are in place, it is easier to look back, evaluate, and identify which standard failed. From there, remedial action can be straightforward and effectively focused.



The Turquoise Ten at Eagle's Flight



Sue is the Executive responsible for all customer implementations at Eagle's Flight

A Case Study from within Eagle's Flight.

How a Commitment to the Customer within the Business-to-Business Marketplace Is Implemented in Practice.

By Sue Wigston

Delivering an exceptional customer experience and achieving your customer's desired outcome requires an intentional focus and commitment from the entire team.

To make the customer experience the best it can be, it is not enough simply to say to your employees, "Try hard and do your best." Maximizing the experience your customer has as a result of working with you must follow a series of processes, standards, and procedures that are well thought-out, strategic, and intentional.

At Eagle's Flight, we use ten simple principles to ensure that each and every client project succeeds. We call these principles, "The Turquoise Ten."

The title of these imperative principles is quirky, easy to remember, stands out, and is printed on a 4" x 11" hard-stock postcard in a turquoise font. By presenting the principles in this way, we make them distinct from any other list. They are memorable. When we prompt people to address "The Turquoise Ten" in a team meeting, everyone knows instantly what we are talking about; they visualize the postcard and they recall the ten principles.

The foundational purpose of the Turquoise Ten is to ensure that our desired outcomes in terms of providing an exceptional customer experience are achieved every single time. We have come to realize that by addressing these key principles up front, we are able to systemize the results we provide our customers and foresee potential issues before they occur (in other words, we proactively ensure a great outcome and rarely need to solve problems along the way, because they have already been anticipated and avoided). This way, we give ourselves the ability to focus on making our customer's journey with us exceptional at every phase. We want it to be easy for our customers to work with us, we want them to feel good about choosing our company, and we want to make sure that we are simplifying their work lives, not adding unnecessary complications.

Every one of the Turquoise Ten principles represents a codified area of focus that requires planning, alignment, ownership, and commitment. Each of these ten areas is assigned an "owner" to ensure its success. Regular team meetings are held to discuss each area of focus and owners update their teams in their respective areas. It is important to note that entire teams provide input and share their perspectives, because sometimes the task owner simply does not have all the information at hand.

The Turquoise Ten

1. Align All Internal Stakeholders

Not only do you need to consider your customer's Executive Team but also any other department that is engaged on the project; for example, the Human Resources team, the Learning and Development department, or the unions associated with the company. It is critical to obtain "buy-in" from all parties to ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction and providing support for the behavior change initiative undertaken.

At a large manufacturer...

Eagle's Flight worked with a large manufacturing organization to deliver training to several employees represented by a union. We invited representatives from the union to be a part of the process right from the very beginning by participating in the pilot so that we could include their perspective and input. Not only did their input help us improve the course, but it also helped us create alignment and ensure that we had their support as we rolled out the training to the site they represented.

2. Measure It

What are the customer's criteria for a successful outcome? How do they plan to measure that outcome? Answer these key questions before beginning in order to build in actions that ensure success.

In the case of Eagle's Flight, our clients are buying an outcome – not a program. Do they want higher safety scores? Increased revenues? More engaged employees? They deem the project a success when their expected outcome is accomplished.

Oftentimes, clients do not know the answer at the outset, in which case we work through it together. We ask questions such as, “What do you want your legacy to be?” and, “What is the driver behind this investment?” In the world of Eagle’s Flight, customers hire us to make a significant difference within their organizations. These questions help them take a step back and think about what a successful outcome actually looks like.

3. Understand the Commitment of Senior Management

Are the senior managers of your customer’s organization fully committed to the outcome you are being paid to deliver? In cases where that particular outcome is a profound one, be wary of promising too much if senior management does not have the necessary time to put in or is not fully invested in the project. How involved are the senior managers planning to be and how much support can you count on? Adjust your pledged outcome accordingly.

At Eagle’s Flight, we change people’s behavior. This is often a significant challenge. If we promise, we deliver. And yet we cannot fully deliver on the culture change of an entire organization’s behavior if we do not have senior management’s 100% support, and must therefore be ready to adjust the expectation around results accordingly.

4. Agree on the Outcome

Take what you have determined from #1, #2, and #3, and clearly define the outcome up front. Both you and your customer must agree on what it is. This outcome must take into consideration what exactly your customer needs at this point in time along with their budget and time allotments.

It must also coincide with your business model so that the agreed-upon outcome makes sense for everyone.

Once an outcome is determined, deliver it – no more, no less.

The road map we create at the beginning of an initiative never completely reflects the journey taken in the end. We are constantly reassessing the learners' journey and the nature of the organizational support required. Eagle's Flight never changes the goal, but we may change the path. On one particular project we originally planned to have all the sessions delivered by Eagle's Flight. A part of the outcome we agreed upon was our assurance that the frontline leaders were fully equipped to sustain the learnings long after the training finished. After delivering the first two modules, we no longer felt as though this was a guarantee we could stand behind, so we responded accordingly and trained the leaders to be the teachers for the last two modules. This created much greater buy-in and understanding, and ensured that the leaders were engaged throughout the entire journey.

Our desire is always to deliver the best possible outcome. Many years ago, we had a client who was very clear on the outcome they wanted, but very limited in the amount of retention and follow-up they could do after each day of training, due to budget constraints within a fiscal time period. The implication of this decision was that it would take longer (more training over an extended period of time) to achieve the desired outcome. Once we had delivered the first few modules, we found ourselves providing the retention anyway because we knew it was best for the participants, and it was!

The consequence for Eagle's Flight was that the desired outcome was achieved much faster than anticipated and the client ended up putting the remainder of the agreed-upon

contract on hold, which had a negative financial impact on our company but was right for the customer. There is no perfect solution with a perfect timeline that fits every customer.

The protocol should be to work within the known constraints to create the best possible outcome.

5. Clarify the Role of Leaders to Support

This aligns with #3 in which senior management drives the project, but this particular area of focus is about leadership throughout the organization. The role of every leader is extremely important. Whether they are a department manager or a frontline supervisor, leaders play a critical role in retention, sustainability, providing feedback, monitoring, etc. At Eagle's Flight, it is our responsibility to make sure our customer understands how vital their leaders are, because this is what helps to ensure the successful outcome we have both agreed upon.

One of the most useful retention tools for one of our customers was the use of customized "huddle cards" – short activities or discussions to be used in team meetings and led by the frontline supervisor. Success was dependent on whether or not these leaders were committed to using the huddle cards. This organization truly set itself up for success. Because they were very clear from the beginning in their communication strategy that the role of the leader was critical, they relied on those leaders to contribute to the successful outcome, and the huddle cards were to be a key tool in the initiative's overall success.

6. Influence the Influencers

In any initiative, you will always have the early adopters – the people who buy in right away and who have a positive attitude around the new project. It is critical that you identify who these influencers are and then determine how you will ensure their ongoing positive support. These are the champions in an organization who have the ability to drive excitement and get people on board. Your communication with them is critical because their voices carry weight. Put your own internal strategies and communications in place to make sure these influencers are informed and involved so they can remain advocates.

Eagle's Flight executed a large Leadership Transformation program with an IT organization. We identified the HR Generalists who supported the various functions as potential influencers. Working with these organizational specialists and equipping them early on in the process served to multiply the impact of the communication before and after training happened.

7. Celebrate

Intentionally, explicitly, and overtly plan to celebrate key milestones both with your customer's team and your internal team. Make a point of identifying early on the key steps in your project journey that deserve to be celebrated once achieved. This is a critical part of a large-scale project and yet, unfortunately, it is often overlooked, skipped, or pushed down the priority list.

Celebrating is important both for your customer and for you.

Build these celebratory milestones into your projects – and budget for them. Keep in mind, a celebration does not need to cost a lot of money. What is important is that you take a moment to acknowledge the accomplishment. Go for ice cream. Send a gift basket to your customer. Treat your team to pizza.

When Eagle’s Flight hit a noteworthy milestone in a large initiative with a pet food brand, we acknowledged the united achievement by presenting our client with a plaque. On one side of the plaque were pictures of the team members and little thank-you notes, and on the other side were pictures of the team members’ pets, to which we gave official “office titles” and comment bubbles. It did not take too much of our time and it did not cost too much money to create, and yet the impact was significant because the client was deeply touched by our gesture celebrating that milestone.

8. Build Strong Relationships

Many individual members of your team have a corresponding contact in your customer’s organization. Where are the connections? How are those connections formed and supported? It is important to create strong relationships and manage them effectively. Every person on your team should ask the question, “What is my role and who is my contact person on this account? What can I do to strengthen this relationship?”

There was one particular Eagle’s Flight initiative where we put on a large event for a customer. The Executive Assistant who had coordinated logistics within that organization had been asked to sit outside the conference room for two days while the event took place, just in case they were needed in some way.

Recognizing the commitment and influence of such a person, the Sales Coordinator at Eagle's Flight took it upon themselves to put together a thoughtful care package for the EA. The package included a short book, crackers, chocolates, a Sudoku puzzle, and a few other items. When we arrived at the event, we gave the care package to the EA and said it was a little something from our Sales Coordinator who wanted them to have it while they sat outside the conference room. In this case, the Eagle's Flight Sales Coordinator did everything in their power to ensure that the relationship with their point of contact was great.

9. Create an Internal Scorecard for the Team

How does your internal team know if it is successful? Once you identify what success means for your customer, develop an internal scorecard for your own team that helps you evaluate progress every step of the way. This scorecard might include budgets, timelines, and handoffs, etc. This allows your team to know what is required to ensure the overall success of the project, and acts as an early warning sign of things to monitor before anything negatively impacts deliverables to the customer.

10. Expand Your Impact

Consistently look for and identify opportunities to communicate, educate, and expand your impact – in all of your areas of expertise – within your customer's organization where you know you can add value. Your top commitment is to deliver what you promised on a particular project. After you accomplish this, ask yourself if there are other ways you can make a greater impact on your customer's organization.

“Oh, I did not know you did that,” is something we often hear from clients we work with. There have been many times that Eagle’s Flight has been asked to come in and help an organization train their leaders. Topics are chosen that reflect the obvious areas for improvement, but we have been able to create much greater value for our customers when, for example, they realize that we can support them in the creation of an overarching competency framework designed to help them foster a strong leadership foundation.

This is the Eagle’s Flight Turquoise Ten, and it is a list of focus areas that can be applied to any service-related business trying to guarantee an outcome. This list can also serve as an example and a foundation from which you can develop your own list.

In order for your Turquoise Ten to work, you must take it beyond merely existing. Each principle must be carefully thought through, its execution planned, all team members must be aligned to it, and then everyone must take ownership for it. Throughout the course of every project, revisit this list and evaluate your progress in each area. This way everyone is informed and aware, and leaders know where and how to provide support to ensure the outcome to which they have committed.

Customer centricity does not happen just because you have a “Turquoise Ten” list. In order for an organization to become truly customer centric, you and your entire team must make a plan, revisit that plan, and continually adjust the plan. Have internal processes fully align in order to guarantee an outcome.

Creating an exceptional customer experience must be very intentional – internally and externally.

Our Turquoise Ten is always consistent. Maybe a customer calls us because they are on a burning platform and they need to fix a serious problem within their organizational culture. Perhaps they are beginning to see cracks forming in their culture and they want to be proactive about addressing them. A customer may be a champion in their respective field, and they know they need to have an exceptional organizational culture to keep that status. No matter what, The Turquoise Ten remain a key focus for us because we have learned it is these principles that help us achieve success.

Today, this list is built into our project teams and processes. It is known. It is respected. It is followed, and as a result, we are able to guarantee our outcomes, and remain truly customer centric.

Chapter Nine

Sustaining and Improving Customer Centricity

Is a Poor Customer Experience Person-Related or Policy-Related?

Oftentimes the customer centricity failure is not person-related, but rather policy-related.

At a large hardware chain...

You can return any product for any reason. No questions asked. That is their policy. What about some of the brand names they carry, though? Are returns there as seamless? If a customer comes to return a drill, in some cases the return takes two minutes and the customer leaves satisfied with a full refund. In other cases, a particular brand requires three pages of detailed forms to be filled out along with images of the defective product, and then everything must be mailed to head office for approval before any return can take place.

The store's customer is frustrated by their experience and yet this has nothing to do with the store's policy; the grief is caused by the policy of the company that manufactures that particular drill being carried in the store. However, the customer-service representative does not have the authority to ignore the drill company's policy, and as a result, this experience reflects badly on the store itself and the experience they provide.

A customer-centric organization is constantly looking for ways to deal with policy or procedure guidelines that frustrate customers.

Continuous Process Improvement

Continuous process improvement is when an organization has created a culture where individuals have the ability to evaluate, and then improve, the processes they are involved in.

There are two parts that make up the whole of continuous process improvement. They are:

1. Process Skills
2. Teamwork Skills

Every person in the organization is part of a process. Work flows through a process, passing from one individual's hands to another. If you are an employee who is part of an empowered corporate environment and you feel as though your process is not efficient, not productive, or not enhancing the customer experience, then you can do something about it.

A process is a series of steps and decision points that you follow in order to achieve a particular task.

An omelet sounds good...

First, you check the egg container in the refrigerator and determine if you have enough to make your omelet, which is the first decision point in the process. If you have enough eggs, you move on to the next step, but if you do not, then you have another decision to make: either do not make the omelet, or figure out a way to acquire more eggs so you can make it. Simply put, if you have enough eggs, your process takes you in one direction, i.e., proceed to make the omelet by pulling the pan out of the cupboard, whipping up the eggs in a bowl, chopping vegetables, grating cheese, adding everything to the bowl, and then frying it up in the pan.

If you do not have enough eggs, you go in another direction, i.e., put on your coat, walk to your neighbor's house to ask if you can borrow a few eggs, walk home, or drive to the store to buy a carton, etc. When you put all the steps and decisions together, you have a process – a series of steps and decision points designed to produce a specific outcome.

When you are not happy with an outcome (e.g., it costs too much money, it takes too long, there is too much waste, or errors occur), then you must change the process somehow. In order to do this, you must follow a disciplined approach to change or improve it, summarized at the macro level as follows.

- 1. Codify the process.**
- 2. Determine where the problem lies.**
- 3. Identify what you can do to solve the issue.**

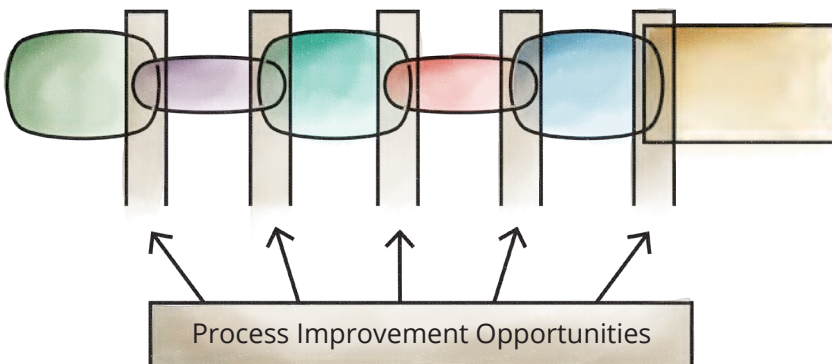
If your organization is truly customer centric, then there is appropriate freedom within the workforce to address the processes you have in place that are inhibiting the provision of an enviable customer experience. Clearly, everyone in your organization must first be trained on how to improve processes, and also given access to the authority to change those processes if they find a problem. If you do not give people access to this authority, you run the risk of your employees simply giving up and stopping the moment something does not go as planned in the process.

Think back to the omelet example when there are not enough eggs, in which case you might say, "I have no eggs, so I guess I will just live without an omelet this morning." An individual with appropriate and approved authority, on the other hand, takes the initiative to alter the process in order to achieve the desired outcome, and ends up with an omelet!

Changing processes usually does not take a great amount of capital, but it does take time and effort. Once employees know they are empowered to make changes in their processes, people intentionally come together who are impacting a particular process – people both upstream and downstream – and then they apply disciplined team skills to optimize their time together and improve the process.

When you think about the customer experience, you must also think about the degree to which you will empower your organization to initiate continuous process improvement.

It is continuous process improvement because you want your people to act whenever they see a problem in the process of which they are a part. The end result is numerous small teams working together throughout the organization that are all committed to improving the process for the well-being of the customer, consistently applying the skills of teamwork and process improvement. If your people do not have process improvement skills or teamwork skills, then they must be trained effectively in these areas to reap the benefits of a fully functioning team working collaboratively to better the customer experience.



Benchmarking

An organization committed to customer centricity has two choices:

1. **Be primarily internally focused**, and attempt to provide great customer experiences only by gaining information from customers and employees, and then continually adjusting accordingly.
2. Or, also **be externally focused** and look outside the company at other organizations doing a great job of providing their customers with exceptional customer experiences.

In the second, you make a point of looking at what others are doing well. This is called benchmarking. Benchmarking can take place within the same industry or across different industries. For example, if you are attempting to improve your return process, who does a brilliant job at it? How do your competitors do it? Who do the objective research studies claim does it best?

Benchmarking can also happen within an organization's various departments. For example, how does the productivity level of employees in Finance compare to those in Marketing?

When you benchmark and you find others doing something better than you, it is time to codify what they are doing, learn from it, and replicate it. Often, those in noncompetitive industries are willing to meet and share their approach in exchange for the opportunity to learn from you.

Your weeds are getting out of control...

You pull the weeds between your interlocking stones by hand. Then you see your neighbor using a natural, safe, and chemical-free weed termination spray that abolishes their

weeds in two days. You can continue to spend hours pulling your weeds by hand or you can talk to your neighbor and get the name of the spray so you can purchase it as well, which is simply a form of benchmarking in action.

Look at others who have already succeeded at what you wish to achieve. Observe. Analyze. Ask. Learn from them. By foregoing this opportunity, you often unintentionally decide to take the more difficult or unproven road.

Benchmarking allows you to learn from others who are better and then, in turn, better your own processes and procedures by applying what is appropriate to your organization or function.

Customer centricity becomes significantly easier when you feel as though you are following a path that will lead to success because other organizations have already created that path, rather than being left to create it blindly on your own.

People, Process, and Tools

In need of a snack...

A patron at an outdoor event buys a hot dog at a concession stand and has a bad experience. The onsite event manager hears about the incident and becomes extremely upset that they now have an unhappy customer. The manager's first thought is probably to discipline the vendor.

While it is certainly possible that the employee operating the hot dog stand is the one responsible for the poor experience, it is also just as possible that this employee was the only good part about the overall experience, and in fact it was another factor altogether that caused the customer-service failure.

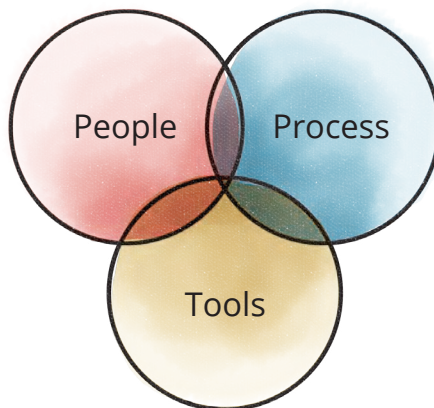
Maybe the hot dog was hot, the bun was fresh, the toppings

were excellent, but the vendor was rude, in which case, the issue does lie with the person; but perhaps the hot dog vendor was polite, courteous, and friendly but the hot dog itself was cold. The oven used to heat the hot dogs was so out of date that it could not keep up with the speed of demand. In this scenario, the problem is the tool that the vendor had to work with. In a third scenario, maybe the vendor was great, the hot dog was perfectly hot, but the bun was stale. In this case, the issue is with the process the company has to transport the buns to the vendors in a timely enough manner so they are guaranteed to be fresh.

The root cause of the problem might have been the person, but it might also have been the tools in use, or the processes that were in place at the time.

When a customer makes a complaint, the first step should be to conduct a diagnostic test to determine whether the complaint is a result of a people, process, or tool problem. Once you have the answer, put the energy and effort into solving the correct problem.

Using the concept of people, process, and tools does not only apply to problems that occur – it can also be used proactively. Considering what's required to be brilliant in terms of people, processes, and tools, in order to optimize the ability to provide outstanding customer experiences, can be done right at the outset.



1. Analyze the People

Is there the right talent and mindset in each function? Do individuals know how to focus on the customer? Are they committed to the customer-centricity initiative? Do they have strong team skills? Are they equipped with the knowledge, education, and training they need to perform their jobs well? Are they backed by great leaders?

2. Check Your Processes

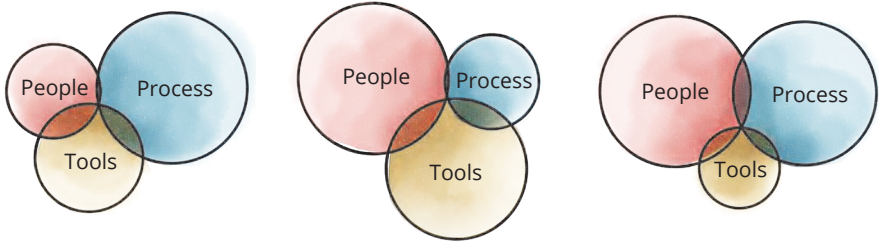
How does the customer go from Point A to Point B? Is the sales process smooth, frictionless, simple, and hassle free? Can the customer easily return a product? Are your processes designed to empower employees and provide customers with a consistently outstanding experience?

3. Provide the Right Tools

Do you have the right technology to enable processes? Is the organization supported by good and reliable equipment? Are there standard operating procedures in place? Are written manuals available where they are needed? Is there a mentoring program to help employees do their jobs better and advance within the company?

Think of these three elements as circles that each overlap with one another. In any given situation, some circles may be larger than others and the way in which they intertwine may vary. The solution to an issue may be some combination of people, processes, and tools, and varying problems may impact each of these in varying degrees.

The amount of effort required in each of people, process, and tools will vary by issue or opportunity being addressed.



When these three important elements are accurately and appropriately addressed within the context of the organization and industry, an outstanding customer experience is delivered.

Reinforcement

Once an organization has reached a point where there is a widespread commitment to a customer-centric culture, all employees are invested in it, and each department is collectively doing everything it can to improve the customer experience, the next question becomes:

Can it be sustained?

It is one thing to focus on customer centricity and foster the right culture, but then how do you maintain this year over year?

There are five practices to put into play that reinforce the focus on customer centricity.

1. Pay Attention to the Clay

My mother was an artist – a very talented one at that. Among the many art forms she practiced was pottery. I distinctly remember that several years ago she took a trip to Brazil during which she participated in various art classes and courses to better her pottery skills. It was here where she discovered what she said was the “very best clay.” Upon her return, I picked her up from the airport and grabbed her suitcase to put in the car and was astonished by how heavy it was!

I asked her what was in the suitcase, and she responded that it was Brazilian clay. My mother told me that in order to make a great piece of pottery, you must also have great clay, and Brazilian clay was exceptional for pottery.

In your organization, pay attention to the “clay.”

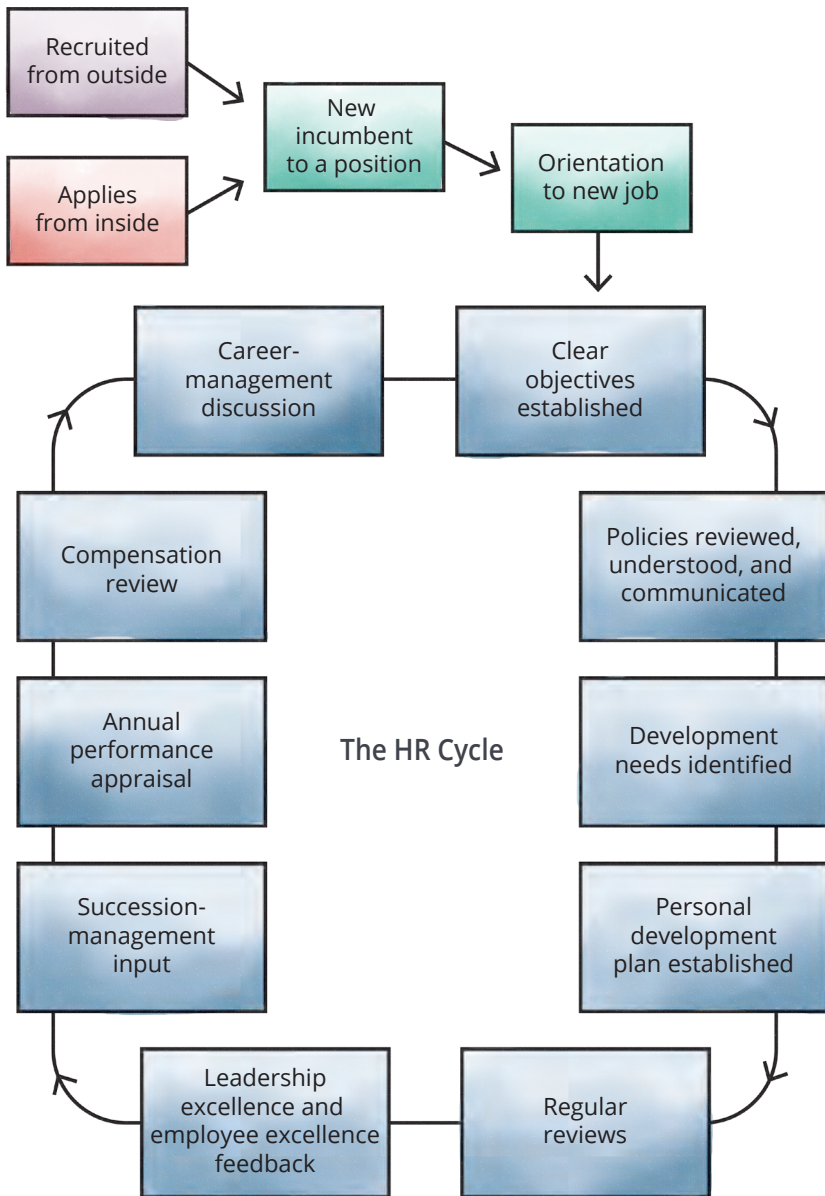
Who are you hiring? How is the recruiting function performing within your company? “The clay” is your people. If you hire great people, you can train those people to produce great results. More specifically, if you hire people who have an aptitude, focus, or skill level in the realm of customer centricity, then you have a team poised for a genuine customer-centric culture.

2. The Human Resources Cycle

Within any organization, the Human Resources Cycle is extremely important. The cycle is comprised of many different elements:

- Recruit
- Hire
- Onboard
- Give clear objectives
- Train to meet those objectives
- Provide feedback on the training
- Assess performance
- Compensate for performance
- Discuss career paths
- If demonstrating exceptional skills, put on a succession plan
- Promote

...and then the entire cycle repeats itself.



Within this cycle, there are many opportunities to reinforce company values. First and foremost, who your company promotes says a lot about what you value. For example, if you promote people who demonstrate inclusion and diversity, this is then clearly what your company cares about. If you also promote people who genuinely care about the customer, then your company is obviously customer centric.

At every point in the HR cycle there is an opportunity to reinforce your focus on customer centricity. Take a look at every aspect of the Human Resources Cycle that can demonstrate your organizational commitment to customer centricity, and adjust it accordingly.

3. Recognition

Assuming that the people in your organization are fairly and competitively compensated, a powerful motivator is recognition, as discussed in chapter 6. Recognition is a public affirmation of performance consistent with corporate values. Similar to the reinforcement possible through the HR Cycle, when you recognize an employee for a job well done, you in turn communicate what your company truly cares about.

A recognition program reinforces your corporate values.

Recognizing people who provided an enviable customer experience reinforces the commitment to customer centricity.

4. Best Practices

One way to move from a desire to be customer centric to actually being customer centric is to determine best practices within your organization (those things you want everyone to do), and then to codify and share those best practices with every employee. In other words, show your team what other people are doing well so they can replicate it.

When you make a point of acknowledging, celebrating, and communicating best practices on a regular basis, these become top of mind. They are seen and recognized every day. People naturally start to focus on doing more of these practices; if they are doing more “best practices,” subsequently they are doing fewer of the things you do not want. Best practices are also linked to recognition, because when you acknowledge a best practice, you also identify and credit the person or team who demonstrated it.

To be truly customer centric, create a best-practices program so the process becomes cyclical and ongoing.

One way to accelerate this tool is through a “best practices” website, i.e., put a specific process in place to post a best practice to that site and, once it is live online, have it accessible to anyone in the company.

The steps to do this are as follows:

- Ensure that it actually is a best practice, which is assessed by the gatekeeper of the website
- It must be short so people obtain the information quickly
- It needs to contain the contact information of the person who performed the best practice, so that anyone can speak to them for more details (this fosters greater interaction around the topic of “best practices”)

- Leaders are accountable for regularly checking the website and then sharing pertinent examples with their team. There needs to be a tracking system in place so that at any time you can see how many people are making use of the site.
- If possible, build the website so it is easily searchable by topic and function; this way, each employee can find what is most relevant to them.

5. Vision Often Repeated

Just because your organization decides to launch a customer-centricity initiative does not mean it is the only initiative of importance. Something else may have been introduced three months ago. Then another initiative may come six months from now, and another four months after that. These initiatives that are introduced will all be important and may be focused on things like innovation, process improvement, safety, and so on. It is only natural for the initial huge focus on the customer to be diluted as new initiatives are introduced.

In order to combat this weakening concentration, the customer-centricity vision must be repeated continually (monthly at a minimum). This communication should answer key questions in employees' minds, such as: Why are we doing this? What is the goal? Why is it important? How are we progressing?

If these five elements are successfully implemented into the organization, they provide an excellent reinforcement program that ensures the ongoing focus and commitment to customer centricity.

The Legacy Room

Think of how much of an impact it would make on employees if they could be immersed into the organization with a deep understanding of purpose, drive, and their own special place in the writing of the company's legacy. Imagine the difference in these employees' contribution if they understood their part in the larger "story." Their "jobs" would become much more than just jobs. Their outlooks would be altered. They would know and feel that they are part of something significant.

One way to achieve this is through the concept of a "legacy room." Create some form of display area inside the organization that showcases the company's history and vision, and captures the way in which your customers have responded and acted towards the products or services you provide. This serves as a powerful visual representation and *reminder of why you are in business: for your customers*. Show how your product or service has affected the lives of many. Then using this space and appropriate video technology (since many may be physically remote from the actual space or room), help every employee recognize how they are an integral part of this ongoing journey and story. Explain that the company is committed to this legacy and are equipping them with what they need to be truly customer centric. Accomplishing this provides employees with a powerful mindset: they come to know that they are part of a larger customer-centric story and are then more motivated to keep that story alive and impactful by their own actions.

Chapter Ten

The Link between Customer Experience and Employee Experience

Paying Attention to the Employee Experience Is Critical



Paul is the Head of Culture and Global Performance at Eagle's Flight

By Paul Goyette

The experience you create for your customers is directly impacted by the experiences you give your employees within your organization. One is never independent of the other, and you cannot have an effective customer-experience strategy without also having an employee-experience strategy.

The latest business dialogue in the market embraces the concept of producing a great customer experience. It is likely that concepts such as "journey mapping," "customer life cycle," and "customer personas" have become familiar to you. But what exactly is a customer's experience comprised of? The entirety of any customer experience consists of every touchpoint and connection that customers have with a company throughout the transaction process. If you look closely at these touchpoints, they are thought of, created, designed, built, tested, serviced, and managed by people – in other words,

employees. Because of this, it is impossible to achieve a flawless customer experience if the employees involved in the customer's interactions within the company are not engaged, passionate, committed, and aware of their purpose.

Are your employees just showing up or do they feel a sense of purpose when they come to work?

The more effort you can put into the employee experience, the more profound an impact you will have on the shape and form of your customer's experience.

Getting Serious about the Customer Experience

While "customer experience" has been a buzzword for the last decade or so, organizations are now taking the concept more seriously than ever before. Annually around the world, billions of dollars are spent to understand and then improve the customer experience. This begins with aggregating data as feedback to enhance organizational self-awareness. The more data that is compiled, the more companies are realizing that no matter who the employee is or what their role, they do have an impact on the customer.

A big part of improving the customer experience is adapting and adjusting your organization to meet customers where they are right now – not where your company wants them to be. For example, one organization offers safety programs to improve employee safety in the workforce across a number of industries. Upon first launch, this organization gave their programs unique, unorthodox names in order to generate attention. After one year, the organization carefully analyzed its data and realized that a significant number of online searchers dismissed the results in front of them because the

program names had nothing to do with improving the safety of their workers. In response, the organization renamed its programs to better align with how potential clients were searching and the types of words that resonated with their needs.

Part of the reason why the focus on customer experience continues to grow stronger is because today there is immediate visibility into a good or bad experience. Think of social media and the emergence of 24/7 news cycles. If you deliver a poor customer experience, you run the risk of that information going public and becoming instantly visible for all to see and learn about, whether it is through an online review, viral video, or social media post.

In addition to visibility, organizations now have access to data that clearly points to a positive outcome when the customer is at the center of all decisions. Research shows that customer-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to those that are not focused on the customer. Investing in the customer experience has the potential to double a company's revenue within 36 months. 86% of buyers say they would pay for better service. And two thirds of a company's competitive edge is based on the experience they deliver their customers.

While the spotlight on the customer experience still shines brightly, there is a new spotlight in play on the global business stage that goes hand in hand with the customer experience, and that is: the employee experience.

The Employee's Role in the Customers Experience

Shifting our focus to the employee for a moment, each employee's experience is comprised of their day-to-day working environment, the culture they are a part of, the choices they have, and the opportunities at their disposal to make a difference in their own

lives and those of their customers. Given that this is so, it becomes increasingly clear that every employee personally impacts the customer experience, no matter where they are in the organizational chart.

This concentration on the employee can be seen as organizations have started to place a large emphasis on their leaders to be more human, authentic, and genuine in their leadership responsibilities. A more human leader fosters better relationships with employees. A more authentic leader can create a culture of openness and vulnerability within their team. A more genuine leader cultivates trust. Leveraging these people-centric characteristics as leaders is the greatest opportunity an organization has to influence the customer experience.

While it is clear that the customer experience and employee experience are inextricably linked, each has a strong case for organizational focus on its own.

Why the Customer Experience Is So Important

The delivery of an exceptional customer experience can result in:

- Higher profitability
- Greater likelihood of repeat and additional business
- Increased loyalty

Why the Employee Experience Is So Important

When an organization focuses on optimizing the experiences its employees have, it can realize:

- Lower turnover
- Better employee engagement
- Higher scores of employee satisfaction
- Improved productivity

Employees who have exceptional experiences at work tend to be involved, happy, and motivated to perform at their best and make the greatest impact on the customer experience at each touchpoint.

A Customer's Journey with an Organization

A customer is in the market for a new lawn mower... Their last lawn mower lasted 20 years so they know they need to research and learn about what types of lawn mowers are presently available in today's market. They start on the internet or ask friends as they begin their search.

Now picture yourself as a manufacturer of battery-operated lawn mowers. You want to make sure you position your company in such a way that the customer comes to you, as opposed to one of your competitors.

1. The Customer Has a Need

The Customer's Reality: The day comes when the old lawn mower hits the scrap pile; it's time for a new one.



You want to make sure your organization is:

- Easy to find
- Effortless to navigate the website
- Demonstrating that it has the perfect solution


You do not want your organization to be:

- Unknown, or worse, impossible to find
- Clunky and difficult to navigate
- Lacking an obvious solution offering

It is unlikely that your potential customer is talking only to your company. If they are indeed communicating with many, you must ask yourself the question, why should they choose us?

2. The Customer Is Considering Your Organization

The Customer's Approach: After asking friends and searching online, options are gathered for exploration.



Consider

You want to make sure your organization is:

- Simple to engage with
- Unobtrusive
- Supportive
- Knowledgeable


You do not want your organization to be:

- Unfriendly
- Difficult to connect with
- Too desperate
- Lacking the knowledge and authority to effectively serve the customer at the right touchpoints

This is a critical stage in the customer's purchase process, since it is here where you demonstrate that selecting you is the superior choice. If you succeed, the customer makes their purchase and moves onto the next phase.

3. The Customer Chooses Your Organization

The Customer's Decision: Your product and customer attention have made "the cut." Now it's time to transact.



Purchase

You want to make sure your organization is:

- Easy to work with
- True to its word
- Thinking about and projecting issues before they occur
- Providing the right information, at the right time, in the right way

You do not want your organization to be:

- Difficult and unclear
- Robotic
- Assumptive (wrongfully assuming the customer already understands what you do and how you do it)
- Focused too much on the transaction

Once you make the sale, it is here where the customer experience really evolves to another level. Now is your chance to impress, serve, inform, deliver, and cater to each individual customer so that this is not the only time they buy from you.

4. The Customer Uses the Product or Service

The Customer's Relief: It's time to deliver your battery-operated lawn mower for customer use.



You want to make sure your organization is:

- The right fit
- Meeting the stated objective
- Delivering on a world-class scale
- Logistically smooth
- Simple and straightforward in its communications

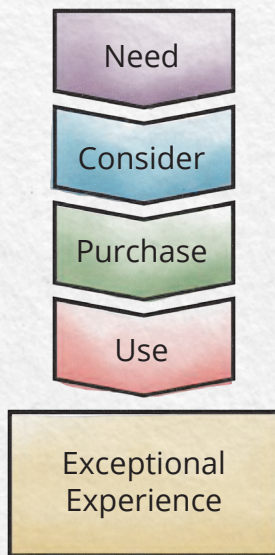
You do not want your organization to be:

- Convoluted in its process
- Lacking in needed follow-ups

- Delivering just like every other company in your field
- Logistically sloppy and laden with errors
- Confusing and unnecessarily complicated

In this step, you want your company to shine. You want your customers to know, without a doubt in their minds, that they chose the right organization to work with.

As you travel through these four generic steps of the customer's journey, the relationship you have with your customer becomes increasingly personal. With each touchpoint comes another, deeper level of contact. You can see how important it is to ensure that the employees involved at each touchpoint are passionate about what they do, equipped with the right tools, and ready and willing to do everything they can to make that customer's experience an exceptional one.



What Is the Employee Experience?

The employee experience is the sum total of everything the employee experiences within an organization from before onboarding to after retirement. This includes how employees find the company, how they communicate with the company prior to hire, how the company hires them, how the company develops them, how personal workflows are organized, the environment they work in, the tools they have at their disposal, what they are provided in order to maximize productivity and optimize satisfaction, and so on. Every single factor plays a role in the overall employee experience – in precisely the same way, every single factor plays a role in the overall customer experience. As an employee, each interaction has, by some degree, an impact on your customers' satisfaction.

Imagine you are an employee who has been working hard and putting in overtime hours to finish a major project...

Three weeks later, you complete the project and it is a huge success. One week after this, your leader comes to you with a plaque, and offers you a promotion and a raise. Picture how this makes you feel. Valued. Rewarded for hard work. Recognized for success. Think of how it impacts your overall experience as an employee.

Now change this scenario to reflect a situation where you put in the work and the extra hours, and you end up with a completed and highly successful project. The difference is, at this company, one week later there are changes to management and now your new leader notifies you that one of the computer software programs vital to your job will be phased out, and discretionary spending accounts for everyone in your area will be cut by 25%.

How might you feel in this situation? Frustrated? Undervalued? Unrecognized for your efforts and successes?

How you feel in this and all situations adds to your overall employee experience.

The History of the Employee Experience

Historically, from the turn of the century to the Great Depression to the Industrial Revolution, businesses did not focus on the employee experience because the corporate attitude, and quite frankly, the employee mindset, was all about having the right person for the right job with a “just do it” mentality. Employers provided the basics of desk, pencil, and light...and the employees brought the rest.

Next, enter the era of role efficiency where we saw consultants crawling throughout organizations with stopwatches to fuel new process improvements, content production for standard operating procedure manuals, and workforce planning algorithms. Ironically enough, all of these efforts concentrated on improving productivity from an already dedicated employee base.

Then came the “do more with less” mentality and when it took hold, employees were working harder than ever. Enter the employee-engagement drop zone. Here’s where we saw employee burnout, KPI fatigue, record work hours, frayed nerves, and increased stress-related issues. These were the unforeseen products of pushing for a hyperproductive workplace. To address this issue, employee engagement began to creep into organizational lexicons. Incentive programs were rampant, suggestion boxes could be seen at every corner, the creation of subgroup culture teams became more visible, and employers began differentiating themselves from the competition by providing future skills training and not just “in my job” training.

It is my belief that in the last 10 years, given the rapid growth of global communication in the form of social media platforms and communication apps, employees have now begun to see what is possible in their work environments and business relationships, with flexibility in work schedules, relaxation of

dress codes, and inclusion of family (even pets!). Now we see a new business vocabulary: “hoteling,” “inclusion strategies,” “employee journey mapping,” “culture transformation,” and more. Be it for the short term or long term, the emphasis inside organizations has moved away from “getting the right person” and towards “ensuring that the right person feels valued at every step of their journey.”

What Is the Business Case for a Focus on the Employee Experience?

It is in the data.

Companies gather significant data on corporate culture and employee engagement, and the overwhelming conclusion is that the employee matters. A simple Google search returns title after title that will tell you exactly what to measure and how to measure it.

Just a few examples include:

“The 10 Company Metrics you should...”

“5 Simple Ways to Assess...”

“5 Culture Metrics You Should...”

“8 Ways to Measure...”

The bottom line is, you can determine how engaged your employees are simply by asking. Ask employees formally through surveys and employee-engagement software platforms, or ask employees informally through team meetings, town halls, or leader-led culture initiatives.

The employee-centric aspects most focused on determining employee engagement should include:

- Communication
- Role agility
- Personal development
- The work environment
- Purpose alignment
- Role responsibility

This data is invaluable in your development and positioning of an employee-centric strategy, and at the same time, the data comes with an enormous potential pothole. That pothole is inaction. Once employees become receptive to the idea of employee engagement, and more importantly, being asked for their opinion, there is an expectation of action on the part of the organization and its senior leaders. Inaction when it comes to data runs the risk of creating employee disengagement, making it that much more difficult to drive a focus on the customer experience.

The Facts

When you do ask your employees about engagement, and take action to right the wrongs and enhance the rights, there are some overall data points that are essential to consider.

Statistics show that:

- Happy employees are more productive employees
- Disengaged employees cost companies money
- The majority of employees in North America think the corporate culture they are a part of is not right for them
- Employees want to feel supported and do not change their habits when they make more money (reward programs tend not to have a long-term impact, believe it or not, because inherently, people want to do a good job – but are they given the opportunity to do so?)

- Poor employee experience leads to more sick days
- Better employee experience leads to executional excellence, which leads to profitability
- Choice of environment improves performance, i.e., when employees are given a choice of where and how they can work (in the office, at a corporate hotel, at home, in a coffee shop, etc.), this demonstrates a flexible and accommodating organization, which is more likely to lead to a positive experience
- Job perceptions matter to a person's overall personal comfort level

The Three Pillars of an Improved Employee Experience

If we know that the employee experience is important, what can we do to enhance it? As you consider an employee experience strategy, three fundamental elements to consider are culture, environment, and available resources.

1. Culture

A company's culture represents how its employees act and behave, particularly when no one is watching, and includes how an employee feels when they work for the company.

Consider:

Logical Reporting Structure: Who does each employee report to? Does it make sense?

Demonstration of Company Purpose: Are the company values and purpose reinforced frequently, and clearly?

Decision-Making Freedom: Are employees given the appropriate authority to make decisions for themselves in order to produce better outcomes?

Autonomy at Work: Are employees trusted to work with an appropriate degree of autonomy to get the job done?

Clear Directional Insight: Are employees effectively guided, at the right time and in the right way?

As you make strides in your organization to focus on and improve the employee experience, offer clear paths for advancement. Allow true freedom of expression. When you hire, be mindful of finding people who also fit your culture, not just the roles in which they are to be placed. Be intentional about encouraging work-life balance and avoid work-life integration. Listen intently to the opinions and voices of your employees.

2. Environment

A company's environment includes the large and the small, the physical and the conceptual, which together comprise a complete working experience. It reflects what an employee experiences when they are at work.

Consider:

Work-Space Adjustments: Consider sit, stand, or walking desks; ergonomic chairs and work spaces; proper lighting; relaxing break spaces, etc.

Clear Working-Hours Framework: This can be decided either by the employee or the company. It must be clear from the beginning and aligned with the company's strategy needs.

Team-Bonding Experiences: Create impactful team events that foster the relationship your employees have with one another – not at the expense of employee personal time outside of work.

Open Space: An increasing number of large organizations today are developing open, communal spaces in their work environments to promote togetherness, connection, and collaboration among employees while they are at work.

Green Space: On average, most working people spend 90% of their time indoors. Studies show that indoor green spaces have a significant and positive impact on the overall employee experience.

Flexible Hours and Locations: Focus more on what you want your employees to produce and achieve, and then work backwards, providing an opportunity to choose appropriate hours and work locations to boost productivity and work enjoyment. Employees are more motivated to do great work in a great space.

3. Available Resources

When you equip your employees with the right resources, they are either able to do their jobs faster, easier and better, or as expected but more predictably. This, in turn, leads to higher productivity and better outcomes, and greater on-the-job efficiency.

Consider:

Availability of Company Materials: What is available at this present moment for employees to use freely? Be sure materials are easy to acquire.

Job-Related Technology: Are your technologies current and relative to each job position? Does each employee have the right technologies to help them do their job better? Provide company communication platforms that can help you better collaborate as an organization, including Instant Messaging, Direct Messaging, or VoIP.

Organization Apps: Do your employees have apps they can download right on their smartphones to help them stay organized and on point in their daily work lives?

Role-Efficiency Systems: How can you maximize your employees' success? Consider apps and systems that increase their daily efficiency such as Contact Relationship Management, Expense Apps, Communication Platforms, HR Platforms, and Performance Management Systems.

When employees have what they need or know where to get it, the end result is higher productivity and a happier employee.

What the Future Looks Like for the Employee Experience

It is time to ask – what can be done to improve the experience of the employees, at all levels of the organization?

At the Organizational Level

Be sure that everyone in your organization harnesses the company's vision and unanimously focuses on the end goal. Everyone must be aware of the fact that resources can be shared in order to make the organizational end goal a reality. Culturally, your organization must be ready to listen, reflect, and respond, which is the foundation of the Employee Platinum Rule: treat other employees the way they would like to be treated. Listen to stated needs. Reflect on the financial and cultural impact. Thoughtfully respond with answers.

At the Leadership Level

Let your team know their role in the journey to becoming more customer centric. Maintain frequent, positive, useful, and effective communication with your workforce in order to foster enthusiasm and a united effort towards the improvement of the employee and customer experience each day. Leaders must define, model, coach, and require

employees to act and behave in particular ways that are directed at a continual improvement of the overall customer experience. More specifically, define expectations clearly, model the appropriate behaviors, and coach those who need support. Require the expected behaviors when modeling and coaching aren't producing results.

At the Individual Contributor Level

Searching for clarity is an individual's greatest responsibility in the quest for employee engagement. This encompasses clarity of purpose, personal responsibility, anticipated skill development, expected behaviors, organizational non-negotiables, etc. And with great clarity comes great responsibility.

Organizations that take their focus on the customer experience and marry it with a profound focus on the employee experience, put themselves in a position to optimize their customer experience even further. The more an employee's experience helps them feel that they belong, the more inspired, ambitious, and motivated that employee will be to create an equally exceptional experience for the customers they serve.

Chapter Eleven

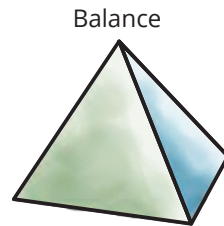
Ensuring the Longevity of a Customer-Centric Culture

Four Focal Points

There are four areas to be mindful of in order to ensure your focus on customer centricity is sustained.

Balance: Customer Centricity Relative to Other Priorities

Organizations have many priorities. Some are long term (e.g., innovation, research and development, expansion), others are short term (e.g., be environmentally responsible, be socially responsible, be culturally appropriate), and others are pragmatic (e.g., earn more revenue, hire a new team, open a new office). Customer centricity could then become “just another item on the list.” While customer centricity is indeed important and is defined as a priority, it must still exist among many other important priorities, all of which must remain in balance.



Customer Centricity May Not Always Be Your Top Priority

There is no shame or fault in recognizing the fact that customer centricity is not always at the top of the priority list. In fact, there are many times where it would be illogical and irresponsible to

put it first. Think of company safety. Would you put customer centricity ahead of the safety of your employees? How about above the acquisition and renewal of the licenses you need to stay in business?

Sometimes some priorities will supersede others, and at different times priorities will simply coexist with one another. What is important is that you assess the situation and rightfully determine what relative position each priority belongs in during critical moments.

Customer Centricity Must Coexist

To gain insight into the correct order of priority at any given time, consider this critical question: What happens if I do not do this and then what are the consequences? That which is immediately and apparently obvious (the need to be customer centric), must fit in with the other priorities at the appropriate level so that the organization knows how to apply its time, energy, and effort. It is not a matter of “either/or,” but rather “to what degree.” “Either/or” refers to ranking the order of each priority, whereas “to what degree” helps people understand the relative value of the priorities so they know which ones coexist and which ones interrelate.

Consider parenting as an example...

You are a parent and you are always (naturally) concerned about your child. You put your child first and they are one of the utmost priorities in your life. Spending quality time with them at every possible moment is something you prioritize. However, if you decide never to spend quality time with your spouse, it is likely that your relationship will suffer as a result; if your spousal relationship is weak, this then impacts your child. So then, by not moving your child down the priority list and moving your spouse up periodically, you may actually do your family more harm than good.

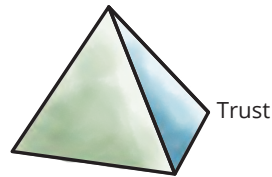
When it comes to customer centricity, break loose from tendencies to think in absolute terms. Customer centricity is not

an absolute. It is an imperative and it is a priority, but you must use your judgment and wisdom to put it into context, which may in turn change, quarter to quarter, or year to year.

Be mindful of having the organization aligned in such a way that customer centricity has its rightful place in the overall structure and environment in order to sustain both the enterprise, and the enthusiasm of your customers.

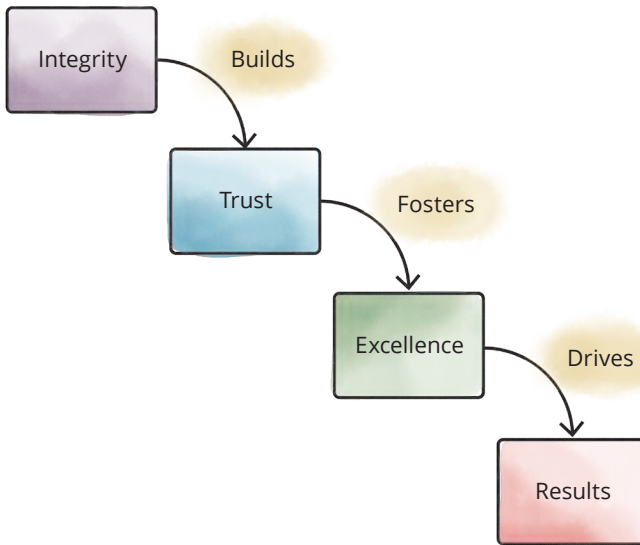
Trust

Customers highly value trust. As a result, the organization must also place a high value on trust. If there is trust in the organization, it will then be reflected in the interactions with customers. On the other hand, if the organization is weak with respect to trust, it is likely there will be customer-experience-related problems along the way.



Think of the organization as a highway for a moment. A trustworthy organization is a smoothly paved highway; an untrustworthy organization is bumpy, unpaved, and full of potholes. On the paved highway, drivers arrive at their destinations easily and predictably. On the unpaved highway, drivers encounter many driving difficulties and may never actually reach their desired destination.

The truth of the matter is that most organizations do not place adequate emphasis on trust. To better understand how to address it, we can break the concept of trust into two parts.



Trust Begins with Integrity

To understand integrity's role in building organizational trust, consider the following Integrity Model.

In order to build trust, first and foremost there must be personal integrity. This is when people can rely on others to do what they say they will do, and are also absolutely clear on what has been committed to.

Consider this example.

You tell a friend that you will help them advance their career. In your mind, this means reading over their resume and making edits. In the mind of your friend, however, it means editing their resume, calling your contacts in executive roles, and then arranging interviews. In this case, what you said you would do was really not as clear as it needed to be, since both parties left with a different view of what "helping me with my career" meant, and hence how personal integrity would be assessed.

A large portion of your personal integrity is not simply what you

do, but what is perceived that you have promised to do. You must manage others' perceptions of what they believe you will do. In the example above, you can make yourself clear by stating to your friend, "I will help you advance your career by reviewing your resume. You can take it from there." Then your planned actions are crystal clear, and your integrity will be evaluated accordingly. Otherwise, your integrity will suffer because you failed to do what your friend thought you would be doing, even if what they thought was never your intent.

If you demonstrate integrity, you are building trust. Integrity is at the heart of trust. Every time you demonstrate integrity, people begin to trust you more and more. If people can trust you, this then fosters excellence, because whenever people interact with you, they have confidence in what you say. As trust builds, this creates an environment in which individuals can excel at what they do; when people excel, they drive better results within an organization.

***Integrity builds trust. Trust fosters excellence.
Excellence drives results.***

Within an organization, there is therefore a direct link between integrity and results, at the very core of which is trust.

In the world of customer centricity, you want your customer to trust you. If a customer trusts you, then what they perceive they will obtain from your company and what they actually obtain is the same. In order to achieve this you need organizational integrity. This way, trust builds with your customers so they feel confident to engage with you continually, time and time again.

There is no room for lack of integrity and trust. Given that this is so, unhealthy workplace traits and behaviors should be eliminated, including internal politics, "water cooler talk," talking behind one another's backs, saying one thing and doing

another, refraining from saying what you really want to say, hidden agendas, etc. Everything that is damaging to trust is also damaging to the Integrity Model and, as a result, customers find themselves dealing with an organization that cannot be trusted.

Trust Happens between People

If you want a trustworthy organization, you must have solid relationships between the individuals who comprise it.

Fostering great relationships within an organization creates a trusting environment, which in turn impacts the customer experience.

Five things are required to improve trust between individuals within the organization.

Translate

T When two people interact, they may be speaking the same language, but the words might not carry the same message as intended by the person who says them. For example, “I will return your call soon.” This statement may mean 15 minutes to one person and 24 hours to another. There is a need for people to translate the words they use into the message they want to send. What you hear must be consistent with what the other person intends that you hear.

Respect

R Two people may not always agree with one another. There are different perspectives, viewpoints, expectations, cultural experiences, etc. Perhaps you bring something to a relationship that another does not value or see the same way, but that does not mean they should not respect you. Trust does not mean you must agree with everything someone else says or believes, but it does mean you must respect what they say and believe.

Understand

U Even when you translate and respect, this does not necessarily mean you understand. Understanding includes an appreciation for the rationale. It means you fully grasp where the other person is coming from and why. It has been said that “to understand all things is to forgive all things.” While this is not entirely true, it is often accurate.

A potential candidate is coming in for an interview...

You are conducting an interview for a new hire and they arrive 45 minutes late. Before you have even spoken to them, you decide you cannot hire them because their tardiness indicates a lack of respect for your time. As soon as they arrive, they apologize profusely and explain that they are late because an accident closed the highway both ways for 90 minutes. You may then “forgive” that person for being late because now you understand the “why” behind the circumstance.

Strengthen

S Trust in a relationship is a two-way street. It is not all about giving or taking. In a strong relationship, you walk away feeling strengthened, be it practically, emotionally, or intellectually. In some way you feel as though that person has brought value to your life. Naturally, we trust people who make us better people – we trust people who strengthen us. Inherent in strengthening is a commitment to the other person, because in order for you to strengthen another, you must put time and effort into the other person and place them in a priority position over yourself. The only reason you would give someone else such a position is because you care about them. If someone else knows you care about them, then they are far more inclined to trust you. When you are strengthened by another, you subsequently trust that person because you know they have your best interests at heart.

Tolerate

T There are many times in a relationship where, no matter how significant the effort, two people simply do not see eye to eye. In such a case, there must be tolerance. You can still interface as intelligent human beings. Trust can be strengthened by the fact that someone is willing to go the extra mile to live with the other person's foibles and annoyances for the purpose of this higher trust.

Great relationships are born from the ability to translate, respect, understand, strengthen, and tolerate. If these five elements are executed, the relationship has trust.

If trust exists in a relationship, then those people are able to accomplish much more than they were able to do without it, and better results are achieved.

These five elements cannot be performed in a manipulative way; they must be performed with personal integrity, because their value is recognized and understood.

Think of the impact on your customer if you are able to achieve this throughout the organization. Your customer feels that their message has been heard, respected, and understood, and they walk away feeling strengthened and tolerated no matter what. This becomes an outstanding customer experience, but if you take a deeper look, it is as a result of the manifestation of what is happening inside your trustful organization.

As success breeds success, so a trusting organization breeds a trusting customer, which is in turn vital to providing an exceptional customer experience.

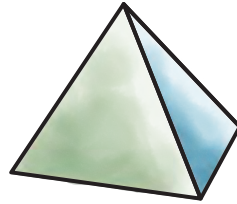


Washrooms and Lobbies

Washrooms

Your visit a new restaurant..

You are probably not going to the restaurant to use the washroom – you are going for the food, the service, the ambiance, etc. At some point, however, you will likely need to use the washroom. If it is not clean, it is bound to impact how you feel about the restaurant. Depending on how poor the state of the washroom actually is, this feeling will likely dictate whether or not you go back, especially if there are plenty of other options in the area. In this case, you make a judgment about a restaurant as a result of the state of its washroom, even though the washroom is not why you went there. This is interesting because their washroom is also not what the restaurant advertises or promotes. Nonetheless, the poor washroom worsened your overall experience.



Washrooms
and Lobbies

This raises the question: who is responsible for the washroom? Is it the janitorial crew? On-floor manager? Or the HR training? Or Operations not allotting enough of their budget towards washroom cleaning services? The answer is perhaps more important on reflection than it appears at first glance.

What are the “washrooms” in your organization? Those ancillary parts of your product or service that are not “core” and that you may pay less attention to, but that may be significantly influencing your customer and their decision about returning.

It might be a non-user-friendly website that is slowing people down, a hard-to-access entrance into your store, or an offensive poster in your office. A “washroom” can deeply and negatively affect the overall customer experience you provide. So do not pay less attention – pay more attention to the “washrooms” in your organization.

Lobbies

A company I once visited claimed to be customer centric, but their lobby was filled with some of their flashy product-related equipment. It was quite a sight and certainly looked “cool,” but it had absolutely nothing to do with me as their customer. In fact, I felt I was less important to them than their fancy equipment. In this case, the company messaging spoke one thing, but their lobby demonstrated another.

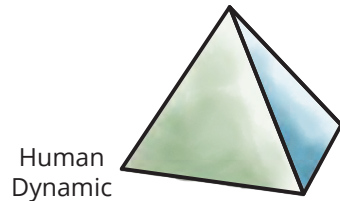
What does the “front lobby” of your organization communicate to people who walk in? Your “front lobby” might be an actual lobby, or a personal office, or plaques on a wall, or a waiting room. What message are you sending your customer from which they may be drawing conclusions? Is your “lobby” different from what you aspire to? Is it consistent with your commitment to customer centricity?

If your observable message is different from your aspirational and spoken messages, you will have a problem with your customer experience.

Be conscious of the washrooms and lobbies within your organization. Think about what they are. Then analyze them for the messages they might be sending. Check your “washrooms” and fix the issues you find. Then be sure that everything about your “lobby” coincides with everything you want your organization to be.

The Human Dynamic in the Customer-Centric Organization

Understanding the human dynamic in a customer-centric organization begins with a deep appreciation for the complexity of the human being. Recall for a moment a previous concept I mentioned where there is predictability of the group, but not of the individual. This human complexity helps explain the reason why there is individual unpredictability.



Look firstly at the differences between human beings in a general sense. (It is important to note that these differences are for human beings who are healthy and living in stable environments; for example, not suffering from some disease or illness, or inhabiting an area of the world that is troubled, dangerous, or unhealthy.)

The various dimensions of a human being can be broken down into four categories:



Physical

Each of us has physical strengths and limitations. We have different body types, different speeds at which we move, different energy levels, and different sleep requirements in order to feel our best. Some of us are in good shape, others in poor shape. One person may have small children who keep them up at night and as a result they constantly feel tired, which affects the way they operate on a daily basis. Someone else might have sliced their finger in the kitchen the day before and the injury

is now affecting their typing speed at work for the next few days. An employee may be coming down with a cold, and this is making them feel sluggish and unmotivated.

There are a countless number of factors that may influence a person's current physical state. Age is a significant determinant of a person's physical behaviors and patterns. In every organization, all of these factors play a role in performance.

Social

The social component touches a human being's emotions. Is the person happy or sad? Preoccupied or focused? Worried or excited? One person may have a great boss and they enjoy going to work every day. Another's boss might be a very poor leader and they hate work because of it. An employee may have a child who is ill, and they simply cannot stop worrying. Someone else might have parents with a milestone anniversary quickly approaching and they are planning a large surprise party for them, which is preoccupying their thinking. Another person may be wracking their brain about last-minute items they need to buy for their family camping trip this coming weekend.

There are countless social influencers that can affect the way a human being feels, acts, and behaves at any given moment. This social side of humanity is also hugely influential on our day-to-day activities.

Mental

What does a person know and not know? The mental component refers to their experience levels, and their ability to make good judgments or poor judgments. What does a person aspire to? What motivates them? What is their state of mind at this very moment?

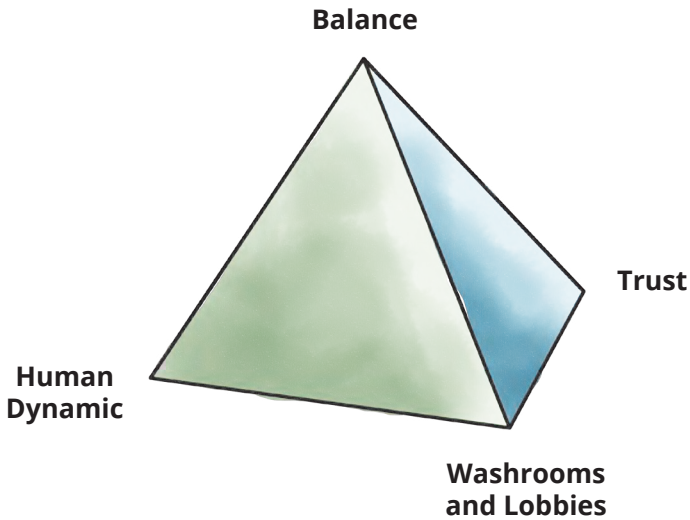
One employee has 10 years of experience in their role, and therefore is confident and able to quickly arrive at solutions. Another worker is driven by money, so every time they receive a raise they perform better. An executive may come to work in a negative mental state after their children behaved badly that morning, which dictates the way in which they handle their team that day. Our mental moods can change day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, and can have a significant impact on our actions.

Spiritual

What is a person's belief system? According to their spiritual point of view, what do they believe is their place in this universe? Our spiritual component addresses our beliefs, morals, and values as an individual on this earth.

One person believes that everyone should look out only for themselves and does not see the value in having concern for others. Another individual is loving and caring towards everyone around them because they believe that the better they treat others, the better they will be treated personally. One person believes in an afterlife, another does not. One person never tells lies, another believes that telling the odd lie is fine as long as there are no cruel intentions. The spiritual component can vary widely from one person to another, and both the simplest or most profound beliefs can change the way we act and behave.

As human beings these four areas comprise us. Under very normal circumstances human beings can be relatively predictable – but never entirely, and the four areas listed above do not represent everything an organization must be aware of in a human being. There is another critical element: their potential.



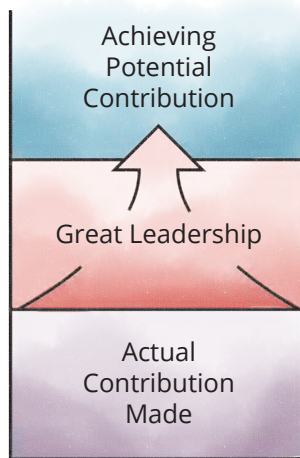
The Potential of the Human Being

“Potential” is what is yet to be developed. A human being’s potential refers to their ability to do something in the future that they have not done in the past, or that they are currently in the process of working on, but from which they have yet to see any results. We all have the ability to develop our capability or talent in order to accomplish a new goal at some later date.

If you have never had the privilege to work for a great leader, you may be doing the best job possible, but it is difficult to do more than that because you do not know what “more” looks like, and have never had a role model to learn from. On the other hand, if you currently work for a great leader, you are challenged, motivated, equipped with the right tools, and now you find yourself outperforming what you have done in the past. Why are you doing so much better now? Because a good leader knows how to harness the potential of human beings to allow them to excel.

One of the biggest drivers of organizational success is harnessing human potential within the company.

The potential of a human being is not something you want to ignore. Look for it. Recognize it. Figure out a way to harness it. One of the secrets of corporate success lies in tapping into this potential. The cost of the workforce is essentially fixed, but the potential is not. If the company can get more out of the workforce for the same amount of money, the profit is greater.



The Implications of the Human Dynamic and Human Potential on Customer Centricity

If an organization wants to be customer centric, the care of the customer must coexist with the fact that all employees are normal human beings with natural instincts towards self-preservation, self-care, and self-focus. While we can all usually successfully manage the many forces affecting our lives, there is also always the risk of being unsuccessful as a result of some other circumstance taking place in our lives (e.g., dealing with an ill parent or going through a divorce). In such cases, it is not that the person is doing anything wrong, it is just that

their life is particularly complicated at the moment, and this in turn complicates their ability to focus on customers' needs and expectations.

The reality is that when it comes to the human beings that comprise an organization, the organization is dealing with both a challenge and a benefit. The challenge is that human beings are extremely complicated. The benefit is that they have a tremendous potential that can be unlocked and optimized. So then, recognize each person for their capability and potential, then point them in the direction of customer centricity, and be mindful of the fact that they also have their own needs as they pursue that goal.

At times, it is difficult to put the customer first. The many variables at play do not always mesh well together. For example, if you ask an employee to give their full care to the customer but they are dealing with the stresses of an emerging illness, they may be unable to give that customer their all. If an employee is worried about passing an exam tomorrow that is critical to their long-term growth at the company, chances are their full attention will not be on the customer today.

Human Beings Are Far More Complex Than We Assume at First Glance

The issue at hand is that an organization and all its leaders must recognize the many factors influencing their human beings, be able to deal with those factors, and then show them that these factors can still coexist with the dynamic of caring for the customer.

So then, how can you successfully support the organization to be customer centric in light of the complex nature of the human beings on whom the company is relying to provide the customer with a great experience?

It Begins with the Way in Which You Treat Your Employees

Treat people in your organization better than you want them to treat your customers.

If someone does not feel well at work, address it thoughtfully. If another employee needs a flexible work schedule, try to provide it. When a worker is going through a tough time, give them the support and resources they require. If an employee comes to you with a complaint or concern within the organization, listen intently and try to develop an appropriate solution.

The same way you want your employees to handle customer complaints, product returns, or special requests, that is with care, courtesy, and kindness, is the way you must handle employee-related matters. Think of every employee as worthy of the very highest level of treatment. When you treat your employees in such a powerful way, they then know precisely how to treat customers in the same fashion.

To be customer centric you must first be employee centric.

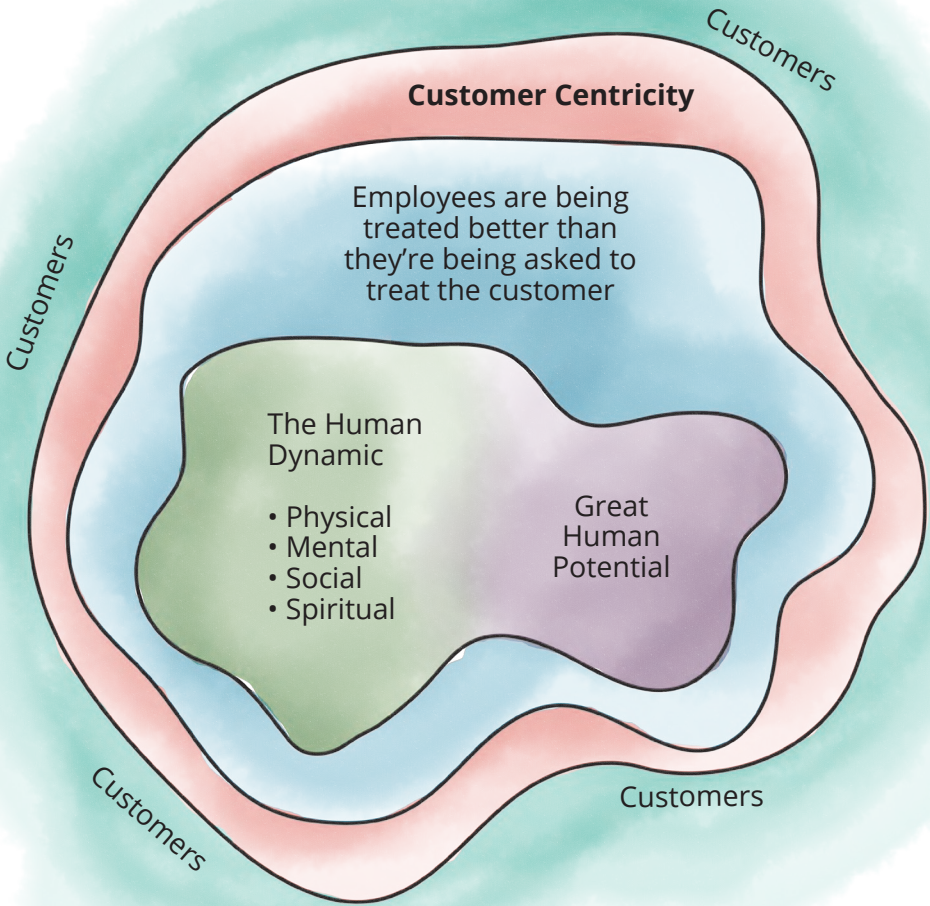
When employees feel cared for, respected, supported, and happy with the way they are treated at work, it is much easier for them to treat their customers in the same way.

At our very core, as humans we are fundamentally heavily influenced by our emotions. Think of being in love. When we are in love, we often do the otherwise unthinkable simply because we love that person. For example, you move to another country because your spouse received an incredible job offer, or you sell your home to help fund your child's dream of becoming a famous actor. These actions are driven by emotions – the strong emotion of love.

In the same way that we are emotionally driven in our lives outside of work, we are also driven by our emotions inside of work. Customer centricity must begin with an emotional drive. Everyone in the organization needs to be positively and emotionally engaged. Where exactly does that come from? The organization itself and its leaders. Does the organization truly care for its employees? Does it harness their potential? Is it respectful? Empowering? Empathetic? If it is, and if it indeed treats its employees amazingly well, then it is easy to have those employees treat their customers amazingly well too.

The human component of an organization is complex and significant. In consideration of all other activities, processes, policies, and initiatives taking place inside an organization at any given time, the human component is always present and intertwined. In order for it all to exist in harmony, there must be both awareness of, and appreciation for, each human being in all their individual uniqueness, and then a commitment to treat those human beings with respect and care.

This commitment is the foundation of true customer centricity, and key to achieving success in creating outstanding customer experiences.



Making every customer a priority is now more important to organizational success than ever before, a priority that will become increasingly vital in the years to come. The focus on becoming customer centric is intensifying.

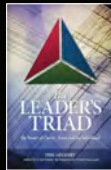
A Customer Centric culture is one in which every employee consistently asks:

*“How will the decision I am about to make impact our customers’ experience?”
Supported by their leader, they then know what to do about it.*

Incorporating contributions from several of his Eagle’s Flight colleagues, in this book Phil shows how to make this mindset and behavior a reality in your own organization.

Phil is the CEO of Eagle’s Flight, a behavior change company which demonstrates Customer Centricity internally; and whose expertise lies in helping others do the same.

Other books by Phil



www.eaglesflight.com

