

# THE EMPLOYEE FACTOR: READYING YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SUCCESS

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In today's competitive business environment, organizations are investing money, time and energy into customer experience as a key strategy to deliver the brand promise they make to customers. They are creating customer experience strategies, mapping customer journeys and looking for ways to measure their customer experiences. All of this is important, but ultimately the customer experience lives in the employees themselves.

Most organizations recognize the vital role employees play in delivering customer experiences. But the question remains, how do you engage your employees and ensure they are ready, willing and committed to deliver your brand promise—your unique, branded customer experience?

All the money and effort invested in customer experience will have no impact without a committed team of employees to deliver it. Linking employee reward and recognition programs to customer experience measures is one way to encourage employees to deliver your brand promise. However, this extrinsic “carrot” is not enough. *How do you really engage your employees to deliver on your brand promise?* **You need to capture their hearts and minds** so that everyone is intrinsically motivated to live the brand and not just simply follow policies and procedures that tell them what to say and do.

There are three key elements that are essential to readying your employees and ensuring they are willing and committed to delivering your brand promise:

- 1 Establish the Compelling Need
- 2 Develop the Right Mindset
- 3 Deliver the Right Experiences

### 1. Establish the Compelling Need

Every organization has its own specific reasons for wanting to improve the customer experience. Perhaps it is because of evolving customer needs and expectations, industry or business changes, or increasing competition. These internal and external pressures, and the need for change, are very clear and apparent to senior leaders. However, they are usually not well understood by employees. While executives feel a “sense of urgency” to improve the customer experience, employees rarely feel that same sense of urgency.

This “sense of urgency” gap exists in nearly every organization that undertakes a customer experience transformation. It is especially important to address the “sense of urgency” gap if your employees believe they are already delivering a good customer experience.



Without a compelling reason to change, there is a high risk that customer experience efforts will not be optimized because employees will not understand why changing their thinking, behaviours and actions is important to the organization's success. In many cases, they will simply view customer experience as just another "flavour of the month" initiative.

To engage your employees to deliver your brand promise, start by giving them a reason to change and let them know what's in it for them and the benefits of making a change. Take time to recognize and thank employees for their efforts and share the benefits of continuing to improve the overall customer experience. This will create the motivation for employees to deliver your brand promise.

## 2. Develop the Right Mindset

Employees must have the right mindset to deliver your brand promise. It's not about telling them what to do or say. It starts with ensuring that they understand your brand promise and the experience you want to create—your Experience Purpose. Every employee—even those who don't interact directly with customers—needs to understand how they impact the customer experience. They need to see how their thoughts and actions can be used to deliver the brand promise to customers every day.

### Create your Experience Purpose

Employees need to understand the experience you are trying to create—

- what does your brand stand for?
- what do they need to do to deliver your brand promise?
- what feeling should customers have at the end of every interaction?

Only when employees understand your brand can they begin to deliver it.

An Experience Purpose is an internal expression of your brand that clearly articulates to every employee the role he/she plays in delivering your brand promise. It helps leaders and employees understand and make meaning of your brand, the promises your organization makes, and what they can do to keep that promise. A strong purpose statement can accelerate your customer experience transformation.

### Change employees' thoughts and actions

Once you have created your Experience Purpose, it is important to "activate" it with everyone in the organization. Activation is more than just an announcement or communication. You need to create a dialogue that helps employees change the way they think about customer experience.



Employees need to understand what they will see, hear, and feel when everyone lives your purpose and delivers your brand promise. Share a story of a typical customer interaction and contrast it with an example of an ideal experience to show employees how small changes in their words, actions and behaviours can make a big difference to a customer. Reinforce that you want them to think about how their words and actions impact the customer experience and if they are delivering the brand promise.

#### **Connect purpose to everyone's role**

Everyone in your organization—leaders and employees; customer-facing roles and non-customer-facing roles—needs to understand how what they do impacts customers. Non-customer-facing employees often don't understand the significant impact they have on customer experience. Yet, they formulate the policies, write the procedures, develop the systems, and create the tools that ultimately affect the customer experience. Share examples of specific actions employees in various roles can take to deliver your ideal customer experience so everyone understands the role they play in delivering your brand promise. Ask all employees to commit to key actions and behaviours that align with your purpose and deliver the desired customer experience.

### **3. Deliver the Right Experiences**

Even after you have clearly communicated your purpose to everyone in the organization and they have committed to live it every day, you are not done. Employees will only believe the organization is committed to delivering the brand promise when they experience it for themselves. And only then, will they be committed to changing their own behaviours to deliver a great customer experience.

#### **Align your employee experience with your brand**

Many organizations overlook their employee experience—the entire employee journey—from hiring to onboarding, through day-to-day work and potentially departures from the organization. Leading customer experience organizations believe in the Golden Rule—treat others as you wish to be treated—and they deliberately design and deliver their employee experience to match their customer experience. Ask yourself if the experience your employees have with your organization reflects the experience you want them to deliver to customers.

Do employees experience your brand promise on their first day on the job, in corporate communications, interactions with leaders, and in their day-to-day work?

If you aren't delivering an experience for your employees that reflects your brand, they won't believe in it or commit to delivering it to customers.



### **Enlist leaders as enablers**

When you ask employees to change their actions and behaviours to deliver your brand promise, you are embarking on a cultural transformation that needs to be led and enabled by leaders. Employees need to see that their leaders are aligned to the brand promise and are consistently living the purpose. Leaders need to consistently create the right experiences for employees to demonstrate the organization's commitment and ensure living the purpose becomes part of the organization's culture.

A leader's words and actions create experiences for employees and also for customers. If these experiences are not aligned with your brand promise, employees will not be committed to delivering it either. Leaders need to set an example with their words and actions. They need to demonstrate how to live the purpose every day.

Ensure leaders know the critical role they play in engaging employees to deliver your brand promise. Everything they do will either reinforce or undermine your purpose—what they choose to focus on during team meetings, the behaviours they coach and reward, and the success stories they choose to share with their team. All of these actions send subtle (and not-so-subtle) messages to employees about the importance of living the purpose and delivering your brand promise.

### **Empower employees to deliver the purpose**

Employees may believe in your purpose and may be committed to changing their behaviours, but they will quickly become frustrated if they are not empowered to be able to deliver your brand promise. Look to remove barriers that prevent employees from delivering great customer experiences. Sometimes a simple change to a policy or process can make a world of difference.

Frequently, employees are hesitant to accept their new found empowerment. They fear the repercussions of not following the status quo. To accelerate this change, employees need to know, and see first-hand, that leaders support their empowerment and the actions they are taking to deliver your brand promise.

Ask leaders to promote the right behaviours by sharing stories and examples in team meetings and other communications. Consistently recognizing and promoting the desired behaviours throughout the organization will demonstrate the organization's commitment to living the purpose and will encourage all employees to do so.



## Conclusion

The very best customer experience strategies and initiatives will ultimately fail if you don't consider the potential impact of the employee factor. You need every employee to commit to delivering your brand promise at every touch point.

By establishing the compelling need, developing the right mindset and delivering the right experiences, your employees will be engaged and committed to delivering your brand promise to customers. When everyone is engaged in living the brand, rather than simply following directions on what to say and do, your organization will be able to deliver your brand promise and create great experiences for your customers.



