Video Transcript
A Customer-Centric Culture Needs a Customer-Centric Leader by Customers That Stick

Here it is our first official blog post of the 2020s and what better way to start off the new year and new decade. A decade that I hope will be marked by incredible improvements in customer experience, design, thinking, and execution. By taking a look at one of the most essential ingredients of customer experience, leadership. I'm not a fan of absolutes but in this case one applies. A customer centric culture is the only way to deliver hero class customer experiences consistently. Customer experience can only be systematized so much, even for organizations whose relationship with customers is primarily digital. There are human touch points, and in these cases, how focused, trained and empowered team members are to deliver best-in-class experiences will have a massive impact on the experiences that customers eventually have. Not every moment can be scripted. Not every customer stays on the journey map. A customer centric culture executes when planning and design cannot.

Culture is one of the most undefinable aspects of any organization. Like the idea of love, culture often has a synergistic, intangible quality that makes it hard to define. Well we can certainly isolate key attributes that contribute to culture. Truly understanding a particular organization's culture at a given time is challenging because culture is more than just the values, ethics and processes of an organization, it's inevitably made up of its people. Like the ingredients in a complex recipe, each individual in an organization influences the culture in their own way. Of the people who influence culture in an organization, leaders tend to have a proportionally outsized impact. Leadership is one of the most essential aspects of creating a customer centric customer focused culture and while leaders cannot single-handedly create a great culture they can't single-handedly break a culture by valuing goals and objectives that are not aligned with cultural priorities.

When we think about creating a customer centric culture particularly in an organization that has not been centered around the customer in the past, one of the most crucial aspects of this change is executive buy-in. Does the leader at the top believe in having a customer centric mission? Does the leader believe in and view each and every business decision through the lens of how it impacts the customer? In my keynote on customer experience leadership, we share our 3E leadership framework for customer experience leaders. The first E is for embody. Does the leader walk the talk? Does the leader embody the principles and behaviors that they expect from their team? Too often the answer is rarely or sometimes. The CX leadership disconnect is real.

Now, if you ask most leaders if they value customers or even put customers first they will

say of course, yet when you ask people down the line in the organization they tell a different tale. In this disconnect we can see some of the most important ways that leaders can impact a customer service culture. The first is priorities. Saying we value customers is one thing. We've all been customers at a business that had something on the wall or on the checkout counter saying how important we were as customers yet our experience did not live up to the slogans' Why? Because often the priorities of the organization were not customer centric. The company might have been focused on short-term results and unwilling to invest in customer experience. They might have placed strategic focus in areas not directly related to customer experience. Of course, I'm not saying that every organizational decision should be to give the customer what they want in any given interaction, but in a customer centric organization every decision should at least account for the long term relationship with the customer.

Next, are incentives. This is an offshoot of priorities. Are we incentivizing the behaviors we want from our team? Telling a team that customers come first but then focusing on how many sales were closed, how far below budget they were, or how productive they were, particularly when these metrics might be at odds with the best customer experience, can really be a gut punch to creating a customer centric culture. Incentives send a message they tell teams what a leader's real priorities are. Leaders who want to create a customer centric culture put their money where their messages are. If you want to deliver hero class customer experiences to win with experience then you have to invest in customer experience.

The final disconnect, and it is the one that is most damning, is that the leader really doesn't mean it when they say that customers are the priority. The leaders say our customers come first because they know they are supposed to, but once you scratch the surface you learned that their view of customers is particularly transactional. You know this may be the result of their Industry, their market position, or simply their worldview. The customer is given lip service while other priorities are elevated to the detriment of customer experience. Now, let me say something that you won't hear most customer experience experts say, customer experience is not always the most important thing. In some industries customer experience is not what creates competitive advantage or drives long-term success, however, these industries are becoming fewer in number every year. For those industries where customer experience matters, where organizations are striving to create a customer centric culture, executive buy-in and sponsorship is essential. The leader cannot put the wheel of customers posters on the wall and then push efficiency and short-term profitability at the expense of customer experience and relationships. Leaders cannot expect those they lead to serve two masters. Teams will figure out what leaders care about and if customers are not at the top of the list leaders will get behaviors that aren't customer focused as a result.

When you're trying to create a customer centric culture the customer is at the center. That doesn't mean that you give away the store or, for those of you who have seen many of my videos and blog posts over the years, that you create a model that's unprofitable. You must have a profitable model for customer experience or what is the point? It just means that you're considering the customer when making strategic investments, when making process and policy decisions, when making staffing decisions, and when making all of the other leadership and business decisions either in the short term or the long term that will have an impact on the customers' experience and the relationship with the customer. In the end, you cannot have a customer centric culture without a customer centric leader. You cannot have a team dedicated and focused on customers when the message from the top, when the structure and priorities, and financial resources allocated from the top are not reinforcing both the theory and practice of being customer centric. So, for leaders if you want to have a customer centric culture just remember, it starts with you.

Well I'm Adam, thanks so much for being with us and we will see you on the next video. Until then be your customers' hero.

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