



How to Sustain the Focus on Customer Experience in Good AND Challenging Times

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Ian Golding, certified Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt and longtime Customer Experience Specialist sat down with The Conference Board's own Demet Tunç to discuss the importance of Customer Experience during both a crisis situation and business-as-usual.

It has always been difficult to keep the focus on the customer, but in a crisis like this the noise and pressure applied to organizations can make it even more challenging. Despite the strain, roughly three-quarters of those polled during the webinar said that leadership in their organizations now considered customer experience (CX) as a top business priority as a direct result of COVID-19. Many also found that siloes within their organization had been broken and that there were many positive changes occurring. One of Ian's clients has had a project that had been a "top priority" for three years, but due to COVID-19 many barriers have been broken it's taken only five days for a solution to be enacted. When this is over, we should all be encouraged to evaluate and take away some of the pointless activities that take up our time so employees can focus on what is truly important.

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Some of the previous hold ups in the CX discipline may be due to language that can

confuse the lay-person, and it is more important now than ever to ensure these naming conventions are clearly understood. Many people will use “customer service” and “customer experience” interchangeably as though they are the same thing. It is vitally important that organizations and employees understand that everything they do contributes to the delivery of customer experience in some way. To deliver sustainable growth and a financial effect improving the experience within a customer centric environment is essential. Such an environment enables employees to think and act in the interest of a customer at any time. The thinking must be systemically changed from asking what is in the interest of the business to what is in the interest of the customer.

All customer experiences are made up of three parts: accessibility, functionality, and emotional connection.

- Whether or not a product is accessible determines how easy it is for your customers to get to the product, an excellent example is Amazon – a company who has made their experience so accessible many customers no longer bother to look anywhere else.
- Functionality is the only thing that a customer takes as a given – they expect the product to do what you say it is going to do. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate by functionality alone.
- Emotional connection is the most important of all three attributes as it represents the way your experience has made your customer feel. A customer will remember one of three things from a given interaction: very good things, very bad things, or nothing at all.

One of the best ways to implement accessibility and increase the chances of positive emotional responses is to move from an accidental to an intentional experience. Most organizations are delivering CX by accident and are relying on the good will of their people to know what to do and how to treat the customer in whatever situation they face. While some employees are naturally very empathetic and knowledgeable others may need more direction. If left unchecked this disparity leads to random experiences. To minimize these random occurrences every organization should adopt a framework. Right now, those who have a structured approach have been able to use it to manage their way through the COVID-19 crisis. They do not have to start from scratch because there has always been a north star.

It can be difficult to pick a framework; a Google search will show you dozens of variations used by all kinds of organizations. A simple, generic framework considers the following: strategy, measurement, and people. Among the questions concerning strategy that organizations should ask: do we truly know who our customers are, and do we have a clear understanding of what they need from us? For measurement: do we know what the journey looks like and how do you measure it from the perspective of the customer? What should our priorities be for improving the experience? Do our people know both the business and CX strategies? Are they experience ambassadors, and are they enabled to

deliver the experience we desire? If a company can't answer all of these questions it signals that the firm may not have as structured an approach to CX as it needs. By taking the time to develop a basic framework (or updating an old one) and ensuring someone is accountable for each component, your firm will be on its way to developing an accessible, emotionally charged, and intentional experience for customers.

This blog is based on the April 23, 2020 webcast: How To Sustain The Focus On Customer Experience In Good AND Challenging Times, hosted by The Conference Board. Some responses have been edited for this format. To view the entirety of the webinar or download the presentation [click here](#).

Don't miss the next one! [Register here](#) to join us on May 5th for **Transforming Your CX at the Pace of the Marketplace**. Live participants can ask questions and are eligible for one CPE credit.

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