

The Secret To Superior Customer Experience

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It's no surprise that greater employee engagement leads to better customer experience (CX). It makes intuitive sense and data proves the point. The Temkin Group, for example, has reported that companies with stronger financial performances and better CX have employees who are considerably more engaged than their peers. Not as well-known, though, is that superior CX requires more than general employee engagement.



Credit: Rawpixel.com

Work engaged employees are critical, but insufficient. To be a top CX performer, employees must also be engaged in CX.

New research shows that general employee engagement is good, but employee engagement with CX is even better. Yvonne Nomizu and her CX consulting firm Pacific Consulting Group (PCG) have found that, to excel at CX, an organization's employees should be more than satisfied at their jobs and they should find more than enjoyment in their work.

General Employee Engagement Is Not Enough

In a new report, PCG shows the correlation between employee engagement and CX performance. It looks at general work engagement (the level of engagement of employees in their work and the organization) by measuring the occurrence of engaged employee emotions such as excited, enthusiastic, energized, and happy vs. negative or merely satisfied emotions of tense, irritated, sad, and calm. And it classifies companies into 3 groups of CX performance -- the top 25%, average, and below average -- using annual CX performance measures for over 400 companies from a leading CX research firm.

PCG finds a limited correlation between general work engagement and CX performance -- that is, having a higher ratio of work engaged to merely satisfied employees is part of the equation to becoming a top CX performing company. But there is a higher correlation between employee engagement in CX specifically and CX performance. In other words, having Work engaged employees is critical, but insufficient if an organization wants to be a top CX performer -- employees must also be engaged in CX.

CX Engagement Is The Secret Sauce

CX engagement is comprised of four drivers: Self-motivation, Ability, Support, and Knowledge. At the top CX companies, employees were more engaged in CX in every dimension.

Self-Motivation. Self-motivation (PCG calls this "Willingness") to perform great CX is the number 1 driver of an organization's CX performance. 80% of employees at top CX companies agree with the statement "I chose to work for this company because I am highly motivated to provide a great experience for customers," compared to only 48% at below average CX companies.

Other indicators of self-motivation in CX include:

- I strongly believe that it is important to focus on the customer first, before business concerns (83% of employees at top CX companies agree vs. 48% at below average ones).
- I really enjoy the interactions I have with customers (82% vs. 52%).
- I serve my customers every day with a smile and a positive attitude (82% vs. 58%).
- I frequently do more for customers than I am actually required to do (77% vs. 55%).
- I will try something new outside of standard procedure if it will lead to an improvement for customers (67% vs. 42%).

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Ability. Employees' ability to deliver great CX (i.e., "I feel am able to [provide superior customer service/do the best job can] because of the support I receive from the company") also distinguishes top performing CX companies. 72% of employees at the top 25% companies agree with that statement, while only 52% did at below average performers.

CX ability also depends on employees feeling free from restrictions and limitations, including:

- I never feel overly restricted in my ability to [serve customers/do my job] by the budget or 'cost cutting' (62% vs. 32%).
- My work schedule is never a limiting factor in my ability to [serve customers/do my job] (68% vs. 43%).

Support. Employees must feel supported by their managers in their CX efforts. This support is primarily emotional and psychological, so PCG calls this "Motivation by Management." Top CX companies have a higher percentage of employees agree "Management does everything possible to keep me motivated provide a great experience for our customers" than did below average ones (66% vs. 58%).

Employees at top CX performers also report on management support by agreeing:

- I am actively encouraged by management to make suggestions to improve the experience for our customers (87% vs. 52%).
- Management understands my work-related problems at my level (70% vs. 55%)
- Management regularly shares customer success stories with our team (70% vs. 52%).
- I receive recognition when I go above and beyond for customers (68% vs. 45%).

Knowledge. A higher level of understanding the company's CX vision and strategy among employees correlates with higher CX performance.

- 78% of employees at the top CX companies said they understand the company's CX vision and strategy very well, where as only 60% did at below average companies.
- Agreement that "My company has a well thought out CX vision and strategy" also differs between top and bottom performers (75% vs. 58%).

Engaging Employees In CX

Achieving CX engagement is completely within the control of business leaders -- some steps are quite easy and basic, while others require more of a commitment.

The first steps are simply to understand and use employee segments. Through engagement

surveys, leaders can assess the proportion of employees who are merely engaged with their work and those who are engaged in CX (and of course, those who are neither.) The data can also help pinpoint the drivers of engagement or disengagement -- e.g., do employees understand the CX strategy? Are they getting the management support they need to produce great CX? Do they feel restricted from improving CX? Armed with this knowledge, managers can be as targeted with their employee needs as they are with customer needs.

Other straightforward steps are to Inform and educate employees about the CX strategy and vision, inspire them with customer success stories, encourage their input on improving CX, and recognize exceptional CX behavior.

Managers should also keep in mind the self-motivation drivers of CX engagement, and whenever possible, recruit employees who inherently like the mission of creating a stellar customer experience.

But self-motivation can also be cultivated. Leaders should create and reinforce an environment that promotes the desire to contribute to CX excellence by exposing the benefits of it. For example, employees are more likely to want to deliver great CX if they can see, feel, and observe for themselves that the experience is great. So leaders should create employee experiences that are aligned with CX, directly expose employees to customers as much as possible, and share customer feedback often.

Leaders can also inspire self-motivation by role modeling the behaviors associated with it -- serving others every day with a smile and a positive attitude, going above and beyond what is required, and developing new approaches to improve CX.

In general, leaders should create a culture and environment that gives employees the best opportunity to love that their work contributes to providing a great experience for customers.

Not Just Happy, but Engaged Employees

PCG's research shows that general work engagement is only the baseline from which to achieve highest CX performance. "The operative focus is not happy employees but engaged employees," Nomizu concludes. "Engagement is about energy. Leaders must build engagement in an agenda, an energy towards getting somewhere."