Fuse Customer Experience and Employee Experience to Drive Your Growth

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If you want to know which comes first, employees or customers, Donna Morris will answer "both." As the EVP of Customer and Employee Experience at Adobe Systems, Morris spearheads efforts to attract, engage, and develop employees *and* customers. Moreover, these efforts are well-integrated and aligned. In a recent interview, Morris outlined for me some of the primary ways she fuses together customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX) and provided advice for other organizations that want to combine their CX and EX efforts.

(Photo: Used with permission from Adobe Systems.)

Donna Morris, EVP of Customer and Employee Experience at Adobe Systems, spearheads efforts to attract, engage, and develop employees and customers.

CX + EX -- Why

When Adobe launched its enterprise business and started to directly engage with customers several years ago, Morris and other leaders recognized that they needed to develop a stronger customer support function within the organization. They also understood that had to evolve their brand identity: Adobe needed to be known not just for its excellent products and how they enable creativity, but also for providing excellent customer experiences. When they asked themselves what was the biggest thing that would drive the way they needed to evolve, Morris said, they knew it was their culture.

They recognized that the excellence the organization had achieved with employees -- the ability to fill key roles with top talent, the retention of talent, and people's successful growth and development -- could and should extend to customer relationships. "We had become acutely

aware of the parallels between how you build a great experience for customers and for employees," Morris explained, "and we want to be as exceptional to work *with* as we are to work *for*." So they created a new department -- a combined customer and employee experience organization -- which brought together the support people on the front lines of helping customers with the human resources team responsible for supporting employees.

Morris believes that any business that is highly dependent upon employees to drive successful outcomes for the company or where employees operate in close proximity to customers should consider combining CX and EX into a single department.   The same three core elements drive relationships with both -- attraction, retention, and development -- and the same success criteria apply to both.   With a combined CX and EX function, you can create an organization like Adobe that is focused on world class customer *and* employee experiences.

CX + EX -- What

The fusion of CX and EX enabled Adobe to change its culture to be more driven around the success of their customers. In her new role, Morris led the organization to implement several mechanisms to influence a stronger customer orientation among employees.

She knew that if she and her colleagues wanted employees to deliver great CXs, employees needed to know what was expected of them and there had to be "an element of risk" to it. So Adobe implemented a compensation program that ties every employee to the customer. It's a short-term cash incentive plan that reflects company revenue performance and customer success measures such as retention and customer ratings such as "easy to business with." The program not only makes more tangible the contribution to customer experience that every employee makes, but also produces group alignment and synergy because everyone is working toward the same goals, Morris reported.

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Morris set up listening stations, where employees can go either virtually online or physically in an Adobe office location to hear from customers directly and learn about their successes and challenges. Morris's team increased the communications storytelling capability at Adobe so the organization got better at showing employees how customers use their solutions to run their businesses. And at every all-employee meeting, leaders give an update on the company's CX delivery.

Adobe also initiated "experience-a-thons," modeled after hackathons, through which employees give feedback on the features and user experience of products in development. By involving non-technical employees in the product development process, Adobe's engineers and designers receive fresh perspectives akin to customers' feedback that might not be drawn from their tech-savvy peers.

CX + EX -- How

Morris offered advice and insight about fusing the CX and EX functions at other companies. First, she recommended putting the combined position where it will be most successful in driving and influencing change. At Adobe, that meant creating a function that Morris described as "agnostic," meaning that she doesn't own customer or employee relationships, she only influences the people who do. Because she's not "being pulled by the product or revenue demands," she said she is "uniquely positioned to drive the changes that are needed by the customer."

Morris also observed that the people who assume responsibility for CX and EX must understand the company's products and services. Most average HR people would not have this knowledge, she said, therefore would not be successful. She added that "a really strong leader of a customer-facing department could lead EX if they understood the fundamentals of leadership and management."

Ultimately, though, she emphasized that it is less important that the CX and EX functions report into same person than that they are strategically aligned. For example, she warned companies not to segregate employment brand from customer brand. "You can't live out a different brand with customers from the employment brand and what the employee experiences," she said. That's why at Adobe she worked with the company's Chief Marketing Office to ensure the company's core values "inherently linked to the brand *and* reinforced the values we expected from employees."

CX + EX -- Results

Adobe recently reported a 25% year-over-year annual revenue gain and net income grew 45%. It also garnered the #26 position on Fortune's 2018 100 Best Companies to Work For list. While it's not possible to attribute the company's success solely to the organizational and cultural changes it has undergone, the fusion of CX and EX has enabled a more customer-centric culture and that clearly has produced results. As Morris concluded, "If employees are aligned, they will ensure the success of your customer." And customer success equals company success.

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