Your Team Leaders Are Crucial To Your Customer Experience

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Seven years ago, a study by Walker Information offered a finding that many found difficult to fathom. It reported that by 2020 the key point of difference between brands, B2C or B2B, offline or online, would be the customer experience.

We're very much into 2020, and that prediction was prescient. Customer experience, or CX, is a much-explored topic in virtually every business. Forrester Research suggests the

customer experience officer, or CXO, is the hot new position in the C-suite. Denise Lee Yohn, a branding expert, asserts in the *Harvard Business Review* that every company needs one.

Interestingly, Ms. Yohn also notes that a fixation on CX alone is done at an organization's risk. The employees — actually, their employee experience, or EX — is crucial to a positive CX, especially when they're on the front line. Let me build on that by noting that Gartner advises that "organizations must recognize the influence service employees have on CX delivery."

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Those front-line employees are aptly named. They're literally on the front line of your business, interacting with customers every moment of every day. And if they don't provide a good experience, customers will take their business elsewhere 60% of the time, according to PwC.

To create a great EX, Gartner suggests applying traditional CX practices like working to understand employee wants and needs as well as the current state of the EX within your organization. In addition, involve your employees in improving EX and CX by learning what they are seeing, hearing and thinking. And, perhaps most importantly, make the EX measurable: Establish KPIs and processes to govern and improve performance.

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All that sounds wonderful. However, it will be for naught if you don't have the leadership in place to support those front-line employees. By leadership I mean those on the ground, so to speak, working with the front-line employees. They're often called team leaders — first-tier managers who oversee groups of 10 to 20 employees. All too often, it's their first managerial post; they're either newly hired or newly promoted into the role.

It's this team leader who can make all the difference in turning a customer-centric strategy into a successful day-to-day reality. In my work with companies with large numbers of front-line employees, I see brilliant CX strategy fall apart once it moves to the sales (or service) floor, in a manner of speaking. And, to be sure, no amount of technology investment will cure a broken process. At the least, such a process will severely limit your company's ability to get the full value of that technology.

A quick look at the role of team leaders, and you realize they're the ones who can most help or harm the crucial bidirectional information flow about CX and EX. This flow goes from them to employees to instill a CX culture and to management to enhance the EX.

But let's look more closely at their roles. Accenture tells us most managers spend 54% of their day on administrative tasks. Little time is left to develop the members of their team, to

infuse them with the right behaviors to provide an exceptional customer experience. More to the point, they have little time to learn how to be effective team leaders.

So, then, how to make the most of that time? I recommend employing microlearning in the flow of work to let your team leaders absorb bite-sized portions of learning. And you can use it, as well, to build comprehension and close performance or knowledge gaps through repetition of learning activities.

And do not overlook the utter necessity to identify and assign EX/CX-related goals and KPIs that team leaders need to shoot for. By extension, this form of learning and data-based performance management needs to include the team members themselves.

By doing this, you set the critically important team leaders up for success. And when you empower them, you enable them to empower your front-line employees, who then provide the sort of experience that has customers coming back for more time and time again.

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Manufacturing companies have a big appetite for 5G.

That was the top-line takeaway from a 2019 survey conducted by Capgemini Research Institute, which explored how next-gen networks will benefit industrial operations.

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After surveying around 800 manufacturing and "asset-intensive" companies across the world, researchers found that 75% of respondents believe 5G will unlock their digital transformation within five years. In terms of importance, 5G ranked second only to cloud (at 84%) among nine key technology and innovation enablers. What's more, these companies are willing to pay a premium to get it.

"We concur that the long-term impact of 5G is huge," says Karl Bjurstrom, EVP of Capgemini Invent. "We think there's money to be made now." While Bjurstrom concedes that perspectives around 5G have ranged from overhyped to skeptical, he thinks that ultimately it will be transformative for enterprise companies.

"It will be a kind of foundational fabric that will enable future use cases and the strategies that companies are looking for as they connect people, businesses and society," he says.

Here's why many businesses are eager for 5G, how they'll benefit from its rollout and Bjurstrom's predictions on when next-gen networks will start changing the business world.

A Transformation Over Time

"What 4G did for us as consumers, 5G will have the same impact on enterprises," says Bjurstrom. "The long-term promise should not be underestimated." That's to say: Considering people primarily used pre-4G mobile phones to talk and text only, 5G could

revolutionize entire industries.

But there's nuance to that promise, specifically around 5G's time to market. Bjurstrom explains that the impact of 5G on enterprises will manifest in a variety of ways over time—with distinct effects unfolding in the short-, mid- and long-term futures.

For Early Adopters, Operations Could Transform

Initially for businesses, the opportunities exist around setting up private 5G networks—or what Bjurstrom calls "private cellular" networks. It's common to hear about manufacturers being early adopters of these systems. In these use cases, everything on a factory floor, for example, can be IoT-enabled. But manufacturing is just one type of business that's well-suited to this early adoption of 5G, and it's not the industry that makes it a good candidate, but the layout of its operations.

"Think about places where you have a confined space where you want to have better control and better efficiency and flexibility," Bjurstrom says. "That could be a mining company, a manufacturer, it could also be potentially an aircraft, a boat, a cruise line, perhaps."

In the mining company example, Bjurstrom imagines a local 5G network deploying IoT into the field—moving toward a total digital transformation down the road. "Maybe it doesn't drive immense gains in the beginning, but the future could be an almost autonomous mine," he says.

Engage In The Partnership Ecosystem

Industrial companies are positioned to become early adopters of these 5G opportunities, and, in turn, models for how other businesses can follow suit. In fact, says Bjurstrom, industrial companies have a higher willingness to pay for next-gen networks than what many telecom operators—also surveyed in Capgemini's study—even realize.

"There's a lot of appetite if you have the right sort of use cases defined for them and you engage in the right way," he says.

But one of the first lessons those businesses that are ready to invest in 5G will need to learn is that being ready for the next-gen networks requires more than just dollars. "You want to start engaging the ecosystem," says Bjurstrom. "There's going to be a lot of new partnerships for many companies that they didn't have, and they didn't need to be exposed to before."

That's something every company should be thinking about now. Businesses that choose to wait, he warns, risk missing the boat both in terms of building those partnership ecosystems and testing, rolling out and managing their 5G-enabled technology.

Bjurstrom says that some of his most forward-leaning clients are already setting those partnerships in motion.

Innovations Today Mark Sweeping Changes Ahead

Some businesses may experience equally dramatic changes, but not quite as soon. Bjurstrom describes the mid-term future of 5G as between three and five years away.

"That's where we start seeing a lot of the enterprise use cases take place," he says. "And we also have a lot of the in-home 5G use cases where we might start seeing some of the inherent, fixed-line services becoming even more 5G-enabled."

That transition will naturally present new opportunities for businesses to offer 5G-enabled services, but will also create challenges for those industries experiencing 5G disruption—those fixed-line service providers like broadband and cable companies, for instance.

Over the long term—which Bjurstrom estimates to be eight to 10 years away—society will experience the full promise of 5G: autonomous vehicles, remote surgeries, virtual reality classrooms and more.

"Those kinds of futuristic use cases, they're not that far away," he says. "That's when things really start changing in our society and for our enterprises."

By the time those big, visible societal changes emerge, more incremental innovations like digital factory floors and autonomous energy extraction could already be widespread. Given how soon that could be, it's no wonder Capgemini has the same message for all businesses, regardless of where their own opportunities lie along the timeline of 5G evolution: Start thinking, planning and engaging now.

To learn more about the impacts of 5G connectivity on private cellular networks, IoT and autonomous operations, check out

t-mobile.com/business/trends-and-insights.