

# customer-centric culture

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Many companies pay lip service to being customer-centric, but don't actually put it into practice. When used primarily as a buzzword, it's no surprise the results are only buzzword-deep.

The CMO Council found that "only 14 percent of marketers would say that customer-centricity is a hallmark of their companies, and only 11 percent believe their customers would agree with that characterization."

Much of customer-centricity is cultural. That sometimes gets overlooked in all the data crunching.

As Denise Lee Yohn put it in an HBR article last year:

***"Why do so many companies struggle to get customer centricity right? The volume, velocity, and variety of customer data that now exists overwhelms many organizations. Some companies don't have the systems and technology to segment and profile customers. Others lack the processes and operational capabilities to target them with personalized communications and experiences."***

***"But the most common, and perhaps the greatest, barrier to customer centricity is the lack of a customer-centric organizational culture. At most companies the culture remains product-focused or sales-driven, or customer centricity is considered a priority only for certain functions such as marketing. To successfully implement a customer-centric strategy and operating model, a company must have a culture that aligns with them — and leaders who deliberately cultivate the necessary mindset and values in their employees."***

Denise recommends a few strategies that companies can use to develop a more customer-centric culture, including hiring for customer orientation and facilitating direct interaction with customers.

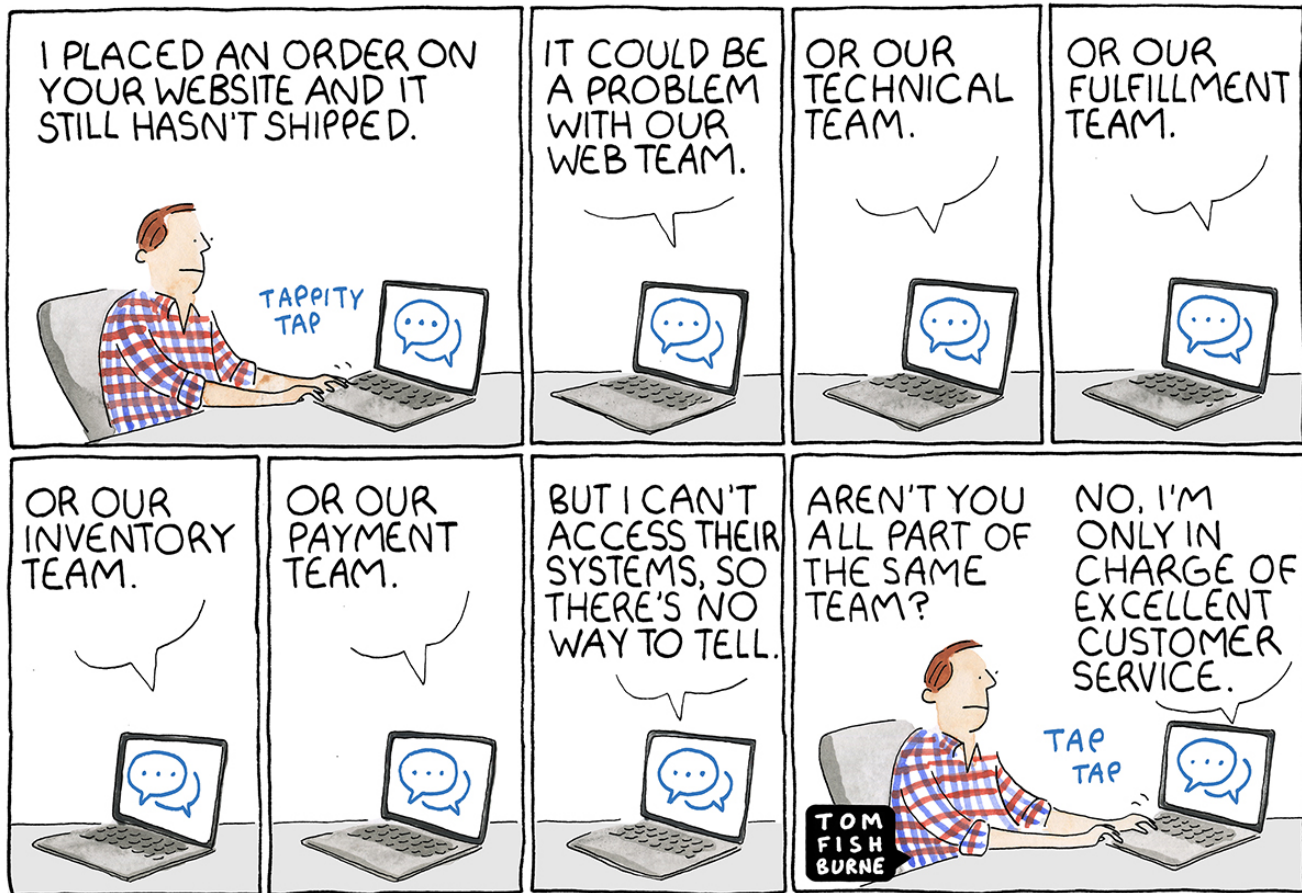
When I led the Method Europe team years ago, we used a hiring technique to screen for customer orientation. Before every interview, we gave the same homework assignment of three questions. One was a technical challenge related to the candidate's functional area, one was about the Method culture, and the third question was my favorite. We first showed candidates an example of actual fan mail we received from customers (for a cleaning brand, we got a lot of fan mail — photos, art projects made out of our bottles, even Valentine's cards made out of our dryer cloth sheets). We then asked the candidate what they would do personally to make sure we continued to get fan mail like that.

It was one thing to hear an interview response from someone in marketing or product development, but quite another when hiring someone in a traditional back office role, like accounting. One of my favorite interview responses came from someone in supply chain management, who suggested that Method print a joke (a clean joke since we were a cleaning brand) on the side of each brown corrugate case shipped to retailer warehouses. He argued that it would cost nothing, yet might give a smile to the retail employee in charge of putting Method bottles on their shelf, which could in turn impact how well people found our products in the store.

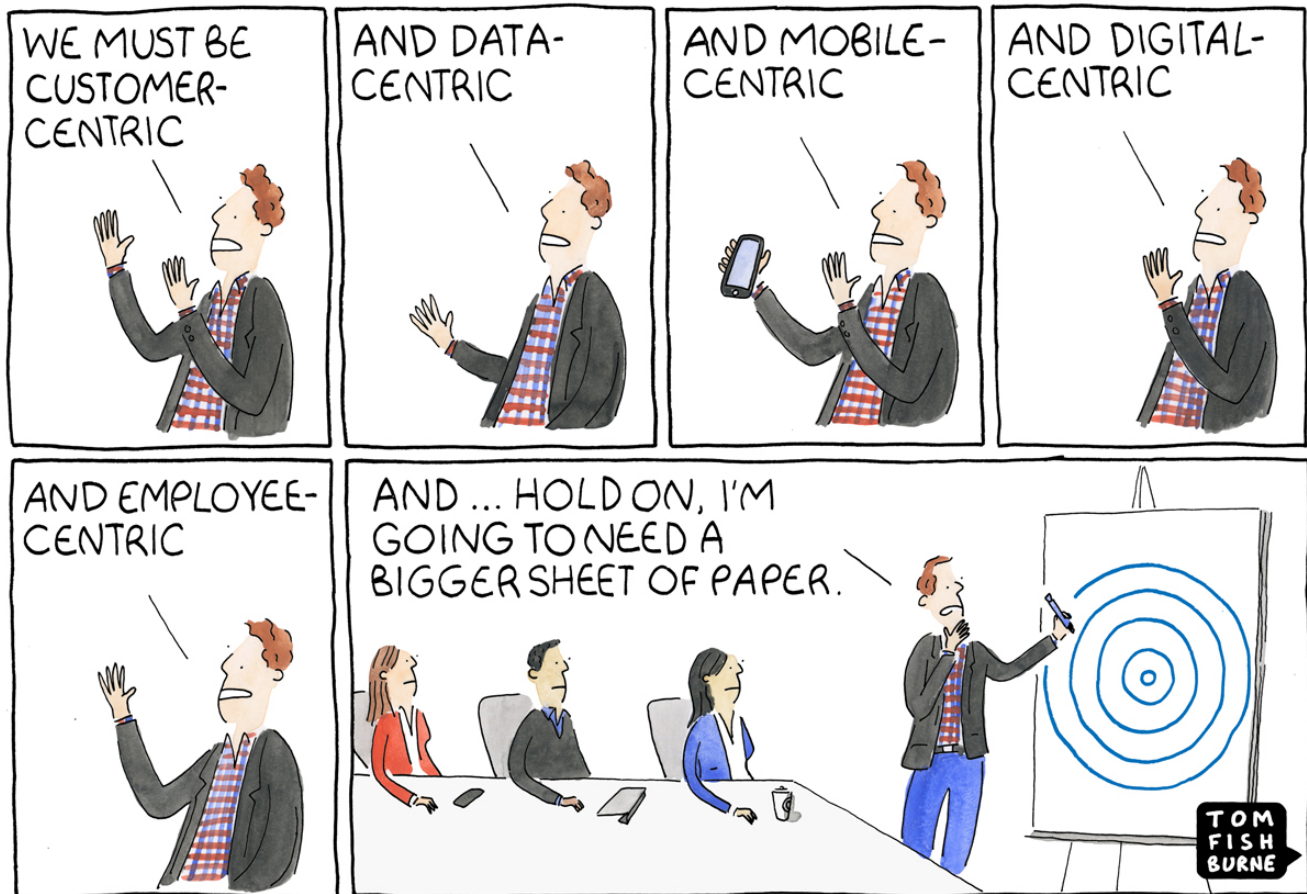
This simple interview question helped set the tone at the start that everyone on our extended cross-functional team, not just the marketers, had the ability to impact an aspect of customer experience. I think that's true of any brand.

Marketing is too important to be left to the marketing department.

Here are a few related cartoons I've drawn over the years:



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"Customer-Centric" January 2017





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"If marketing kept a diary, this would be it."

- Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer of MarketingProfs  
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