STELLAR CX

Leading Stellar CX

RATE EXPERIENCE

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (CX) Leadership Q&A

Gem Jones BA (Hons) CXAD (Dip)

Interviewed by Jane Bayler

CX Leadership Q&A

*In this, our launch edition of **Leading Stellar CX**, branding expert and NED Working host, Jane Bayler interviews our Founder and CX Expert Gem Jones, answering some of the most commonly asked CX questions from business leaders.*

Is CX just customer service?
This is one of the most common mis-conceptions around CX and indeed many companies now call their customer service teams "customer experience" functions or managers, which can add to the confusion.

Firstly, it's important to clarify what we mean by Customer Experience, or CX in this context. Customer experience isn't one function or one interaction with a customer, to answer a question or place an order. Customer experience refers to the way a customer FEELS ABOUT EVERY INTERACTION they have with a company, brand or service, from their very first awareness, to post purchase interactions and relationships. Ultimately, their view, good, bad or indifferent, is based on the sum of all those experiences and their over-riding feelings following their interactions with your brand.

Our expectations as a customer are based on our previous experiences and the promises organisations make before, during and after our interactions with them. Customers are all different and will have differing expectations, which is why it is so important that we understand who our customer is and how they perceive their journey with us and we can't do that if we only ever view the interactions from the brand or businesses' perspective.

But CX is something only customer service or sales teams do really, isn't it?
Customer Service (CS) is a part of the overall customer experience, so it's true that customer facing teams, such as CS, have a large and important part to play in making sure the customer has a favourable and memorable experience with your business. Indeed, many CS leaders find themselves taking the baton for CX in their companies. However, digital experiences, such as the website or apps, advertising and events, in-store experiences, if you have physical retail outlets, stock availability, delivery experiences, complaint resolution and interactions with your brand outside of a particular transaction, all play an equal role in shaping your customer's perception, and consequently feelings, about your company and brand. If you leave CX improvement and focus solely to the Customer Service team, you may find that your CX is excellent in the call centre or order administration area, for example, but falls short in other vital areas of the customer journey, such as logistics, quality or provision of information at the very start of the customer's journey with your business.

CX Leadership Q&A

Is CX strategy only really applicable to service industries or direct to consumer businesses?

It's true that highly regulated sectors, such as finance or utilities providers, adopted CX principles many years ago now and most have established and active strategies and monitoring. However, the principles of customer experience and the benefits of developing high trust and engagement with your customer are just as relevant and impactful to other sectors, such as distribution or manufacturing, regardless of whether you serve B2B or B2C clients. The fact that many of your competitors are late to the party on customer strategy can provide you with a distinct competitive advantage.

Do businesses need to train their staff before they start to focus on CX strategy?

I understand that, for some businesses, the thought of implementing a new customer based strategy may be daunting, especially if you feel that your staff aren't ready. It is also true that many CX initiatives fail because of a lack of staff training and empowerment.
However, you must have a strategy in place first, because, if you can't clearly communicate what your brand's vision for the customer is and how that translates into what your staff are promising your customer, the question I would pose is; "What exactly are you training them?"
The customer and their need/s should be at the very heart of your strategy. What do they need or want from you and how will you provide this to them?
Develop your customer strategy first and then design your staff training, metrics, roles and responsibilities and rewards to effectively deliver this.

What if someone says to you, "our customers are repeat customers they've traded with us for years, we don't need to improve CX"?

It's true that when customers build up high levels of trust in your brand, due to consistently excellent experiences, they are far more likely to reject competitor offers for similar products and services, in fact, a recent UK study showed that a significant 88% of customers indicate that a positive service experience increases their likelihood of making repeat purchases.
However, it's also true that you should never take your best customers for granted! Regardless of whether we are buying for ourselves or purchasing for work, we are becoming far more influenced by all our experiences, both at home and at work, when judging our interactions with a brand. Studies show that we tend to base our expectations on the best experiences we have had. Therefore, if your customer has just returned from a five-star mini break, where nothing was too much trouble for the concierge service, be sure that when they call your business on Monday morning and fail to get what they need first time, they will be making comparisons! Conversely, if you build trust by always striving to create outstanding customer experience for your customers, they are also far more likely to allow your company a few small issues or mistakes without removing their business, if you've built up a high level of trust with them- providing it's a rare occurrence of course!

3

CX Leadership Q&A

What would you say to leaders who would argue that they know their customers really well and therefore don't need to review their CX, as they'll know if something's off?

A lot of businesses make this assumption, however, I would say that if you don't have a robust voice of the customer feedback in place, you don't actually know what the customers aren't saying to you! Most customers don't complain, they just stop buying, or they buy less frequently or slowly start to spread their spend over multiple suppliers. Once you start to notice this happening, it's usually too late to do much about it, your customer has made the decision to go! Regularly receiving customer feedback and focusing on how to make the customer's interactions more seamless for them, by developing deep understanding, will help give you an early warning mechanism for any issues or discontent.

The second point I would make is that the most successful customer centric companies innovate with their customer experience. It's about staying one step ahead of the competition, building deep customer knowledge, which you then use to personalise your interactions. Surprise and delight your customer, by removing unnecessary processes or stress and go above and beyond, now and again, to increase the chance of triggering a reciprocity response. In most sectors true product innovation is rare, however, it is possible to create clear brand differentiation through outstanding customer experiences that keep your customers returning time and again.

I imagine focusing on CX can be costly for some businesses though?

Implementing CX strategy doesn't have to be as costly as many leaders fear. In fact, I developed the Stellar CX leadership programme for this very reason. It's a way of allowing business leaders to follow a framework to create and implement highly relevant CX strategy, without significant upfront commitment to increased headcount or digital programmes, for example. We set the strategy first and then you can invest with confidence, in the right areas, if you chose to do so. The point many leaders miss with CX, is the significant opportunity to reduce risk and save cost through a clear CX strategy! For example, in one case, we removed almost £2million of outstanding invoice risk, through a VOC programme that picked up on a previously hidden system and process failure.

Regardless of the sector we operate in, creating efficiency and reducing costs is more important than ever. By identifying the optimum customer journey and focussing on this, we can streamline processes and improve efficiency by reducing or removing activities that no-longer add value to your customer. And when you engage your teams in CX, great value is created from the sharing of customer knowledge and expertise among team members. When your employees feel empowered, they become more adaptable and open to change, which allows you to make those efficiency changes more smoothly.

The result of all this is an organization that can reduce unnecessary cost, have sharp focus on what matters most to the customer and pivot quickly in response to market demands—essential for maintaining a competitive edge and increasing profitability.

What's the difference between customer vision and customer promise, they're the same things right?

Yes and no!
The easiest way to remember it is that Customer Vision is internal (to employees) and Customer Promise is external (to customer).

A customer vision is not just a fancy statement; it is your guiding light that shapes employee behaviours and expectations. So, it's crucial that this vision is:

1. Differentiated - It should set you apart from competitors.
2. Clear and Simple - Avoid complicated language; clarity is key.
3. Inspirational yet Realistic - It should motivate your team while being attainable.
Your ability to deliver on this vision consistently is what will truly resonate with your customers. Your Customer Promise is a clear and compelling statement that defines to your customer, what you commit to delivering to them in every interaction. It encapsulates the core expectations, values, and experience your customer can rely on when engaging with your brand. It can use the same words as your customer vision, which is your internal statement, or it can differ slightly.

What would you say to leaders who may argue that CX projects are a nice to have, however, they don't bring sufficient financial benefit to be worthwhile?

Ultimately, how your customers feel about every interaction with your company will determine the value of their purchases. For example, do they place that extra project with you because you're so easy to deal with? Do they aim to buy all their accessories and sundry items from you as well as the main product, because they trust your brand and love your service? They are also far more likely to become early adopters of new products and innovations from your brand if they trust in you.
In my experience, B2B customers, who score highly on Net Promoter Score (NPS), spend 20% more in pound note value than customers who score low on NPS. In B2C that can be as high as 75% more pound note value spend.
It is critical however, that customer metrics, such as NPS, Customer Satisfaction (C SAT) or Net Ease are linked back in to the specific financial objectives of the business, in order to show the true ROI of CX improvements. Being able to make those links and putting together financially sound business cases is a crucial skill for anyone involved in CX, if they are to gain buy-in and investment. Such is the importance of this step, I've even dedicated a module to this subject in my Leadership programme.

CX Leadership Q&A

What practical steps can a business take to improve their customer experience or take better advantage of their already competitive position, knowing the day job must go on?!

Start with knowing who your customer is. It sounds obvious but do all your people know your core target customer groups, what they actually do for a living, what methods of communication they prefer, when they want to communicate or buy from you?
Equally, do they know what makes the customer happy and what frustrates the hell out of them? If the answer if no, then you need to define your target customer groups and encourage your employees to really get to know and understand what makes our customer tick. It sounds like a cliché but walk a day in your customer's shoes and you'll see their interactions with your business in a whole different light. As a leader, you have to empower your workforce to be able to do this, which could involve downing tools for a day to attend a site visit, for example.

Secondly, find out the parts of the customer journey that matter most to those core target customers. For example, if my core target customer is a construction worker then the most crucial part of the customer journey to them could be the actual delivery of product to site. Do they know when it is arriving? Is it delivered to the right place, is it the right quality? Therefore, you, would focus on excellence in these elements first.
If my core target customer is a parent with young children and I have a retail outlet then parent/child parking and baby change facilities may be the most important part of the journey to them, therefore, we would remove any issues here first. It doesn't mean that the customer doesn't care about other elements, such as check-out or availability of information on the web, it just means that you reduce risk and increase impact by prioritising CX improvements based on known importance to customer.

If there's one thing you'd advise senior leaders about CX, what is it?

You must lead and be seen to be leading CX from the very top. If you don't live it, breathe it and speak about it every day, your employees across the whole organisation simply won't prioritise it. It doesn't matter how fantastic your CX Manager is, or how engaged your Customer Service and Sales teams are; unless absolute customer focus comes from the very top, organisations will naturally drift back to doing what makes the most sense to them, from an internal perspective. You'll get silos forming between different departments, which can add complexity for customers and you'll ultimately find your customers trying to fit in with and work around your internal processes. This creates frustration and gives them a golden opportunity to look elsewhere.

CX Leadership Q&A

Isn't removing functional silos pretty impossible in reality?

Having functional expertise is important and no-one's saying you should merge all your teams into one, I've seen some pretty unrealistic ideals on this, and let's face it, we have functional expertise for a reason.

However, businesses should be aligned under one common strategy and vision for the customer. This should shape specific roles and responsibilities in each function and include metrics to review progress and reward teams for the relevant actions that they undertake to make the customer journey as seamless and high quality as possible. For example, in Marketing this may be around the availability of inspiration and product information at the decision making stage, in Manufacturing Operations this may be about having the right stock and the right quality of product available, in Logistics the right products loaded for despatch and on-time and well communicated deliveries. In Customer Service, clear order confirmations, excellent first call resolution (FCR) and super-fast complaint resolution.

Each function will understand their targets and can therefore see the benefits to them and their team of performing well for customer, be that cost reduction, process efficiencies to free up time or improved customer reviews and increased sales referrals.

It's a good idea to pull together a team of CX Champions or advocates, from across the business to work with you on CX strategy and represent each function. They provide a two way conduit for CX feedback, ideas and actions, whilst being a positive and relatable role model for CX roll out in each part of the business.

As a senior leadership team, you can then review the whole business performance, with your CX Champions representing each function, to ensure you stay on track for customer experience excellence!

Any final tips for Senior Leaders wanting to engage more with CX?

Story tell! Share case studies and examples of customer visits, things that went wrong and how you fixed it, things that went right and celebrate it with all your employees. Hearing the business leaders share stories of customer experience wins and learnings is one of the best ways to drive awareness and increase engagement. The best bit is, it costs very little, if anything to do! You can even film yourself talking into your phone whilst on site or in the car for example, everyone is used to this sort of communication now and it makes it more real and relatable for many employees.

In Summary

Starting your business on a course to a clear and highly impactful CX strategy doesn't have to be complex or costly. It requires commitment, a customer first mindset with visible leadership and the support of a proven, clear framework and process to get you there.

The benefits however, are significant:

1. **Differentiation** – A truly unique identity for your brand, that is almost impossible for others to replicate.
2. **Increased revenue** - Through customer loyalty and retention.
3. **Customer acquisition** - Through advocacy, which can significantly reduce costs in the business associated with traditional customer acquisition methods such as on and offline advertising and field sales calls.
4. **Employees** - Are engaged, passionate and committed to their role and the wider company meaning retained experience, lower recruitment costs and better quality work.
5. **Cost & risk reduction** - Through process review, reduced complaints and returns, as well as advocacy and staff retention.

Guidance & Support
For Your Business

Expert advice from our founder Gem Jones BA (Hons) CXAD (Dip) Stellar CX

Combining over two decades of business expertise and experience within large manufacturing organisations with formal CX learning, our founder Gem Jones developed the Stellar CX Senior Leadership Programme to help businesses de-code CX and overcome the challenge of developing a CX strategy that is highly relevant, achievable and cost effective, whilst maximising opportunities to grow customer loyalty, acquisition and lifetime value.

If you'd like to know more about the programme or Stellar CX consultancy services please get in touch.

Info@stellarcx.co.uk or select a call to suit your diary
www.stellarcx.co.uk or scan the QR code

Jane Bayler is an entrepreneur and brand and online marketer with over 20 years experience in international media and entertainment. Having started her career as an art director in theatre, film and television, she then transitioned to global advertising, heading up accounts for some of the world's best known brands, such as Coca-Cola, British Airways, Discovery Networks and ITV.

She scaled and sold a brand identity business to US communications group Interpublic, before developing her own products and services in client development and acquisition. Jane is also a published author, podcaster and consultant who loves to help ambitious businesses and brands succeed.

9