

# Reliant Talks About Making Customer Experience Part of Their Company DNA

*CX Team: Scott Burns and Suzie Dieth | Head of Customer Experience; Director of Customer Experience, Reliant*

*Attribution: FROM THE BOOK: UNLOCK THE VALUE OF CX*

## Q: WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR EXECUTIVE CX CHAMPION TAKE?

**A:** As part of Reliant's program, we're very fortunate to have strong executive leadership and buy-in that supports customer experience (CX) and our efforts every step of the way. When we first decided to form the "Customer First" program and set out on this journey, Elizabeth Killinger, our President, was actively engaged and passionate about the initiative. She helped guide our CX strategy and direct and shape the program—while infusing customer experience as an objective for her leadership team and the entire organization. To have an executive champion is an absolute game changer. Instead of customer experience just being something else on the side that folks may or may not pay attention to, it became an immediate priority throughout the company.

Over the years, we evolved and continued to strengthen our customer experience by making our CX metric one of the primary metrics that our employees are held accountable to. Every leadership meeting our President reads real quotes from all types of customers—

promoters, passives, and detractors. It's not just the positive. She's willing to tackle the big issues and invest her time. On customer experience day, Elizabeth spent time in our contact center, talking to customers, and thanking them for their business. She spent time with our employees handing out doughnuts and saying thank you for being a part of our organization, and for giving their time to create a culture that puts our customers first. She integrates customer experience into town hall meetings and she doesn't shy away from holding people accountable to the needs of our customers.

Without Elizabeth's leadership as our number one CX champion we would not have the success of the program, the change in culture, and the benefits our customers are realizing that we've had over the past several years.

And without her drive to differentiate our company on customer service and experience by treating our customers as if they're family, we wouldn't have seen the success in the metrics we've seen over the past year.

## **Q: WHAT IS A CX FANATIC AND HOW DO YOUR EMPLOYEES BECOME ONE?**

**A:** One of the ways we have really ingrained “Customer First” into our organization is by identifying a small group of subject matter experts within key functional areas to include “Customer First” as part of their job responsibilities. Prior to that, we had a larger group of approximately 45 employees that were asked to join us on the crusade and participate as they were able. We found that while this strategy did engage employees, it was less effective at holding teams accountable. Once we put the new program in place we made sure each CX Fanatic had “Customer First” as part of their personal

development plans to encourage everyone to drive towards a common goal.

We trained the team on customer experience, including our Voice of the Customer platform, and made each of them responsible for looking into root causes to either drive change or reinforce all that we do well. This group meets regularly. We share best practices and work together to advance our organization on our mission of putting our customers first. We also inform our executive team and employees together.



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## **Q: HOW DO YOUR BUSINESS MANAGERS AND FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES SUPPORT YOUR CX PROGRAM?**

**A:** Since our team is from different organizations throughout the company like IT, product development, and segment marketing, we realize that many of them may not be comfortable with customer experience. We understand it's not their background, so we feel strongly about the importance of investing in training to help them feel comfortable and empowered in their stretch role.

We engage the team not only in digging into root causes, but also to help engage their teams in being customer-centric. When we celebrated Customer Experience Day, everyone participated by creating a customer room that more than 300 employees visited to walk in the shoes of a customer. Our goal is to shape the culture so every employee feels excited and passionate about doing what's right for our customers.



## WHAT BUSINESS IMPACT ARE YOU SEEING AROUND YOUR CUSTOMER FIRST PROGRAM?

**A:** There are several metrics we track to validate the success of our CX program.

### INDEX SCORE:

We use the index score that's based on survey feedback from our customers at different touchpoints in the lifecycle. In just one year, our index score metric improved by 150 percent. The tremendous growth was something we all celebrated and we look forward to realizing more growth.

### MONITOR COMPLAINT RATES:

We also closely monitor customer complaint rates. In the utility industry, our peak call months tend to be in the summer, which is historically when we see more customer complaints. With our new program, last

year, during peak summer months, our complaint rate dropped 60 percent in one of our main sales channels.

### CUSTOMER EFFORT SCORE:

We also measure Customer Effort Score on a continual basis. Our change in culture and consistency in focusing on customer experience has been proven by our Customer Effort Score which is well above the industry average and we have continued to see it improve the past few years.

At Reliant, we believe in celebrating our successes, challenging ourselves to manage and measure many different aspects of our business, developing plans and driving actions based on what we're hearing from our customers, and developing a culture that is truly customer first.



## WHAT IS THE STRATEGY BEHIND YOUR PROGRAM AND HOW OFTEN DO YOU REVISIT THE PROGRAM?

**A:** Our overall strategy is to not lose focus that this is a journey. This is not a program we implement for a few months or a year; it's a long-term strategy to drive loyal customer relationships. We shifted away from a dedicated CX department to creating a more integrated

structure that involves everyone in the organization. We use Voice of the Customer (VoC) insights to drive our program and we constantly push ourselves to be best-in-class and not just within the utility industry.



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**A:** There are many ways to define winning. Our President Elizabeth Killinger says:

“Winning for Reliant is ensuring that customers love us, they want to do business with us, they want to buy more from us, and they want to promote us to their friends and family. The example I think about is when they see our brand, like in the market, they smile, and they like who we are as a company and want to continue to do business with us.”

Winning for Reliant is not just being the best customer experience from an electricity or home services company perspective, it's also being best-in-class relative to the champions in customer experience. Companies like USAA, companies like Amazon. Being at that same level so we're delighting our customers every step of the way.

## About the Authors



### **SCOTT BURNS | GENERAL MANAGER, HOME SERVICES, & HEAD OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, RELIANT**

Scott Burns leads Reliant's Home Services business, which includes services like air conditioning, plumbing, electrical, backup generators, and home warranties, as well as creating and implementing Reliant's overall CX strategy. Scott has been focused on consumer-facing energy product strategy since joining Reliant in 2008 and has helped launch multiple products including energy emails, web portals, mobile applications, time-of-use pricing, and home automation. He was a key contributor on the application that led to Reliant's selection as a Department of Energy (DOE) Smart Grid Stimulus Grant recipient and the product lead on the company's implementation of that program.

He also spent time at Direct Energy where he led smart energy product strategy and served as the company's interface with British Gas and their smart homes team. Scott previously spent eight years in a variety of marketing and product line management roles at Corning, a leader in fiber optics and telecommunications equipment, including profit and loss responsibility for two of the company's leading product lines. He led development of a number of key products used in the country's first large-scale Fiber-to-the-Home deployments.

Scott is a former military officer and pilot after graduating from the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. He has his MBA from Georgia College, a graduate marketing certificate from Southern Methodist University, and completed Wharton's Innovation for Growth program.



### **SUZIE DIETH | DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, RELIANT**

Suzie Dieth is responsible for the vision and strategy of Reliant's Residential and Small Business CX program. She has more than 20 years of experience in customer experience, marketing, and communications. During the past eleven years, she has worked in the electric utility industry designing and implementing CX programs. Her initial focus was within the contact center, including phone, chat, and email interactions to reduce customer effort and increase sales among the company's 800 call center representatives. In the past four years, her CX role expanded beyond the contact center to engage 2,500 employees across all departments, from executives to front-line staff. Her work has been published in the Harvard Business Review and The Effortless Experience by Matthew Dixon, Nick Toman, and Rick DeLisi. Suzie is a Net Promoter Certified Associate and a Certified Customer Experience Professional (CCXP).

Suzie holds a Masters in Business Administration from the University of New Orleans and a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from Louisiana State University.

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