



How Employee Ambassadorship Creates Customer Advocacy

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Several years ago, customer experience (CX) researchers who were trying to drive stronger downstream customer behavior for a major high-tech client found that processes and customer interaction had to take service employees well beyond the basics of knowledge, efficiency, and friendliness. Consistently, and irrespective of continent or country, the most effective reps showed true empathy for the customer's issue, literally "owning" the problem as if it were theirs. They walked in customers' shoes and thus made a true emotional connection.

What wasn't as understood at the time is that this level of employee commitment and personal investment also positively impacted the employee experience. This was something of an epiphany for that high-tech firm, representing an unanticipated bonus result. Customer experience pros can argue about whether a vendor can create deep emotions such as bonding and love in a customer. There are lots of articles and studies stating things like "highly engaged customers are loyal customers". There's little doubt that engaged customers help shape the brand. They can also provide

useful feedback and build brand-based communities. But is that still enough today?

THE TRAJECTORY OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

From my perspective, experiences that drive customers' emotional brand trust and bonding can be both shaped and sustained. That's largely a function of organizational culture, customer-focused processes, and ambassadorial behavior. On the employee side of the equation, ambassadorship builds both passion and partnership, enhancing the customer experience. And, just as importantly, it also enhances the employee experience which is something many brands are just now becoming aware of and attempting to leverage (especially given current challenges like The Great Resignation).

A number of professional and academic studies have linked employee attitudes and behaviors with the value customers perceive in their experiences. Through targeted research, resultant training, communication, processes, and recognition initiatives, what we define as



ambassadorship formalizes the direction in which employee engagement has been trending for years. The trend is optimizing and connecting employee commitment to the organization, its goals, its value proposition, and the customer. This creates a state in which all employees are focused on delivering customer value as part of their job description. This focus is delivered irrespective of employee location, function, or level.

In other words, though HR, executives and the like must coordinate and manage experience initiatives, everyone from file clerks to CEOs must have this day-to-day focus embedded within their job responsibilities.

CREATING AMBASSADORSHIP

This phenomenon raises a classic chicken-and-egg question, though: does focusing on the employee (and the emotions

inherent to creating and sustaining a positive employee experience) generate as much benefit for the organization as enhancing the customer experience? There's an ongoing debate about which should be the priority. Entire books, in fact, have been written on this subject (such as "The Customer Comes Second" by Hal Rosenbluth and Diane Peters, and "Firms of Endearment" by Sisodia, Wolfe and Sheth).

There is, however, general consensus that in order for an enterprise to be successful, it should emphasize employee ambassadorship and the customer advocacy that brings. In other words, having employees focus on the customer drives more positive experiences and stronger loyalty behavior for *everyone*.

CONNECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT TO CUSTOMER ACTION

Just as satisfaction has little proven connection to customer behavior, employee engagement was not specifically designed to drive customer behavior—nor was it designed to enhance the employee's experience. To build on this statement, let's begin by looking at the results of satisfaction on downstream customer action. Beyond macro-level connection to sales, customer satisfaction (as expressed through the ACSI) has been shown to have little direct connection to purchase behavior (to the tune of 0.0% to 0.1% correlation).



Many companies are still measuring customer satisfaction in the hope that learning about its drivers will build customer loyalty behavior. However, satisfaction isn't contemporary regarding longitudinal experience and decision making. It's also not reflective of what's going on in the customer's real, emotional world.

As discussed on multiple occasions, and as proven in our own research, the term 'employee engagement' has many meanings and interpretations. However, relatively few of them have to do with

impacts on customer behavior. There is typically little to no mention of customer or customer focus elements in either measurement or analysis of employee engagement. Though there is evidence that customer experience and resultant behavior are impacted by engagement, it is more tangential and inferential than purposeful in nature.

EMBODYING THE EXPERIENCE

A leading marketing research consulting organization summarized employee ambassadorship very well: "Ambassadorship should be an enterprise-wide mantra

for every organization, and all employees need to embody the intended customer experience. A narrative must be passed down to every single individual in your organization. Your employees must clearly understand their role in delivering the promise that narrative makes to the end customer. This requires multiple conversations and socialization across all business divisions and at every level, not just for customer support roles."

To that summary, I say amen.

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