

HOW Stephen Cannon



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Vice Chairman,
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Q: What is the number one lesson you have learned during your CX career journey that you use on a regular basis, that you believe all CX professionals should know?

One of my favorite phrases is “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Culture is so important to achieving business outcomes. It doesn’t matter what the business outcome is, as long as you focus on creating an amazing, empowering culture that will allow people to show up, bring their best selves every day, feel they can make an impact every day.

You’re going to get a different output from those kind of people, so I like to refer to culture as an invisible operating system.

Q: While all customers should be treated well, do you think all customers should be treated exactly the same?

There needs to be a basic experience that everyone receives. Every customer is due a predictable process so that what you deliver is good and repeatable. But in order to go from good to great, you have to be able to solve individual problems and cater to individual tastes; that is a higher level of customer experience. To each customer, it’s all about them. So, if you treat every customer the same, you’re going to miss the mark.

Q: What is your best piece of advice for CX leaders to be successful?

You can absolutely apply a CX approach from one industry to another. It is about having the right mindset – you can apply the CX mentality, approach, and many of the same processes from one industry to another.

Q: If you could have one CX superpower, what would it be?

The ability to spread empathy. I wish I could hand it over or infuse it into people. Putting ourselves in other people’s shoes and thinking about their issues is required to deliver excellence in customer experience.

Q: What is your most favorite customer experience memory?

One of the most amazing experiences I ever had was the Heroes for Hospitality Hall of Fame introduction. It was our version of the Oscars, where we recognized and celebrated staff members that work on game day inside of Mercedes-Benz Stadium, making the fans’ experience the best of the best.

It was amazing to see and be a part of the power of recognition and celebration around people that have dedicated time and energy to make fans the number one priority on game day. Knowing that we have developed a customer care culture that allows people to do amazing things for our fans. To see people proudly standing up with tears in their eyes, accepting a level of recognition, even bringing their families to join in that moment was powerful and meaningful.

Q: What is your least favorite customer experience memory?

I am a student of customer experience, I look at it almost like a clinician when I'm out and about consuming experiences because so much of my last 20 years has been dedicated to creating and perfecting the customer experience, the fan experience. I ask myself, "Can I learn something from this that I might apply to our businesses? Is there something so bad that I want to make sure we avoid it at all cost?"

For example, we were at a small restaurant for lunch. We arrived and the host never looked up from the podium, she just kept looking at whatever was on the podium. We were not greeted. I gave my name and we were taken to our table, with the only words spoken "Please follow me." The whole dining experience was negatively impacted by that single moment of truth where the host didn't have time to look up, take a second, set herself, smile, welcome us, and ask how she could help. So for me, the food didn't taste as good.

Q: What are the most overused business words or phrases?

The one that resonates - and it might sound a little counterintuitive - is "The customer is always right." That's just not true. I will do somersaults and backflips to service and meet the needs of a customer, but I've come across some customers that don't deserve it. Yes, some customers should be politely thanked for their business and told we will no longer be able to service them.

Q: What is the best job you've ever had?

I feel like I'm Forrest Gump, I've managed to find my way into situations that I could have never, ever imagined. Looking back, I just say wow, how fortunate I've been to have found two distinct industries, two completely separate things. I have had the honor to work for an amazing global iconic brand, Mercedes-Benz, and then to be in the sports world. Both have been the best jobs and I would humbly do it all over again.

Q: What book changed your life?

It was one of the first business books that I read coming out of the Army: "In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies" by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr.

This book started my exploration, it sparked the level of interest that has had a gigantic influence on my whole career path. I didn't ever plan to go into customer experience; I was in the marketing business and I was working for Mercedes-Benz. But suddenly there was this opportunity to differentiate, to create, to wrap an amazing world-class experience around an amazing car.

Q: What is your motto?

Be interested, not interesting.

It means don't focus on you, focus on them. We want people to see us as great; make it about them because when we do, we grow in their eyes. We can learn, and can enrich our lives by being interested.

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