

## You and Your Employees Must Live a CRM Collaborative Culture

By Silvana Buljan, Buljan&Partners

The European low-cost airline EasyJet is known for having a culture that motivates employees, which in turn leads the employees to make the customers feel welcome. It's one firm that is working on creating what I call a CRM collaborative culture.

That is what happens when an organizational culture is based on the principle of putting the customer first in each and every interaction with the customer and across all departments. This means that a marketing employee will respond to an internal inquiry from a call center agent in the shortest possible time in order to give a quick reply to a calling customer. It also means that customer service is not the last to be informed about new product developments, new campaigns and new prices. And that means customers won't have negative experiences when they ask customer service for more details about those products, campaigns and prices. At the same time, customer service proactively informs the marketing department of new customer insights and feedback to products.

Does that sound too good to be true? It may be—in those organizations that do not make the customer the protagonist of daily business.

Our positive or negative experience as customers depends on whom we are dealing with in an organization. One company representative can be the most compelling and emphatic person, and our impression of this company is just fabulous. The same company, however, can be represented by an employee who is having a bad day, doesn't care about what you think and causes a truly bad impression.

How can your organization align your staff to make sure everyone is delivering great customer experiences every day?

First of all, the human relations or human resource department needs to be involved. The department should define a development program based on living a customer-centric culture. This program could look something like this:

1. Put the employees in the customers' shoes.
2. Put the employees in the shoes of a particular colleague.
3. Review your own habits and attitude.
4. Be evaluated in a 360-degree approach by colleagues you frequently deal with (through a random selection of evaluator-evaluated person and/or "mystery shopping").

**1. Putting the employees in the customers' shoes** is a very effective exercise. In lots of occasions, I have wondered why everybody is so good in telling their own stories about failed customer orientation in private life, but as soon as they cross the work threshold, people forget about having been customers. They start to defend the company they work for "against" complaining or demanding customers. You can do this exercise as a role-play, where trainers are internal employees and internal employees have the role of customers. The guideline for the role-play must be a realistic customer scenario.

EasyJet: executives show up as surprise flight attendants and service the customers—and at the same time try out teamwork on board.

**2. Putting the employees in the shoes of a particular colleague** is where your workers start to understand why it is so difficult to coordinate each other, and in most cases they experience a very complex reporting line for decision-taking. This exercise makes the employees aware that all of them are in the same boat and nobody can perform without the collaboration of another.

A very effective instrument for this awareness of “the internal client” is job rotation and helping out each other in peak working times.

UPS does this by having managers driving delivery trucks one Saturday a month and delivering packages and messages to customers. They not only understand those employees who do this work every day better, but also they “live” real customer experiences—and get to know the real customer.

Toyota does this a little differently, with high potentials working in production plants to seed a collaborative culture between management and production personnel and to understand the core of Toyota’s business: manufacturing and selling cars.

**3. Reviewing your habits and attitudes.** After having gone through the first two steps, your employees should take a moment to consolidate lessons learned: How does a customer feel when she is not attended to as expected? How does a customer feel when he cannot reach the appropriate person to communicate his feedback? What my colleague’s feeling if no one responds to his information inquiry? How does he feel when contacting the customer to relay a decision that fulfills your company’s business rules but which he cannot stand behind? It certainly helps to go deep inside and confront your employees with these questions.

**4. Someone who does not want to listen needs to feel the consequences.** Or so says a German proverb. Annual bonuses and salary variables are always very challenging and political. If you decide an employee fulfilled his objectives mainly on individual performance, then you risk the possibility that each employee is only following his or her own interests, not that of the overall company—and surely not the customers’ interest. One effective measure is a 360-degree feedback approach, where colleagues at the end of the year evaluate each other by random selection.

By following this outline, you seed a clear long-term customer commitment within the organization and leadership that actively lives that commitment, supported by effective processes and evaluation schemes that integrate the customer view in overall management and corporate culture.