



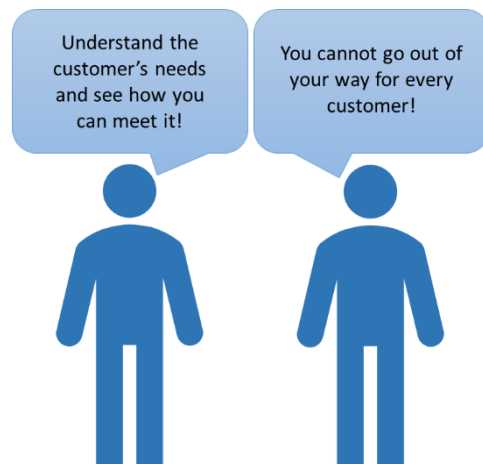
THE ROLE OF MANAGERS IN A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

When thinking about the various roles within a customer experience (CX) program, employees, especially those who interact with customers on frequent basis, come to mind. We also think about the role that executive leaders play, but often one key group that is left out of the plans for companies CX programs are *managers!* Managers have a key role to play within any CX program, but too often are missed when structuring the program and assigning roles and responsibilities.



A TALE OF TWO MANAGERS

Recently my wife and I moved to a more rural location and our current wireless did not cover our area well enough to meet our needs. After doing our research we decided on the right carrier for us and went to the closest store about 45 minutes away. The employee on duty provided very good customer service; answering our questions, explaining everything and helping to select the right phones. Unfortunately, the phones we chose were not in stock and he would call us when they arrived. A few days later he called to inform us that the phone I wanted was discontinued and he could not obtain any more. The next day we called a store much further away and talked to an employee there. He confirmed that the phone was being discontinued and that they did not have any in his store. But he said he would call around and see if he could find one. Later he called back saying that he had found one and had called his manager, who was off that day, to have him authorize having the phone sent to his store. As a result, we drove over an hour further to buy our phones and cell service from the store who went the extra step and provided the better service.



Looking back, both employees strived to provide us with a good experience, but one employee went way beyond to ensure that we had a great experience. A key reason for this difference turned out to be their respective managers. The first store's employee had told us his manager restricted what they could do to meet and resolve customer needs, essentially limiting how far he would go to take care of customers. While at the second store, we saw firsthand the manager demonstrating over and over what great customer service should look like, as well as supporting his employees so that they could also provide great experiences.

During this interaction with the two different stores, it became quite clear to me ***how important managers can be and should be in creating great experiences for customers and employees alike.***



WHEN MANAGERS ARE LEFT OUT

Early in my career one company launched a project to improve customer experience by empowering employees so that they could resolve customer issues on the first interaction without the need to escalate to supervisors and managers. For this to work, the company had to educate and provide them with the information so that they could resolve customer issues without hurting the business.



Unfortunately, a major gap was created by not addressing how this dramatic change to the business would affect supervisors and managers. Many were confused by the changes and were not sure of their role within the company, while others did not support the project throwing up roadblocks wherever they could. The company quickly realized the need to close this gap by communicating and educating the supervisors and managers on their new role of coaching and empowering the employees. Once this was achieved, the program succeeded with its goals and made great strides in improving the customer experience and achieving its goal of reducing customer churn.

A recent report by the Temkin Group, [Employee Engagement Competency & Maturity, 2018](#) showed that the least supported members of customer experience activities are leaders of non-customer-facing groups. Typically, groups that do not directly interact with customers are the least supportive of CX activities as they do not see how their actions impact customer experience. So, it is understandable that if companies provide little to no support to these leaders, then these groups will not vigorously support the company's CX efforts.

Managers must understand and support the goals of the CX program and believe in the importance of building a customer centric culture. An effective CX program will have continuous improvement activities taking place which will need to be supported by employees across the entire organization. It is critical to have the managers buy-in and backing of the program to ensure that their employees will have the assistance, resources and time required to support the program and its activities.





THE ROLE OF MANAGERS IN A DYNAMIC CX PROGRAM

So, what is the role of managers in your CX program? They need to be **champions and advocates** of the CX program, able to **communicate** its purpose, goals, activities and results. They should **model** firsthand what providing great customer experience looks like. They need to provide the **leadership** and structure while creating an environment that will foster teamwork and cooperation which leads to success. But the role of the manager goes much deeper. Employee engagement is a major cornerstone to any CX program and a recent Gallup study, [State of the American Manager](#), reveals that managers account for as much as **70%** of variance in employee engagement scores.



Managers have one of the single greatest impacts on employee engagement, which in turn helps to make or break any CX program. It begins with **attracting** and **hiring** employees who have the right attitude and attributes for providing exceptional customer experiences.



Next comes **training** and **mentoring** employees so they are equipped to complete their responsibilities while also being customer focused. Too often companies do not provide enough training for employees to succeed at their daily tasks let alone provide customer skills training.

Motivating and **empowering** employees are important activities of managers. Listen to employees as they are usually the most knowledgeable regarding their jobs and the needs of your customers. But it goes beyond just listening, you must act upon what employees are telling

you. One of the best ways to empower employees is to equip them through training and information so that they can be given the authority to take care of customer issues without having to constantly escalate. Lastly, make sure you are a role model inspiring your employees to provide exceptional customer service.

Right next to motivating and empowering is to **recognize** and **reward** employees. Everyone appreciates when their achievements are acknowledged, and it is one of the best ways to reinforce the desired behaviors. Learn to acknowledge individual and team efforts or activities on a daily basis that create the customer experiences that your CX program is working to achieve. Remember that recognition can be either formal or informal. Formal initiatives can be put in place on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis while informal recognition should take place when it is merited.





ARE YOU SUPPORTING YOUR MANAGERS?

In today's competitive business environment where creating customer-centric companies are a requirement to be successful, managers need to be much more than just people in charge. They need to be effective communicators, inspiring coaches, and role models who walk-the-talk. ***For managers to be all these things companies must fully support and equip them.*** As with engaging employees, communication is always a vital element. Make sure your managers understand the goals, activities and accomplishments of your program. Ensure they understand why the program is crucial to the success of the company and that they understand what makes up great customer experiences. Understanding how the program impacts them and their team along with the benefits they will see, will help them support your customer experience program.

HR groups need to be strong partners with managers. Guiding them on what to look for when hiring new employees, developing training materials, and how to recognize and reward employees providing positive customer experiences. Implementing Voice of Employee programs that will provide insights to managers, aiding them in improving employee work environments and experience is another important way to support your managers.

ABOUT RKC SOLUTIONS

RKC Solutions was founded by Robert and Kimberly Cowie to provide consulting in the area of customer and employee experience. Our goal is to work with you to identify key touchpoints, collect feedback from customers and employees, and determine actionable insight that will directly affect the experience of your customers and employees.



Robert Cowie has over 30 years of experience in the consumer electronics and television broadcast industries with the ability to create programs, build teams, drive change, reduce costs, and improve processes. As a transformational customer experience leader, Robert is passionate at helping businesses build effective CX programs which yields actionable insights for creating customer and employee experiences that will drive business success and growth. Robert became NPS certified in 2011.

