

IT'S ALL ABOUT

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CEX!

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The Essential Guide to  
Customer & Employee  
Experience

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JASON S. BRADSHAW

**CHAPTERS 1 & 2**

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JASON S. BRADSHAW



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# INTRODUCTION

## MY JOURNEY TO EXPERIENCE

My parents, David and Nicola, had a profound influence on me, an influence that ultimately inspired me to start my own business at the ripe old age of fourteen. I was born in an Australian country town called Murgon, which, at the time, had a population of two thousand.

As I was growing up, my parents always had a side hustle—some business they worked on outside of their normal jobs. My grandparents also ran their own independent clothing and drapery retail company. During holidays, I could often be found at either my parents' or my grandparents' businesses, not only observing them at work but, whenever possible, also engaging with them and trying to learn. I was encouraged to ask questions about what was happening so I could understand what was going on.

I had many opportunities to spend time with my father and mother in their various professional and business pursuits. I pursued many of my own projects as well. For example, I used to bottle, label, and sell gun oil. One of my father's lifelong side hustles was gunsmithing. So a few times a year, we traveled to firearms shows where he would buy, sell, and trade associated items. When I was a teenager, he always reserved space on his table at these shows so I could sell some of my bottles of oil.

My mother had her own side hustles, and at one point in her career, she was part owner of an auctioneering business. On weekends, I traveled with her to rural auctions to help with various tasks, including record keeping and running auction sheets for auctioneers.

Each of these opportunities taught me how to get things done and, as will become clear throughout this book, instilled in me a bias for building momentum using customer and employee experience. I learned early on that experience is the key differentiator of a successful business.

Seeing both my parents and grandparents run their own businesses piqued my interest, so I began, even as a child, to read business magazines. I started with *Australian Small Business and Investing*, which I would ask my father to buy for me every month. It was filled with

articles about entrepreneurs, but I was particularly fascinated by the various business opportunities presented in the classified ads.

At thirteen, I made my first Amazon.com purchase, which was a big deal at the time. Remember that Amazon only officially came to Australia in 2018, but I started using it long before that. My first purchase was a Tom Peters book called *The Pursuit of WOW!* on a twin cassette tape (which shows my age). In the book, Peters talks about wowing both customers and employees in order to grow. I find it interesting that he was talking about this back in 1994, and here we are, in 2018, still talking about the importance of experience in making an organization sustainable and successful.

### **MY FIRST BUSINESS: TENACITY AND SERVICE**

My desire to read and learn about the world exposed me to small-business concepts, so by the age of fourteen, I was ready to start my own business. To be honest, my primary interest wasn't becoming an entrepreneur—I saw it as a means to an end. Chiefly, I wanted to own the latest and greatest gadgets, whether my parents could afford them or not. My parents provided me with a great upbringing and supported me in every way, but there was one thing they wouldn't freely buy me: the latest and greatest computer tech or gadget of the season.

I came up with a harebrained idea. If I could get someone to sell me computers at wholesale prices, I could turn around and sell them for a profit, and with that money, I could fund my desire for the latest computer tech. This was the heyday of Gateway computers, when desktop computers were much bigger than they are today (and could do much less than the phones we carry in our pockets). At that time, a cutting-edge computer cost well over \$4,000, and I had to have one!

By then, my family and I lived in a regional Australian town called Toowoomba, the largest noncapital inland city at the time, with a population somewhere between ninety thousand and a hundred thousand. I figured I could ship computers in from the closest major city, so I began contacting businesses in Brisbane to find a supplier. I also began looking for customers, talking to friends of my parents, neighbors, and anyone else I came into contact with. Through that experience, I learned the importance of both tenacity and customer service, lessons that have served me well ever since.

After choosing a business name, filling out all the paperwork to register the business, and sending it off to the government, I went to the bank to open a checking account. The bank informed me that at fourteen, I was legally too young to open an account. This created a

major hurdle because in 1994, a checking account was the only way for businesses to transact.

I could have given up at that point, but it became a teachable moment. Rather than accept the bank's rejection, I tracked down the actual legislation to see what the law said. In doing so, I discovered that the law didn't technically forbid a fourteen-year-old from opening a checking account. As I recall, it said, in essence, "An individual must show that they have the mental capacity to use a checking account."

With this information in hand, I sat down at my typewriter—because I didn't have my dream computer yet—and promptly wrote the bank a long letter. In it, I explained why I believed the bank was in error and how I met the requirements of the law by the simple fact that I had successfully registered a business. Upon receiving my letter, with a little more pushing from me, the bank agreed and allowed me to open an account.

Now that I had a checking account and a business name, I started setting up suppliers. All of the suppliers were cash on delivery, so everything was built to order and shipped on payment. In the business world, people talk about the importance of cash flow. In my first business, it was *everything*. If I didn't get paid by my customers in

advance, I couldn't afford to purchase the product from my suppliers.

Through all of this, my tenacity paid off. A large painting-supply business in Toowoomba asked me to provide a computer retail and wholesale solution with a complete accounting software suite for their brand-new retail facility. I put together a quote for the hardware and accounting software. At the time, I knew nothing about accounting software, so I had to identify the best software, engage a Queensland distributor, and convince them to contract with me as their local reseller. In the end, at fourteen years old, I supplied the painting-supply company with brand-new computer hardware and the accounting software they needed to run their multimillion-dollar business.

I soon began to generate positive press. I was interviewed by *Australian Small Business and Investing*, the magazine that had first fueled my desire to start a business. During the interview, I was asked what made me different from every other computer business, and I responded that my level of service set me apart. I couldn't play on price. I wasn't the cheapest, but I delivered a top-notch service experience that customers wanted to talk about and were prepared to pay for.

This commitment to customer service enabled me to expand the business to other products. People don't buy

a new computer every month, so I needed new revenue streams. My plan was to sell complementary products. People who buy computers need things such as printer paper, ink cartridges, blank disks, and other office supplies, so I began to offer them. I also sold mobile phones, telephone systems, fax machines, and a whole range of office equipment. This allowed me to build a stable customer base by creating ongoing relationships that strengthened my reputation and helped me grow.

Of course, this first business wasn't going to take over the world of office equipment. That wasn't my intention. I only wanted to make enough money to buy the latest shiny gadgets, but I had loyal customers who were happy to refer me to others.

Those loyal customers funded my hobbies and then some. In addition to earning a nice amount of money, I'd started building lifetime skills in sales, negotiations, operations, and of course, how customer experience (CX) can be a differentiator that grows your business.

As I said, I couldn't offer the best prices. For example, one of my regular products was a permanent marker, but I couldn't buy it wholesale. Instead, I simply bought them in bulk from other retailers, put a margin on each one, and sold them to my clients. While the margin wasn't high, it still made my prices slightly higher than most major suppli-

ers. Still, my customers needed permanent markers, so they bought them often. With each sale, I had another opportunity to continue my relationship with them, acting as a direct supplier of their office needs in a way that was convenient for them. You see, sometimes it's not about squeezing the most profit out of a product; it's about continuing the customer relationship by providing more opportunities to offer a great experience and a needed product.

As a result of this first experience, I have remained committed to differentiating myself through service. Over the years, customer expectations have changed substantially. People expect a higher level of service from companies than they used to. Pure customer service is no longer the differentiator. Now you have to deliver an experience to both your employees and your customers.

Think about your own business and the experiences you deliver. Is there a way to increase the frequency of interactions with customers? Each interaction helps you build trust and create repeat and referral business.

## **MY SECOND BUSINESS: CREATING AN EXPERIENCE**

When I got to college, I just wanted to be a kid again. During my first year, I lived on campus, went to parties, and put more focus on my social life than my academic life. This caused me to jettison my first business.

It didn't take long to realize that the party lifestyle wasn't sustainable—it certainly wasn't feeding my thirst for growth—so I got a job as an outbound telemarketer, selling carpet-cleaning and pest control services. As it happened, my mother worked for the same company but in a different capacity, so she recommended the job. Every day when I wasn't in class, I made cold calls for four to five hours a day. This experience taught me a different set of sales skills, but unfortunately, it didn't last long. By the time I was nineteen, the company had gone bankrupt.

I decided to start my own domestic and commercial cleaning company. Setup was easy because I had a number of displaced team members from the former company at my disposal. The business, which was called Ultra Clean, offered domestic and commercial cleaning along with pest control and general cleaning services. I subcontracted individuals to perform the work and set up a telemarketing team.

The business evolved over time. At one point, I turned my parents' lounge and dining room into a call center. At another point, I leased a shop front. Through it all, the focus remained on providing a higher level of customer care. I didn't push fire sales or aggressive sales tactics. Instead, I made sure my employees felt as if they were a part of a team and that our customers could see we genuinely cared about them and weren't after quick money.

By offering a wide range of services, we created long-term relationships with customers, and we always followed up with them. Anytime we provided a service, we called the customer afterward to thank them for their business. Then we followed the call with written communication, so they knew we cared and would be available when they needed us again. This was key to building loyalty and business quickly grew, as customers returned for additional services.

In my second business, I again learned a number of things that have served me throughout my career. First, I learned the importance of creating a strong team. In my first business, I had been the sole trader, so the only person who could get angry or become disengaged was me. If I was having a bad experience, it was my own fault. With my second business, I had a team of people whose performance and retention were largely dependent on the experience I created for them.

Our sales model was arguably one of the most difficult: cold-call outbound marketing. Callers had to interrupt unsuspecting people in order to offer them products and services they didn't necessarily want. We've all experienced getting an unexpected telemarketing call. A typical response is "Leave me alone," before hanging up. Let me tell you, it's not easy being on the other end of those calls.

Think about how you respond when a telemarketer calls

your house. Think about how quickly you get off the phone. The people making those calls endure a constant stream of negative reactions. It requires incredible tenacity to handle rejection after rejection, to keep reaching out and making those calls, working to make a sale. Many people despise telemarketers, and there's a whole industry of "do not call" registries and tools to block such calls.

I absolutely support a right to privacy, and if someone doesn't want to receive such calls, I support efforts to block them. Still, think about the strength and tenacity it takes to succeed as a telemarketer when there are so many roadblocks to making a sale. Whether B2B or B2C, it's one of the toughest gigs out there.

When someone is good at it, companies don't want to lose them. They possess an efficiency and effectiveness that new recruits, who are just learning the craft, lack. It was all the more important that I created a strong sense of employee engagement along with clear direction. I did this not by offering free lunches or incentive trips—we lacked the money for such things—but by humanizing my team members in everything they did. That meant giving them every tool and resource they needed to be successful, while also demonstrating that I was willing to do whatever it took to help the team.

For example, we won a commercial cleaning job at a man-

ufacturing site that hadn't seen any cleaners in years. The workshop was so filthy that none of our contract cleaners wanted the job. Rather than forcing my employees to do it, I jumped in the car and drove to the customer's workshop myself. When employees see the founder of their organization scrubbing toilets in a place so filthy—it probably would have been easier to spray-bathe the whole facility in acid—it makes a big impact. This approach inspired the team to do the work in subsequent weeks, so it was a win-win.

We always worked through problems as a team. In one instance, we faced major tax legislation changes, so I created a slideshow, called everyone together, and walked them through the changes. I wanted to eliminate any fear they might be harboring while also ensuring that the business was meeting its obligations.

This was part of a broader focus on paying attention to small details. I worked hard to improve the day-to-day experience of our team, making things as simple and easy to understand as possible. As a leader, this meant constantly looking for ways to help team members. It didn't mean I gave them everything they wanted. Rather, I actively helped them achieve their goals.

The cleaning business is fierce, but in good times and bad, we had a strong core team that stuck together. Anyone

with money can buy equipment and start cleaning carpets. You don't need a university degree to learn the business, so we had a lot of competition. However, creating a strong team that constantly looked out for our customers differentiated us from the rest of the market. We supported one another, we cared for our customers, and we achieved tremendous success as a result.

### **CREATING CONNECTIONS**

After running my own businesses, I decided I wanted to try something different. I had already experienced being my own boss. Now I wanted to become part of an organization bigger than myself, so I started looking for part-time work at a large corporation. I studied numerous organizations and registered with recruitment agencies, and in no time, I got a job working in a call center at a large banking institution. I was quickly elevated to the position of assistant call-center manager, a promotion that came about in part because I was willing to take shifts no one else wanted.

This was my first foray into a big corporate call center. The call center I worked for was part of a special projects team, and at one point, the bank lost some large tenders, which forced them to downsize our team. As that was happening, I looked after my team, kept them informed, and made sure we were always transparent with them.

In 1999, the call center was closed, but my former team members still reach out to me from time to time. Ten years after the call center closed, a former employee called me and said, “I wish I was still working for you, because I still remember how you led.” I had another employee at the call center whom I had to make redundant. Four years later, I wound up managing her at a different company, and I had to make her redundant again. Despite this, she remained positive about her experience under my leadership. Both of these examples reinforce the power of creating connections with your employees.

### **THE POWER OF EXPERIENCE**

In every job I’ve had since then, I’ve always focused on two key areas. First, I look after the people within my sphere of influence, knowing that if I do, they will become a high-performing team and deliver results that reflect positively on the business. Second, I make sure to look after both internal and external customers.

Having a clear focus on these two things has enabled me to work effectively in banking and finance, telecommunications, government, and even healthcare. I sat on the board of a health promotion, services, and support not-for-profit company for seven years as chair of the finance and audit committee, and I discovered that you can focus

on accounting and legislative compliance while still delivering an excellent employee and customer experience.

In every industry, the same holds true. I've worked for the Australian government's largest procurement organization. I've worked in retail, media, and the automotive industry. In every instance, I have been able to deliver exceptional improvements by focusing on the employee and customer experience. At one organization, I was able to deliver \$60 million in savings while improving operational outcomes and revenue growth, reducing employee turnover, and increasing customers through this same focus.

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

In this book, we will explore the importance of experience. Businesses that have stood the test of time have been consistent and tenacious about delivering an experience to employees and customers. By doing so, they've been able to move and shape their business year after year because they make a difference in the lives of their team members and customers, and they impact the communities in which they work and serve. Specific examples we'll look at include organizations such as Southwest Airlines, Zappos, John Deere, Warby Parker, and Telstra.

As industries become more global and people become

more disconnected from their neighbors, the experiences we have with each other become more important than ever. We'll explore how that plays out in everything we do.

We will also look at the ways in which both employees and customers measure their experience with an organization and why it matters. If you give people what they're looking for, you start to get improved performance, repeat business, and referrals.

Finally, I will provide practical advice that you can start acting on now. This book doesn't offer a silver bullet. There's no single action that will suddenly fix all your customer or employee experience issues. You're not going to do one thing and immediately have a million fans raving about your business. Obviously, there are some tactical marketing activities that can get people raving about your business right away, but we're not talking about that here. Instead, we are talking about creating lifelong fans, and there are some actions you can take right now that will start making a noticeable difference.

In 1994, customer service was the differentiator. In the early 2000s, it became employee engagement. Today, it's all about experience management. By 2030, I don't know what it will be called, but I believe the focus will still be on experiences, the memories we create with individuals. By being tenacious and making experiential changes for

employees and customers, you can create systematic and sustainable growth for your organization.



## PART I

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# WHY EXPERIENCE MATTERS

If you do a Google search for the term *customer experience*, you will get over a billion results. If you search for *employee experience*, you'll get around 460 million results. Clearly, many people like to talk about these subjects, but somehow, organizations continue to struggle with them.

Read the annual report of any top-twenty company in any market, and you'll see periods in which they talked about transforming their business by focusing on customer experience. You'll also see that these conversations usually go on for two or three years before leaders stop talking about it. Short-term goals often distract leaders from the long-term experience playbook. I sympathize with this struggle. Having spent most of my adult life in

the corporate world, I know how tough it can be to juggle the demands of this quarter, half, or year with the long-term strategy of experience.

Rather than trying to make sudden, dramatic company-wide changes, adopt the simple approach of being a little bit better every day.

### **WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?**

In this book, we will explore why experience matters and why it's such a struggle. Through the examples of successful companies, you will see how a relentless focus on delivering better experiences creates sustainable improvements to your business.

Forrester Research released a report in 2017 called “ROI for CX Transformation,” based on research into the impact an investment in CX makes on a business.<sup>1</sup> Their conclusion is that in the American market, a one-point improvement in a company's CX index would result in an \$873 million increase in revenue for a company in the automotive market, \$244 million for a big-box retailer, and \$124 million for a traditional bank.

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<sup>1</sup> Dylan Czarnecki and Maxie Schmidt-Subramanian, “The ROI of CX Transformation,” *Forrester*, June 19, 2017, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://www.forrester.com/report/The+ROI+Of+CX+Transformation/-/E-RES136233>

All of this from a one-point improvement in customer experience. What would a 1 percent improvement deliver in your industry?

Think about your organization. Unless you're the leader in your industry, there are no doubt many ways you could improve the experience you deliver to both customers and employees. You are potentially leaving a lot of revenue on the table for your competitors to scoop up.

If you knew for a fact there was more revenue you could potentially capture, how much would the number need to be to get your attention? Ten percent of your current profit? Would \$1 million, \$5 million, or \$100 million be enough? What amount would inspire your team or business to reach the next level? To capture an unfair share of the market opportunity, you just have to move faster than your competitors in delivering a **consistently** better experience.

Improving customer experience will not only prove profitable today, but it can also sustain your business during times of struggle. If you create raving fans, they will be more likely to stick with you if you experience a catastrophic problem in your business, industry, or economy.

The same holds true for employees. Research reveals that the cost of losing an employee is *at least* half their annual

wage, due to the expense of recruiting a replacement and training them to become effective in the role.<sup>2</sup> That number is probably understated. Either way, it is money that is better on your bottom line. When you deliver a better experience for your current team, people will want to stick around, which saves you time and money. I also believe that the experience you create for employees has a direct impact on the experience you deliver to customers, so the two are inextricably linked.

Think about the last time you were having a bad day. How hard was it to appear positive to everyone around you? If employees have a negative attitude because of their employment experience that day, week, month, or year, it's going to spill over into the experiences of others.

If you want to allocate resources into one area that will have the broadest and most profound impact on the success of your business at every level, focus on improving experience. Begin by focusing on the experience of your team members. When you create a more fulfilled, satisfied team of committed employees, that will translate into improvements for your customers, and in the end, you will transform your overall business in ways you'd never imagined.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Real Cost of Employee Turnover," *Standard for Success*, accessed August 13, 2018, [https://www.standardforsuccess.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Employee\\_Turnover\\_Infographic\\_8.27.2.pdf](https://www.standardforsuccess.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Employee_Turnover_Infographic_8.27.2.pdf).

## Chapter 1

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# WHAT IS EXPERIENCE?

One of my strongest memories of my first visit to the United States occurred when I stumbled across a juice store near Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles. I didn't even particularly want a fruit smoothie at the time, but I heard the customers chanting and clapping. The line stretched out the door, but everyone appeared to be having a great time. As an outsider, this looked like the place to be. I was amazed that a place selling smoothies could generate such enthusiasm. After all, they were selling a product you can find in almost every mall in America and countries all over the world.

I couldn't resist the hype, so I got in line with everyone else. When I reached the counter, I ordered some juice, paid for it, and put a tip in the tip jar. As soon as my money went into the jar, every employee in the store cheered and shouted, "Thank you!" I was so taken aback that I put

another dollar into the tip jar just to experience it again. This time, they all shouted in unison, “Thank you for being a superstar!”

When I got my order, I started to leave, but an employee stopped me.

“No, you have to taste it first,” he said. “If you aren’t 100 percent happy with it, we will make a new one.”

Now, honestly, the drink was only five or six dollars. I figured if it tasted awful, it was no big loss, but I took a sip and said, “It’s fine.”

The enthusiastic employee smiled and said, “Thanks for being part of our day. We hope to see you again!”

During that first trip, I spent five days in Los Angeles, and I was so impressed with the experience that I went back to the juice store every day. The product was decent, not amazing. It quenched my thirst, which was all I needed. However, the atmosphere and experience created such a strong memory that I can still recall it vividly fifteen years later. The fruit juice could have come straight out of a bottle, and the experience would still have made it feel worthwhile.

With their attention to delivering an amazing experience,

they achieved two things. First, they successfully delivered the product I wanted and made it feel effortless. Even waiting in the queue didn't take too long. In fact, the enthusiasm made it fun to wait my turn. Second, they created a connection with me and every other customer. Not only did they interact with me in an exciting, fun way, but I also got to see them interact with other customers. It was the customer interaction that drew me into the store in the first place.

### **CREATING LIFELONG MEMORIES**

Powerful customer experiences like this create connections that turn into lifelong memories. Nobody remembers a typical visit to the grocery store down the street, but they will remember a fun or exciting interaction with store employees. Consider your own business. Could you deliver an experience so amazing that your customers will think about it for years to come? The juice shop in Los Angeles didn't have a particularly special product, but I'll never forget the experience I had there. Anytime I'm in Los Angeles, I will try to go back.

When I first visited, I saw ten employees working in the juice shop that day. Chances are at least one of them was having a bad day. Maybe one of them had had a fight with their spouse that morning or had gotten a flat tire on the way to work. Maybe one of them was worried about

paying the rent that week. If so, it didn't show. In the moment, they were completely focused on creating the customer experience. They left their worries at the door and had fun interacting with customers in a genuine way.

An amazing experience inspires customers to speak about your business, but an ordinary and forgettable experience usually leads to customer silence. The feeling you create produces the result.

### **WHAT ARE YOU OVERLOOKING?**

When you work as an experience professional, you tend to become laser-focused and highly analytical about the experiences you have. You learn to become critical of even the smallest things, and when you have a great time at a hotel or restaurant or during an Uber ride, you tend to break down the why.

Conversely, minor annoyances, such as the dust on the counter that most people don't notice or the Uber driver who won't get out and help you with your bags, stand out. Apply this same critical lens to the experience you deliver to your customers, and you will begin to identify shortcomings and areas of needed improvement.

As part of her new job, a colleague of mine inherited contact center operations at a large organization, and

she emailed me to ask my thoughts on implementing improvements. I was happy to help. The first thing I did was pick up the phone and pretend to be a customer at the contact center. I called three or four times, so when I spoke to my friend and former colleague, I could speak from experience about needed improvements. By identifying the low-hanging fruit, I was able to recommend some efficient, easy improvements for quick wins.

I visited a furniture store recently in which everything initially seemed just fine. The visual merchandising team had done a great job of creating the displays. However, it was a multilevel store, and as I ascended the escalator, I got a good look at the backside of the displays. What I saw I can only describe as *years of accumulated filth*. Dirt and dust had built up like snow, and my immediate thought was, “How hard would it be to dust back there once a month?”

My next thought was, “If they can’t bother to clean up behind the display cases, what else are they failing to do behind the scenes?” As leaders, these are the kinds of things you must be aware of. You are responsible for the experience you deliver to customers. I’m not suggesting you get bogged down in the negative. Rather, a good leader focuses on finding opportunities to improve in a positive way.

Here, I have shared with you two simple examples of how

walking in the shoes of your customers or employees can inform your focus areas. Do you regularly ask yourself, “What is the experience of my team members today? What is the experience of my customers today?”

When was the last time you did a mystery shop of your own teams? Often, the answers you’re looking for are in the experiences you haven’t yet personally undertaken. For that reason, the first step to improving your customer or team experience is to walk a mile, or even just a few inches, in the shoes of customers and team members.

In regard to your team, the experience a new employee has during their first few days on the job has the biggest impact on whether or not they stay with you long term. Think back on your first days at the best and worst companies you ever worked for. The lingering memories you have define what I mean by experience. Positive or negative, they left a mark in your memory that influence your expectations to this day.

Now, more than ever, you need to consider the feelings you inspire and the memories you create in everything you do.

## **CREATING STRONG ADVOCATES OR FIERCE DETRACTORS**

Both employees and customers can become strong

advocates or fierce detractors of your company, which is why we are focusing on both throughout this book. An employee can make the job of attracting and retaining talent easier by speaking well of your company to friends and family.

They advocate for your business in the way they treat people even when they're not on the job. When someone at the dinner table says they're having a problem with your company's product or service, the way that employee responds, even though they aren't technically at work, can foster brand loyalty. Employee advocates play a huge role in the sustainability of your business, growing your customer base, increasing revenue, and saving you money, which is why the experience you create for them is of such vital importance.

We're also focusing on customers because they are, after all, the consumers of the experience you create. Fifteen years from now, they might not remember the refrigerator they bought from you, but they will remember the experience they had while buying it. What sort of memory is created for a customer when they buy an appliance, then hear that the store can deliver it only on Friday between noon and six o'clock? That forces them to take time off work, interrupting their lives just so they can have the privilege of receiving the appliance they paid for. That's not a pleasant memory.

We're not limiting our discussion to appliance stores, of course. This book is built for any business, and the tips, hints, and valuable insights on building brand advocates from both customers and employees are designed to be transferable.

Personally, I've worked in seven different industries, and I've seen the importance of experience in all of them, particularly as it relates to three things: success, effort, and human connection. We will address all three of these in greater detail later on.

We will also address the key points in creating consistency of experience, whether in a single, multisite, or franchise operation. When someone interacts with your brand, whether it happens online or in a traditional brick-and-mortar store, consistency is essential. The last experience someone has becomes the new norm, especially if it's a peak experience. It becomes what they expect every time, so you must improve the experience in a sustainable way.

I believe anyone can improve customer experience overnight, but a better way to approach customer experience is to embed an experience mindset in the hearts and minds of your teams. Doing this takes time and commitment, but it rewards you with sustainable growth and results.

Here's the key: customer experience *begins* with employee

experience. Between the two, if you can focus on improving only one, focus on your employees, because more engaged and excited employees will directly improve the experience for customers.

## **A RELENTLESS OBSESSION**

As I mentioned in the introduction, I created a successful computer sales company in 1994, but what differentiated my business wasn't the processing power of the computers I sold or the price I offered. Instead, it was the level of customer service I delivered. By the mid-2000s, employee engagement had become a hot topic in major organizations in many industries. Today, most companies offer some kind of engagement survey every year.

Despite this increased focus, companies that can effectively focus on both employee and customer experience in a consistent way remain in the minority. The ability to create those positive experiences day after day, week after week, year after year with tenacity continues to evade many leaders, so if you develop a relentless obsession about improving experience, you will stand apart.

Throughout this book, I will provide effective ways to create positive experiences that become the stories people share about your business. It's in those stories

that you connect to new customers and new employees,  
driving your business forward.

## Chapter 2

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# WILL IT GO AWAY?

In 1998, at the age of nineteen, I joined the wholesale business of an Australian company called Telstra, which was Australia's largest telecommunications company at the time, providing a range of telecommunication services for homes, small businesses, and corporate and government customers.

I began in the wholesale division, and while I appreciated everything I learned in that role, I eventually stopped feeling valued by the company. I left to become a founding team member for a brand-new contact center in a chartered accounting firm. As the second hire, my job was to help establish a team that could deliver salary-packaging support to the state of Queensland's government employees.

I had never been in an accounting firm, had no profes-

sional accounting training, and had to learn relevant skills quickly. While I thrived on the challenge, the job was limited in its growth potential. I couldn't go far on the corporate ladder, and to be fair, my heart was still at Telstra. At Telstra, I'd felt like I was part of something bigger, and I missed it. When I got an opportunity to rejoin Telstra in a newly created department called the Center for Customer Experience, I jumped at it. It proved to be one of my favorite professional experiences.

Despite the name, the Center for Customer Experience didn't focus on strategizing or improving customer experience. Instead, our purpose was to manage existing customers when they experienced a delay in receiving services. In some cases, the customers we dealt with had waited months to get their new phone services connected, and as you can imagine, they often had strong feelings about the delay—*frustration* is a polite way of putting it.

The company had identified these delays as a pain point in the organization. With new competition starting in the Australian telecommunications market, customers gained access to alternatives, so Telstra knew they had to do something to address the problem. During my time there, I created and implemented customer-service training programs that went above and beyond the norm, surpassing customer expectations with the hope of mitigating frustrations.

Since then, Telstra has developed an entire department focused on transformative customer experiences, covering all aspects of the company. Like many companies, they have realized the growing relevance of customer experience.

### **BETTER THAN LOW PRICES**

Forrester Research and Capgemini SE have both done excellent research on company differentiation, concluding that organizations that don't (or can't) compete on price must differentiate through experience.<sup>3</sup> Many companies reach an absolute floor in their product prices. They simply can't afford to go any lower if they want to remain profitable, but they still have to compete somehow.

It has been my long-held belief that a race to the lowest price is the wrong strategy. A race to the top in delivering segment-leading experiences is the winning long-term strategy.

When competitors arose, Telstra wouldn't (or couldn't) offer the cheapest phone services, so they focused on pairing the best product with an unrelenting commitment to improving the customer experience. Today, they talk

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Ramos, "Back2Basics: Why B2B Marketers Should Differentiate on Customer Experience," *Forrester*, May 16, 2018, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://go.forrester.com/blogs/b2b-marketers-should-differentiate-on-customer-experiences/>.

about customer experience in everything they do. As they say on their website, “We believe the more connected people are, the more opportunities they have. That’s why we help create a brilliant connected future for everyone, [every day].”<sup>4</sup> According to the company website, their strategy, called Telstra2022, includes delivering market-leading customer experiences.<sup>5</sup>

As the company evolved over the years, the focus changed periodically, sometimes with negative results. For a while, they had a relentless focus on engineering excellence. After privatization, they went through a period of focusing on cost reduction at the expense of customer service. As someone who worked at Telstra during the privatization period, I can personally attest to the many “barbecue conversations” among team members about the negative impact this had across the company.

It was the work of CEO David Thodey, who joined the company in 2001, that turned things around. I had the pleasure of working in his division when he was the group managing director of Telstra Enterprise and Government. During that time, I gained insight into David’s vision, and his focus was on the experience of customers and employees.

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4 Simon K., “Proud Past, Brilliant Future,” Telstra, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://www.telstra.com.au/aboutus/our-company>.

5 “Our Corporate Strategy,” Telstra, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://www.telstra.com.au/aboutus/our-company/future/Ourcorporatestrategy>.

David Thodey was appointed CEO of Telstra in 2009. I wasn't with the company at the time, but the media, and my friends, regularly reported on the ways he was igniting a passion for delivering an experience that emphasized the lifetime value proposition of customers. This shift dramatically reduced the number of incoming complaints and created many loyal brand advocates.

Complaints are time-consuming, costly to manage, and they diminish advocacy and loyalty, which is why they are a key factor companies can use to measure performance. This is another reason why customer experience will never cease to matter. Even if we're calling it something else in ten to fifteen years, the fundamental need to connect with customers will remain.

### **FOCUS ON THE BOTTOM LINE**

Some managers think experience is the “fluffy stuff,” because chief customer experience officers don't always take a commercial view of the work they do. Historically, the focus has been on creating individual touchpoints with customers, such as greetings. While these kinds of moments are important, they fail to view experience as a primary factor in helping a business grow and remain profitable.

As CX and EX professionals (or, as I like to call it, XM:

eXperience Management), we must begin to link our work to the commercial outcome of our organizations. When you do that, you not only reinforce the work you do, but you also ensure you have a legitimate seat at the executive table by contributing to a long-term business result that makes shareholders happy. Customer and employee experience provides a massive return on investment if done in a sustainable way that grows repeat and referral business.

Of course, everything you do in customer experience doesn't have to create an immediate commercial impact, but you have to be able to demonstrate ROI. When you can show that customer experience delivers a positive impact to the brand and balance sheet, you will be able to ask for more investment.

When executives understand the ROI you deliver, they will be more willing to provide the resources you need to accelerate your programs even further. I would love to give every new recruit in my organization free lunch for a month or the latest shiny object that we sell, but the return wouldn't necessarily justify the investment. Having said that, of course, providing ways for new recruits to connect with the brand, its heritage, its future, and its products is important. Later in this book, we will explore how a company can do this—and yes, sometimes it includes a free lunch.

Another trap XM professionals fall into is believing their own press, convinced that their program is always right. We must always look critically at our programs and tweak them so they continue to deliver results. Doing this constantly reinforces the notion that what we do contributes to the bottom line.

Then again, even some of the softer skills of customer experience, such as the way you greet people or manage communication, are important and difficult to deliver sustainably. Like everything else, improvements must be rolled out in a commercially sensible way.

### **UNUSUAL AND OUTRAGEOUS IDEAS**

As products and services become more global, organizations are becoming more similar, making it increasingly important to create a differentiated experience for employees and customers. Some companies are trying concepts and ideas that previous generations would have considered unusual or even outrageous. For example, it is widely reported that Google provides employees with the freedom to spend up to 20 percent of their working time on so-called side projects. These side projects don't need leadership approval and can be big or small. Some of them have led to products we now use every day, most notably Gmail. That's the kind of differentiation that makes them stand out as an employer.

Many companies are doing great work in humanizing the customer experience during times of devastation, such as financial companies forgiving loan payments when a loved one has passed away or phone companies providing free mobile services during a natural disaster. These organizations understand that the experience they deliver will create long-lasting memories that will sustain them in a way they can feel proud of.

Consider Zappos, the well-known American shoe and apparel retailer. They've become famous around the world for their customer experience. In fact, if you do a Google search for "Zappos's customer experience," you will get more than 2.7 million responses, the vast majority from customers gushing about their interactions with the company. The CEO of Zappos, Tony Hsieh, has talked at length about their success, which he attributes largely to the culture they've created in the organization.

During an interview with Micah Solomon at *Forbes*, Hsieh emphasized the effort they've made to create and sustain a culture obsessed with customers.<sup>6</sup> Famously, they pay employees to leave the company if they aren't fully on board with the culture. That speaks to the power of the

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6 Micah Solomon, "Is the Proudly-Weird Culture of Tony Hsieh's Zappos Also Its Customer Service Secret?" *Forbes*, June 19, 2017, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2017/06/19/is-the-proudly-weird-culture-of-tony-hsiehs-zappos-its-customer-service-success-secret>.

organization, and they have enjoyed years of significant growth, resulting in their acquisition by Amazon.

As a testimony to the strength of their culture, they've managed to keep it intact even after becoming part of a larger organization. In fact, even though I live in Australia, I wait until my trips to the United States to buy shoes from Zappos because I know I can trust the experience. They have earned my loyalty in everything they do. The consistency of the experience they deliver means that even in countries such as Australia, where they don't operate, they are still routinely referred to at customer experience conferences as a case study.

I visited Zappos for the first time in 2008, but I'd already spoken to them beforehand through their Twitter account. On Twitter, they gave me hotel recommendations. Can you imagine? A shoe company giving me hotel recommendations on social media! While I was writing this book, I decided to test them again, so I tweeted at them, told them I would be staying at the Ritz-Carlton in Marina del Rey, and mentioned that I needed a haircut. True to form, Zappos's Twitter account gave me three recommendations for places to get a good haircut. Of course, they aren't experts in the haircut industry, and they probably used Yelp to find their recommendations. Still, they demonstrated their focus on creating and maintaining an ongoing connection with me. This approach

speaks to how deeply ingrained their customer-oriented culture is in every part of their organization.

In 2018, I was urgently in need of a particular style and color of Nike shoe for an upcoming event. I sent the company a tweet, and they replied that they didn't carry that particular item. However, they told me they had located what I was looking for at another store, a competitor, and they offered me directions.

They understood that a friendly gesture, even if it sent me to a competitor, would contribute to my sense of loyalty and advocacy. After all, here I am praising Zappos rather than the competitor I ultimately bought that pair of shoes from.

Can your company, can your team, can *you* become this obsessed in helping customers achieve success?

Which-50, an Australian news service, interviewed me recently and asked, "When it comes to customer experience, whose responsibility is it?" The answer is clear. It's the responsibility of every single person at the organization to ensure that the experience they deliver both internally and externally consistently aligns with the culture. Every interaction with a customer at every level matters.

Ten to fifteen years ago, organizations were furiously

debating about the necessity of customer service. Some wanted to sideline it because they saw customer service as a cost center rather than a change agent in the business. Since then, there's been a significant push to make customer service, and the long-lasting memories an experience creates, at the forefront—a trail blazed by pioneers such as Jeanne Bliss, who in many respects created the chief customer officer (CCO) role.

For a CCO, customer experience ensures that the company grows through repeat and referral business. After all, word of mouth is the cheapest and loudest form of marketing.

### **THINKING LONG TERM**

United Airlines provides a clear example of what happens when an organization fails to maintain a long-term focus on customer experience. In 2017, the airline gained international attention when a customer was aggressively removed from a seat he had legally purchased. Video footage of airport security dragging him off the plane went viral and led to widespread condemnation.

In May 2017, the CEO publicly vowed that United Airlines would become more customer-focused, but in 2018, the airline hit the news again when a family pet died in transit, allegedly as a result of its handling by the company.

This goes to show how challenging it can be to transform customer experience. As I said, it takes a commitment at every level of an organization.

I'm not suggesting that companies have to maintain a perfect track record. Every organization is run by people, and people are bound to make mistakes from time to time. However, two very public, very negative customer interactions in two years is cause for alarm, especially because the CEO had already publicly committed to focusing more on customers.

This is what happens when you don't invest enough in experience starting at the senior level. By the time the neglect becomes apparent, the damage is done, and it can't be fixed overnight. In the case of United Airlines, it created the appearance that a promise was made and broken, which is calamitous for customer loyalty. Of course, I believe that any company has the ability to transform over time and become famous for the (positive) experiences they deliver.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have the example of Southwest Airlines, a company that has been relentless in delivering a phenomenal customer experience from day one. Southwest was established in 1967, and they are the only long-term airline in the continental United States to make a profit every single year, even though they are

a value-based airline. They've accomplished this feat by focusing on, first, delivering an excellent experience for their employees and, second, translating that into a high-quality consistent for customers.

## **WEATHERING MISSTEPS**

It's important to remember that being obsessed with customer and employee experience isn't about always getting it right. There is great value in learning from failures. When a company is truly obsessed with customer and employee experience, they build a reputation that allows them to weather the occasional misstep. Southwest has had their own missteps and public criticism. There is even a Twitter account, @Southwest\_sux, where people regularly share their frustrations about the airline. In an example of a misstep, *Inc.com* reports that Southwest Airlines landed at the wrong airport, seven miles away from its intended destination.<sup>7</sup> As a result, they are being sued for \$74,999. Despite this misstep and others, the brand has established itself as a leader in customer experience among low-cost carriers.

In 2018, they were rated highest in customer satisfaction in the J.D. Power 2018 North America Airline Satisfaction

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7 Bill Murphy Jr., "A Passenger Sued Southwest Airlines for Exactly \$74,999, and It's Totally Brilliant. Here's Why," Inc., March 11, 2018, accessed August 13, 2018, <https://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/a-passenger-sued-southwest-airlines-for-exactly-74999-its-totally-brilliant-heres-why.html>.

Study.<sup>8</sup> In the same year, they also won the TripAdvisor Traveler’s Choice Award for airlines.<sup>9</sup> The company’s enduring focus on customer and employee experience allows them to continue to grow and, importantly, overcome their missteps.

Southwest might not be the airline for everyone, but it doesn’t have to be. All they have to do is keep the promises they make to customers and employees by maintaining a crystal-clear focus on the experience, constantly communicating it throughout the organization.

## **INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY**

For an Australian example, we can look to the home improvement store Bunnings Warehouse, which is by far the biggest hardware store in the nation, similar to Home Depot in the United States. Bunnings has had a number of competitors, including Masters, a joint venture of Woolworths and Lowe’s. Masters was founded in 2011 but closed its doors in 2016. Although a number

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8 Southwest Airlines Newsroom, “Southwest Airlines Ranks Highest in Customer Satisfaction among Low-Cost Carriers in North America According to J.D. Power,” June 15, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.swamedia.com/releases/release-63dd6d3a3fb0751687938f48891d7a4f-southwest-airlines-ranks-highest-in-customer-satisfaction-among-low-cost-carriers-in-north-america-according-to-jd-power>.

9 Southwest Airlines Newsroom, “Southwest Airlines Wins 2018 TripAdvisor Traveler’s Choice Awards for Airlines,” April 9, 2018, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.swamedia.com/releases/release-de080387b716f7f68a21df8644c871a-southwest-airlines-wins-2018-tripadvisor-travelers-choice-awards-for-airlines>.

of factors contributed to the failure of Masters, one of the clear differentiators at Bunnings was the customer experience. Team members at Bunnings are easily recognizable, and a customer can always approach them to ask for help. Team members will either point the way or lead the customer directly to the item they need. On the other hand, Masters has more of a self-service model. In my numerous trips to the store, I never once saw a team member leading a customer to an item. While the self-service model might seem appealing, it also makes customers feel less appreciated.

Bunnings invested in a better customer experience, an experience based on consistency and ease. At the same time, taking a page out of Ace Hardware's playbook, they embedded themselves in the community, serving in various ways in the cities where they are located. It's not just about the friendly greeting you give when customers walk through the door. It's also about the ways you interact with the community around your business. It's about becoming more than merely a retailer.

Every Bunnings across the nation offers space for charity groups to have barbecue fund-raisers, where they can cook the typical sausages and onions while raising money for their cause. In fact, it has become an Australian tradition to go to Bunnings for a sausage to support the charity of the week. They have created a powerful touchpoint

with Australian communities that strengthens the brand, doing far more to create customer loyalty than competitive pricing alone could ever achieve.

Of course, Bunnings is not without its competition. They still have to contend with companies such as Home Timber & Hardware and Mitre 10. While Bunnings is arguably the most recognizable home improvement retail brand in Australia, they don't rest on their laurels. They remain passionate about their customers.

Customer satisfaction benchmarking completed by Roy Morgan in 2017 showed that Bunnings is number one in customer satisfaction, with a score of 89 percent, an increase of 0.1 percent from the previous year.<sup>10</sup>

Even though 0.1 percent might not seem like much, it shouldn't be scoffed at. Most companies would love to have a customer satisfaction score of 80 percent or more, but Bunnings clearly continued to tweak and improve their approach. At the same time, Home Timber & Hardware dropped 0.4 percent.

The home improvement market is a tough one that requires consistent elevating focus, and Bunnings has

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Morgan, "Bunnings 'Sizzling' with High Customer Satisfaction," October 27, 2017, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7393-csa-results-september-2017-hardware-stores-201710270308>.

become the market leader not simply because of their products but also because people trust them to provide a good experience with every interaction.

### **A MANAGER'S RESPONSIBILITY**

One of a manager's responsibilities is to help team members improve their job performance. We've all dealt with employees who are content with the status quo. "I just want to do my job, leave on time, and go home. I don't want any added stress." However, if team members don't improve, then they won't be able to keep up with the job as it evolves, whether due to technological advances, customer expectations, or the organization's demands.

A manager is successful when they have a highly engaged, efficient, and successful team, but it's difficult to do that if you have high turnover. That's why I say your first responsibility is to create and deliver experiences for your employees. When you do that, you make people want to stay, and when an employee develops loyalty to the company, your investment in them delivers a much higher ROI. Instead of using your money to constantly train new employees, you're paying to enhance the skills and efficiencies of existing team members.

Once you've created an engaging experience for employees, you should work with your team to differentiate

the customer experience. Failing to do so in today's more competitive market is dangerous to the future of your company.

“A Kodak moment” is a catchphrase known for generations, a relic of a time when Kodak was the market leader in photographic film. Anything worth photographing was a Kodak moment. However, in 2012, the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Kodak wasn't simply a victim of the tech boom. In 2016, *Harvard Business Review* reported that in 1975, a highly engaged engineer at Kodak named Steve Sasson developed the first prototype for a digital camera.<sup>11</sup> According to Sasson, his management team said, “The innovation is cute, but don't tell anyone about it.”

Kodak had clearly created an environment where people were committed to the organization and developing groundbreaking products. However, the company failed to find ways to harness that potential, which led to massive negative disruption to the business.

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<sup>11</sup> Scott Anthony, “Kodak's Downfall Wasn't about Technology,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 15, 2016, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2016/07/kodaks-downfall-wasnt-about-technology>.

## DISRUPT YOURSELF

Customer experience, sales, service, and business thought leader Scott McKain,<sup>12</sup> on his *Project Distinct* podcast, reminds us about another company that has suffered as a result of disruption: Gillette. The pioneers in disposable razors, Gillette enjoyed market leader advantage for many years. However, their focus drifted away from the customer, which paved the way for a surge of disruptors such as Dollar Shave Club.

Although they are the founders of the disposable razor, Gillette has been losing market share in the very product they invented because they've made it difficult for customers to obtain the product. When you walk into a supermarket, Gillette razors are often locked in a display case so they won't be stolen.

These disruptors looked at the **friction points** of the typical retail disposable-razor product and removed as many negative interactions as possible. To buy a humble disposable Gillette razor, you often have to find someone with a key to the cabinet they are stored in, or battle a safety mechanism to remove it from the shelf.

Compare that to Dollar Shave Club, which has not only made their razors affordable but also ships the product right to the customer's door every month at the same

<sup>12</sup> <https://scottmckain.com/>

time. Whether or not the product is superior to the Gillette product, they've delivered an experience that is a huge differentiator, making ease of access their primary concern.

If you identify friction points with your products or services faster than your competitors, you can act quickly to disrupt yourself before anyone else gets the chance. Doing this safeguards your business against disruptors.

Think about your own company. Is there a different angle you can take on the experience of acquiring your product? The subscription model of Dollar Shave Club might not be right for you, but is there another way you could make it easier for customers to get it?

The taxi industry provides another example of what happens when nothing is done to address friction points in the customer experience. As a result, Uber, Didi Chuxing, and Lyft have created a completely different experience by embracing the sharing economy. Like taxis, they still get people from point A to point B, but they use mobile devices to make it easier and more convenient. The opportunity existed because the taxi industry, despite having plenty of drivers who were great at their jobs, stopped focusing on the customer experience.

Uber, Didi Chuxing, and Lyft also improved the payment

process. No longer did customers have to pull out cash or a credit card, because payment is handled entirely through apps. Not only is this more convenient for customers, but it's also safer for drivers, who no longer have to carry cash in their vehicles to make change.

Friction is the enemy of positive word of mouth. If you fail to take advantage of opportunities to eliminate friction points, there's a good chance a competitor will. Consider how the news and newspapers have been disrupted by social media. Consider how major airlines have been disrupted by JetBlue and Southwest.

Take a step back and look at your own company and industry. Find ways to deliver from a different angle; consider ways to remove friction points. If you can do that, you will stand out from the pack. Customers will notice and begin to tell your story.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I feel immense gratitude for every organization I've had the opportunity to work with and learn from, and I want to express appreciation for each of the communities I've had the opportunity to give back to.

I offer a sincere thank you to my mother and father, Nicola and David Bradshaw. As an only child, I couldn't have asked for more supportive and encouraging parents, and I know at times they made great sacrifices to help me follow my dreams. I am forever indebted to them.

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To the authors who have provided guidance and support during the writing of my first published book, I say, “Thank you.”

Finally, to you, the reader, I thank you for buying this book.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JASON BRADSHAW** created his first business at fourteen, selling telecommunications and computer equipment in the Australian regional city of Toowoomba. In the lead-up to this, he was inspired by books such as *The Pursuit of WOW!* by Tom Peters, which opened his eyes to the power of customer and employee experience.

Jason has tested and implemented strategies for improving experience in a variety of sectors, including telecommunications, retail, media, finance, automotive, health, and not-for-profit. He has worked with companies including Telstra, Target Australia, Fairfax Media, New South Wales Government, Singtel Optus, and Volkswagen Group Australia, and he has sat on the boards of ACON Health Limited and Oz ShowBiz Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

A cornerstone of Jason's career has been an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of customers and employees. During his time in the telecommunications industry, he was able to implement ideas for improving customer experience in a number of verticals by more than 100 percent. In retail and media, his initiatives to improve efficiencies by focusing on customer and employee experience saved tens of millions of dollars in a matter of months and improved employee retention by double digits year on year.

Jason is currently chief customer officer and director of customer experience at Volkswagen Group Australia. He is also a consultant and regular keynote speaker at business events and conferences.

To contact Jason, visit [www.jasonsbradshaw.com](http://www.jasonsbradshaw.com).

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