

Transcript - Anna Miley and John Sills - How do I build relationships with customers?

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Ross G 00:07

Hello, you're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast, developed to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Garner,

Ross D 00:14

And I'm Ross Dickey. This week, we're asking, do customers want a relationship? We hear a lot about brand loyalty, but does it even exist? To answer these questions, we're speaking to Anna Miley and John Sills of The Foundation. No, not the big-budget science fiction show based on Isaac Asimov's series of novels.

Ross D 00:32

Instead, The Foundation is an independent consultancy that studies, supports and helps create customer pioneers. Anna is a strategy and insight specialist who once scientifically validated that Lynx deodorant does indeed make the wearer more attractive.

Ross D 00:45

And John is a managing partner at The Foundation, where he makes things better for customers. How are you doing, guys?

John 00:52

Very good. Thank you. Thanks for having us.

Anna 00:54

Yeah, thanks so much for having us on. Looking forward to the conversation.

Ross D 00:57

Thanks very much for being here. Could you kick us off by telling us very briefly how you got involved in exploring customer relationships? And I'm going to be coming to Anna first.

Anna 01:07

I got kind of hooked on the idea of customer behaviour really early on, not to give my age away too much, but actually I was one of the first to go through psychology at A level. So I guess when those first range of different qualifications became available and I had a brilliant teacher, he would have us running psychology experiments in the classroom, we would get to run social psychology experiments where someone would pretend to fall down the stairs and we'd see if anyone came to help to study bystander apathy and he was brilliant and he really got me hooked into this idea of how interesting it is to understand people, the decisions they make, what influences them.

Anna 01:48

And yeah, it kind of carried on through that, studied psychology at university, went on to study forensic psychology and realised I was a bit of a wimp and probably couldn't spend the rest of my life in hospitals or secure settings helping people.

Anna 02:02

So jumped ship to the commercial world and became a consumer psychologist for Unilever and as you described there, Ross, helping to do interesting things like prove the Lynx effect, but also helping to understand how we might improve hand washing behaviour in developed markets before then taking my thinking around behaviour change into the agency world and 10 years agency side brand innovation and now working at The Foundation alongside John.

Ross D 02:34

Lovely. And people falling downstairs. Are high school students generally apathetic or do they help?

Anna 02:42

I think they proved bystander apathy is very real. Although I think in the, if you know anything about this topic, the original theory was proved by the number of people who stood by whilst somebody was being attacked in a park.

Anna 02:56

So slightly different, just a trip down the stairs in the sixth form centre. But yeah, no one cared. Even if you screamed very

loud, generally there was just a teacher who would stick their head out of the door and tell you off.

Ross D 03:09

John, what about you? You're interested in the customer relationship?

John 03:12

I think my interest is very unplanned compared to Anna's in a sense. I suppose for me it started when I was about 12 and I decided to set up my own market store outside my house selling Beano comics that I bought from the local newsagents, which I thought was a brilliant idea, but I didn't manage to sell any.

John 03:30

I think for two reasons. One, because I was trying to sell them at a higher price than I bought them at, but unfortunately with the Beano comics, the price is on the cover, so that was quite a hard sell.

John 03:38

The other thing is we lived in a cul-de-sac right at the end of the cul-de-sac and I realised after a couple of hours I was getting no passing traffic. Of course there are lessons from a very young age.

John 03:48

A very young age, yeah, very young. And also no one likes the Beano where I lived apparently. But yeah, I just stumbled through a number of roles really. I did go and work on a market store for a pound an hour selling haberdashery, worked at various places through sixth form and university and just found that I really enjoyed the customer interaction.

John 04:09

I really enjoyed meeting real people and helping them with their real issues. Went into a graduate scheme at one of the big banks from university and ran some bank branches during the financial crisis and that was fascinating, awful but fascinating to see the human behaviour between that.

John 04:25

Then went to look after customer experience globally for that bank before joining The Foundation. And I think one thing that's probably happened all the way through that and gradually built is this rage I have within me whenever I see bad customer experience.

John 04:39

It's completely... Anna knows all about this. She's seen this in action. I can't really help it but if I see bad customer experience it just really, really annoys me. And I feel the need to kind of complain and I'm a serial complainer and I luckily now get to work in a place and in a job where we can try and make things better for customers.

John 04:58

But yeah, really it's come from that natural place of just thinking that customers, companies are really there to help customers' lives be better and if the opposite is happening that, that kind of really bothers me.

John 05:08

So I think that's my slightly haphazard route to getting here today.

Ross G 05:14

My younger brother had a similar experience to you in school where he would buy multi-packs of Snickers and then sell them on the school ground for the recommended retail price of an individual Snickers Bar.

Ross G 05:24

So he had a slightly better experience than you. He actually did make quite a lot of money off it until he was pulled up by the head. That wasn't acceptable.

John 05:33

That's impressive with Snickers as well because they're famously the ones that no one has

Ross G 05:37

Famously disgusting.

John 05:38

Yeah, if you can do it with Snickers. You can do it with other chocolate bars that are available.

Ross D 05:44

This is a Scottish thing, I really like stickers. So we're customer relationships. You know, one of the topics of this episode is do customers actually want a relationship with brands or is this just something that marketing teams are kidding themselves or maybe they're kidding the people who are paying their wages. So, I mean, that's kind of a big question. So what are customer relationships?

John 06:06

Shall I go first, Anna, on this one? I think it's a really interesting question. And I don't think there's a short yes or no answer to it. I mean, I think there's a base level with which is what customers want is to achieve the outcomes they want to achieve.

John 06:22

And to do that, they need companies to help them do that, whether it's to buy the things they want to buy, to go to the places that they want to go to, to read the books they want to read. And so it's easier for them in their life to have organisations that they believe can help them do that and that they trust to help them do that.

John 06:38

Because all of that helps make their life easier and helps them get to their outcomes easier. If another company comes along that makes it even easier for them, then most companies will switch to that company.

John 06:49

So most customers will switch to that company. So it's less about them wanting the relationship. It's about them wanting the thing that they want. When you look at where those real relationships do exist, and we'll probably come onto this later, it tends to be friends and family and hobbies and clubs you're part of and sports teams you support.

John 07:07

They're where you get that deep, visceral, emotional connection. And that doesn't often happen with companies, but it can do, it can do on occasion. But I think the kind of answer to your question is that I don't think customers necessarily seek out and want the relationships in the way that perhaps marketers want them to want the relationships.

John 07:26

But if it happens to happen, then they're certainly not against that.

Anna 07:30

Yeah, I mean, I totally agree. I think the relationship is the outcome of an organisation having done something valuable for a customer it's a definition of how you feel about each other as a result of some kind of value exchange.

Anna 07:46

And it's not really any different than a human relationship. I've been thinking about this recently as having a child just having recently started school. And this whole kind of making friends at the school gate, making new parent friends, new mum friends.

Anna 08:04

And I think you can kind of go into it thinking, oh, I need some of these mum friends in my life. Surely this is gonna make life easier or better in some way. But if you go in with the idea of trying to establish a relationship, then it's just not gonna happen.

Anna 08:18

You're gonna come across as the slightly strange, needy one at the gate who's always trying to strike up conversation where someone else is running for a bus or something. So it's the same with organisations.

Anna 08:30

It's about shared value. It's about doing something that's useful for the other person, finding common ground, making each other feel good. And the result of it may be a relationship, a friendship, whatever you wanna call it.

Anna 08:43

But it certainly shouldn't be the ambition or the purpose stated.

Ross G 08:49

I'm interested to start digging into the word relationship a little bit. I was thinking about when I was preparing for this podcast, thinking about a relationship I have with my barber. I recently moved house and that means there is now a 40 minute walk for me to get to my barber.

Ross G 09:07

Uh, and yeah, I continue to make that walk because I feel like I have a personal relationship with him, despite the fact that there are plenty of perfectly serviceable hairdressing places within five minutes of my flat.

Ross G 09:20

So I've decided to make that decision to go out of my way to get the same product or the same outcome, I guess to use John's word. That I could get just as easily and for the same price. At great inconvenience to myself.

Ross G 09:35

I think that's because of this relationship that I have with my barber. That's a bit different, though, I guess, to what we're talking about because it's a one on one relationship. So I don't have a relationship with his company.

Ross G 09:45

I have a relationship with him as an individual. Um, and what we're talking about is the idea of a relationship with not with a person. You don't have a relationship with, say, Tim Cook, you have a relationship with Apple.

Ross G 09:59

Uh, and yeah, I just wonder if you have any thoughts on, on that word, whether or not that's even the right word to talk about, uh, what we're discussing here.

Ross D 10:10

I think you missed a key detail just before the guy jumped in, which I think, do you not get a free beer when you get your hair cut?

Ross G 10:14

Sometimes. I do, yeah. That's part of the experience.

Ross D 10:19

Because one of the things is that Barber's offering a different service to the ones that you're walking past.

Anna 10:25

It's interesting because what you're describing there is an emotional value that you get from going to see this, this barber. And I think you would, if it weren't that, if it were more functional, you would just, you would go to the local one, you'd go to the one that offered the same functional service.

Anna 10:45

But the reality is we are human beings are emotional creatures. We're always looking to, you know, feel better, feel needed, feel wanted, all of those kind of slightly inconvenient, horrible things that are true about all of us.

Anna 10:59

And for some reason, going to your barber makes you feel good. It makes you feel good. Like you've, you know, maybe it's the conversation, you know, maybe there's even a bit of a negative drive. You might feel guilty if you didn't go.

Ross G 11:12

Absolutely would. I would feel guilty. Yeah. I feel like I was cheating on him, I think, if I went to another barber.

Anna 11:19

Yeah, but you know, from a business point of view, that kind of stuff's magic. Absolute magic. They've, you know, it sounds a bit negative to say they've kind of got you, but they've earned you. They've really earned your, you know, a trusted relationship with you and that you're not going to go somewhere else.

Anna 11:36

And that's much easier with people, with individual relationships than it is on an organisational level where it's much harder to form that emotional connection.

John 11:46

Well, I think what's interesting actually, and what you both said is, I think you've kind of very quickly in this podcast struck on one of the biggest challenges and issues that bigger organisations have, which is exactly as you've just said, Ross, when I ask people, tell me about the most human experience you have, tell me about the best customer experience you have.

John 12:03

Nearly everyone talks about a local company or an individual, a person they know, a certain taxi driver, someone that helped them out one time. For me, it's the two guys that run the little deli next to our office, who exactly as you say, when I go to the honest burger over the road from the deli, I really hope they don't see me walking in.

John 12:20

And once, they did see me walking in and I kind of got my head down. I was like, do I need to go there afterwards and get a double lunch? But the challenge for organisations, because all organisations want to grow, or most organisations want to grow and scale, and growing an organisation is about finding a way to repeatedly do what you do in a consistent way.

John 12:39

And the challenge for many big organisations is that comes at the cost of the humanity and the human experience that they then provide. And there's a funny thing that happens, that these organisations kind of are full of humans, but they're not allowed to act in a human way.

John 12:54

They get restricted by processes and policies and all that individual humanity that you get from your barber just kind of gets replaced by a script that someone's reading on a contact center or an email that's very generic and forgets to fill your name in properly.

John 13:09

And there are some organisations, but the organisations that do this really well and do have these relationships more often if you want to call it that with customers are the ones that have managed to retain that personal touch that allow their people to still be people, that allow there to be an element of flexibility and personalisation, if you like, in what they do.

John 13:28

Otherwise, it just becomes a big corporate machine and then the result becomes self-fulfilling.

Ross D 13:36

I've framed this as if the customer relationship was something that was held and dictated by marketing. But the way that you talked about it, John, was really saying that the customers will go for whatever is the easiest and most convenient doesn't require any effort on their part or gives them some sort of joy, which makes it sound like the purpose of...

Ross D 13:55

It's kind of two parts of this. One is the purpose of marketing is to paper over the cracks in the organisation so that even though it's not the most convenient, you choose that business. Or the other is, who actually owns the customer relationship?

Ross D 14:08

Is it marketing or am I completely wrong? And it's whoever else it might be.

John 14:14

Oh, big questions.

Ross D 14:16

Yeah, I was interested to get them out. So, first question was, is the purpose of marketing to paper over the inefficiencies and poor service of the organisation?

Ross G 14:25

So cynical.

John 14:28

Yeah, I mean, it's a definite no, and partly because many of our clients work in marketing. And so it's pretty much ranking the role in the job that they do. No, absolutely not. I mean, I think that the purpose of marketing is there to accurately portray the service and the product that's going to be offered and to help customers make decisions.

John 14:51

The world is just full of choice at the moment. There's so much choice for customers and consumers. It is absolutely crushing for many people trying to actually make a decision between everything that they could possibly decide between now.

John 15:03

There's a great book by Barry Schwartz called *The Paradox of Choice*. It's probably about 15 years old now, but it really brings to life the difficulty people have with making choices. There's a famous experiment in there.

John 15:13

You're probably aware of it about jam and choosing jam. And they kind of set up a big table of jams to choose from. And I think one had 30 jams on and the other one had six jams on. And far more people tried the jam on the one that had 30 on, but far more people bought the jam from the one that only had six on.

John 15:30

So in this world where you've got so much choice, you need great marketing, you need great brands to help give customers shortcuts and certainty and reassurance at the time. So it's definitely not about papering over the cracks.

John 15:42

However, in some organisations, there is quite a big disconnect between the brand promise and the customer reality. And it's almost as if you've got two halves of the organisation working completely separately, one that's building this amazing dream and brand of what could be, and one that's desperately trying to deliver something with kind of really tightly restricted costs.

John 16:03

And it's just not possible to do that. So it's hugely important, but it does over time. It needs to be backed up by the reality. Otherwise, the brand starts losing all of its shine. As you're seeing with the likes of Facebook, for example, whose brand campaign is as strong as ever, but so much is out of its control and no one really believes the reality now when Mark Zuckerberg says, this is what we're going to build, everyone says, I'm not going anywhere near that.

John 16:27

But Anna, I'm interested to know your view on marketing and what it really is.

Anna 16:31

Yeah, I mean, it was a no from me as well, just to be clear before I get into it. So, yeah, I once worked with a brilliant brand strategist who would talk about brands as a promise, an experience and a memory.

Anna 16:48

And it's about the joined-upness of those things that your experience delivers on the promise, creating the memory that brings you back again to want to take part in the brand. And I think that there is definitely a dangerous disconnect that I think has emerged over the last 10 years or so as brand thinking, kind of independent brand and marketing thinking has taken off that we have a bunch of brilliant comms and marketing people who are obsessed with making their brand famous and distinctive and desirable and purposeful yet have no responsibility for the performance of their customer experience and ultimately the satisfaction of their customers because their job is attraction as opposed to delivery and service.

Anna 17:37

And I think that is one of the, I guess it's kind of one of the emerging, I think, growth challenges that organisations face. How do you connect the two things? How do you make people who are, you know, brilliant at brand and obsessed with it equally as obsessed with customers?

Anna 17:55

Because the brand should be the shortcut to the North Star to servicing and providing for your customers. It doesn't exist as

a thing in its own right. It is nothing unless it is influencing what a customer think, feels and does in relation to you. Well, that was a bit ranty. There you go.

Ross D 18:13

I know it was part of that. I liked it. It linked nicely to the second part of my question, which was who owns the customer relationship because it sounds like you have the most beautiful, inspiring brand in the world, but you can have just one front-line employee can sour a customer relationship quite quickly.

Anna 18:32

Yeah, absolutely. I think we've seen over the past few years the emergence of a thing called the chief customer officer, which I think was trying to really, at least internally and at a senior level, bring together everything around the customer and give some leadership and to join together all of the elements.

Anna 18:48

But essentially, because they ended up as a C-suite focus, you become kind of chief customer officer versus chief marketing officer. That's not a togetherness. That's a separation again. And then you've seen, as I'm sure John will comment on the emergence of a huge focus on customer experience as a profession, as something that's being professionalised and a lot of academic research going into it.

Anna 19:11

But it's still, the two still remain very separate. And I think until you have CEOs, leaders of organisations who are literate in both customer, commercial and brand and operations and people and they are able to join it up as a leader. I think you'll always have these kind of disconnects.

John 19:31

I think actually just building on that, the emergence of this chief customer officer role, in a sense, is a symptom of the problem that we have at the moment, very broadly across many industries.

Ross D 19:44

Papering over the cracks again? Are we allowed to be cynical still?

John 19:48

Well, it's papering over the cracks in the sense because but it's quite a big crack in that organisations aren't putting their customers at the front and center of what they're doing. So I don't really think anyone should own the customer in an organisation.

John 19:58

I don't think there should be one person that owns the customer because I think the purpose of the organisation is to have that customer. So the whole organisation should be focused on the customer and if they're not, then what are they focused on because without customers then there's no business.

John 20:12

I mean, it's such a nice, you know, Charlie Dawson, one of the other partners at The Foundation wrote a book in 2021 called The Customer Copernicus and he talked quite a lot about this, about kind of the way that the world has changed from having the customer at the center to accidentally putting your business and your industry at the center instead.

John 20:29

And the fact you need to employ someone and say, well, your job is to keep us thinking about customers is great and they're doing it, but it really shows that it shouldn't be happening at any point. And I suppose building on that, we, certainly in our work, we tend to find that organisations have got more data on customers than ever.

John 20:48

You know, you've got more feedback surveys than ever. All of us as customers, we kind of have a single experience now without some kind of survey coming through to us. I saw one the other day at London Paddington train station when you come out of the toilets and it's got a touch button, a touch button thing for how satisfied you were with the toilets. And I thought, well, absolutely the least...

Ross G 21:06

Ill-advised post-20.

John 21:06

Least touched screen in all of London, I think that one, isn't it? There's no way I'm touching that coming out of the toilet.

Anna 21:17

Even pre-COVID that would have been a bad idea.

John 21:19

At any point, it's not pristine. But we've got so much customer data coming in organisations, and this gives the impression to leaders that they're close to their customers because they've got data, and they've got PowerPoints, and they've got PDFs.

John 21:35

But the problem is these PowerPoints and PDFs, they act like a barrier to what really matters to customers because it takes away from that visceral feeling, that emotional feeling that only comes when you meet customers for real in person, in their house, if you go shopping with them, if you experience your product with them, if you go on the train with them, for example.

John 21:53

You know, when that gets aggregated up to a series of data points on a chart that shows you on average, your call waiting time is 10 minutes, that takes you away from that person who was waiting for an hour, and they were in a serious crisis, and they weren't able to get through to you.

John 22:07

And that's the kind of visceral story that you need to have as a leader to be able to make change in your business. So there's so much data coming in organisations, but it's not having the impact it needs to make changes for customers.

John 22:18

And I think the CCO, the Chief Customer Officer coming in is a good step, but it still kind of exacerbates the problem of not everyone caring about the customer and hoping it's someone else's responsibility.

Ross G 22:31

Who do you think does this well?

Anna 22:34

by this you mean being customer centric?

Ross G 22:40

Yeah.

Ross D 22:38

It's a long silence. Is it possible that no one does this well?

Anna 22:45

No, the silence was more because I... giving really gentle...

Ross D 22:53

Do you not want to say, Apple?

Anna 22:55

I definitely don't. I definitely don't really. I totally can't. We'll come back to that. I think it's more that it's really easy. All right, okay. It's a bit like when ad agencies or innovation agencies kind of give these lovely case studies of this polished perfect thing that happens.

Anna 23:13

And oh, we did this and this was the outcome. And I think it's really easy to pick a brand that's well-known and a single thing that they did and make a huge assumption that they are customer centric.

Anna 23:25

I think as John said, there are lots of things that organisations do to kind of paper over the cracks and cover up and seemingly look like they are customer centric when actually they are not. So it's actually much easier to talk about those that aren't, which is always easier to criticise, isn't it?

Ross D 23:46

Slinging mud, we can all do that.

Anna 23:49

Absolutely rather than...

Ross D 23:50

I'm looking for inspiration now.

Anna 23:52

rather than those that aren't. I mean, if you, John mentioned the book before by Charlie, The Customer Copernicus, one of the case studies in there, he talks a lot about Tesco, so how they gained their kind of customer-led success over time, but also how they lost it as well.

Anna 24:08

So I think when we're telling stories around customer-led success, we was trying to just be gritty and real because it doesn't help other leaders to listen to these polished, slightly fake stories. So just an example of some of the things that Tesco did right, for example, one of the things that Charlie will talk about in the book is that organisations that achieve customer-led success, they not only have a clear intention and a clear purpose to do so, not an advertising campaign that says they're going to, but an actual internal strong belief that growth comes from doing the right things for customer and therefore earning their decisions and their money ultimately.

Anna 24:46

He will also talk about examples of how you build that belief. So we talk about moments of belief at The Foundation where you, where an organisation has taken a bold, trailblazing move to make things better on behalf of customers in a way that probably doesn't make sense to anyone looking at the numbers internally or even externally, somebody looking and saying, what's that all about?

Anna 25:11

So they put in place, for example, one in front queuing. So there's a period if you went into a Tesco supermarket that if they, if somebody was stood in front of you at a queue, they would open up another till, which sounds a bit bonkers because, you know, surely everyone can wait a few minutes, but it was about setting the intention, it was demonstrating to the whole organisation from the top right to the, right to the front line of those individuals working at the till that customers really, really mattered.

Anna 25:41

They demonstrated that it mattered and it showed in the results that they then got where customer experience improved, more people returned to the store, the numbers then get better and it becomes a real self-fulfilling kind of positive cycle of demonstrating the value and people then following and choosing to do more of it.

Ross G 26:00

Let's do the Apple chat. And so I'll give you an example and you can tell me if I'm on the right thing. So I got AirPods recently, so I think everyone knows what AirPods are. They're the cordless headphones that you can sync with your iPhone.

Ross G 26:16

It was a beautiful marketing website that made them look like this futuristic cool thing. It's Apple, it doesn't really have any buttons or anything like that and then ordered it. So that's the marketing website and ordered it.

Ross G 26:29

It arrived the next day, excellent distribution in this beautiful box that was like an experience opening it. Took them out and go, how do these connect with my iPhone? And I held them up and my iPhone said, do you want to connect with these headphones?

Ross G 26:43

I tapped yes and they were connected. There was no faffing. So that's marketing, distribution, packaging, the tech side of it. That whole thing was just great. And I'm accusing you, Anna, of certainly writing off the Apple example as them doing one really good thing because I think that their ethos was shown through all of those different experiences.

Ross G 27:06

Every aspect of that experience felt great to me. Not that I feel like Apple particularly needs defending and I know it's the most boring example in the world, but that felt like a great relationship to me.

Anna 27:17

Yeah, I think there is a, there's absolutely no doubt that Apple are customer pioneers. So they are amazing at knowing what you want before you want it. So the whole, you know, the whole old story of nobody knew that they needed a, you know, an iPod.

Anna 27:36

They didn't know they needed 15,000 songs in their pocket. You'd have never got that through market research, but they knew it.

Ross D 27:43

Or an iPad, an iPad's even more pointless than an iPhone.

Anna 27:46

Totally, totally. And we've all got one or three.

Ross D 27:49

Yeah, it's great. I love it.

Anna 27:50

And that's what they're brilliant at. How we would describe them is blazing a trail on behalf of customers, giving them what they didn't even know to ask for, and leaving everyone else in the wake behind them.

Anna 28:01

So they are undoubtedly amazingly good at that. And that's true, whether it's in advertising that was unexpected, whether it's the sensory details of the products or the packaging experience that makes you just feel special.

Anna 28:16

So absolutely brilliant at that. And it probably is one of those brands that people have a relationship with, but I feel like there's both a negative push and a kind of positive pull on that relationship.

Anna 28:28

So you, I think, Ross, I've heard you describe yourself before as an Apple person. Are you?

Ross D 28:33

She's a phrase in our prep. Yeah. Yeah.

Anna 28:35

And you're an Apple person both because you kind of have to be now because it's really hard to get out of being an Apple person. So there's a bit of a stick version that keeps you in the relationship.

Ross D 28:46

Nothing syncs up. Can't get Android phone now that won't work with my Apple products.

Anna 28:50

So no point in doing that. And the more you buy, the more you're in, the more you've, you know, the walls build up around you as being stuck as an Apple customer. So there's a little, I don't know, there's a little part of me that doesn't like that.

Anna 29:02

If they really valued you as a customer, they would also help you leave if you wanted to. If they really put your needs first ahead of their needs, that is what they would do. On the flip side, when you describe yourself as an Apple person, they've done a brilliant job of creating this kind of unconscious relationship with you, where you are, you're using them as a badge of

honour, you're using them to tell the world, you know, I'm an Apple person, not an Android person, you can keep your, keep your stuffy Android people, you know, because I'm, you know, I'm one of the creative crowd is what you're, you're effectively saying by the fact you're saying you're an Apple customer.

Ross G 29:38

Yeah, super interesting. Sorry, John. Go ahead.

John 29:40

No, no, you can.

Ross G 29:41

I was just, I was just going to say, like to go back to my barber example. There's also like, I mean, although Ross has sort of walled into the Apple garden, I'm kind of also walled into my barber's garden.

Ross G 29:53

That's a very good metaphor. But, uh, you know, there's also, there's a sort of perceived cost to me of leaving it. Oh, besides the fact that I feel guilty, there's also like, um, there's an inherent risk with switching to somebody, something new, because well, maybe you won't do as good a job cutting my hair.

Ross G 30:09

I'll have to make awkward conversation with this person. I don't know. And that makes me feel a little bit anxious. So there's also a sort of, um, I don't know, sort of default towards the status quo, I guess, like, I think that probably applies.

John 30:22

Well, I think Ross, I mean, that certainty really isn't it? One of the biggest things customers want, and actually one of the biggest things most humans want in their life is certainty. We're not very good at dealing with uncertainty.

John 30:35

Sometimes we, and that's why actually theme parks are very successful because they deliberately put you in a place with big roller coasters of uncertainty and so people effectively pay to have that thrill and that risk that comes with it because you don't normally want it in your everyday life.

John 30:49

You want things to be certain and that's why, you know, a lot of us stay with organisations that we know and you stay with your barber because your hair looks very good today, Ross.

Ross G 30:58

Aw thank you, that's nice to say.

John 31:00

Yeah, and next time you go to get it cut, you want to cut in the same way, which is very different from when I went to see my barber a couple of weeks ago with someone when I went in who I'd never seen before.

Ross D 31:13

We can tell, John. We can tell.

John 31:15

Good. Yeah, well, I'm not sure if this story is good for the podcast, but I went in and it was a Turkish barber so he put the towel around my face and then when I took the towel off my face, he started tapping this talcum powder on my head and I said, what are you doing?

John 31:27

And he said, oh, it's a surprise. One thing I don't want to hear my barber saying during my hair cut is it's a surprise. And then after about three minutes of this, he held a mirror up and my bald spot completely disappeared.

John 31:39

And I said, well, that's incredible. Like, how have you done that? And he laughed and said it with this special powder. And I said, well, how long does that last for? And he said, about an hour. That's completely pointless, isn't it?

John 31:49

Yeah, what's the point in that? But while I was sat there, even in the chair, I could feel a level of uncertainty of like, I don't know who this guy is. I mean, I've not got a lot of heads to play with anyway, but I don't know what he's doing.

John 31:59

So that's certainty you get from your barber. And that, Ross, is what you get from Apple because the one thing Apple does very well is it's very good at sales and it's very good at the start of the process.

John 32:11

So, you know, its marketing is brilliant. Its delivery is brilliant. The box that you open up, there's all kinds of rumours of 100 different versions to get that box, absolutely right. It's so easy to set the headphones up.

John 32:23

Personally, I'm not sure Apple are quite as good when things go wrong, whether that's a small thing. So I pay for Apple Music and nothing's ever gone wrong. Yeah, every, every, exactly every time I play my Fat Boy Slim album from 20 years ago, one of the songs, it just plays a completely different version of the song that's on the album.

John 32:43

And it doesn't matter if you email them, it's kind of the walls up. But I had a problem with my laptop towards the end of last year.

Anna 32:49

He did say he complains about everything, didn't he? Just to... imagine the email that said track number 11 is not working for me.

Ross D 33:00

Yeah. It is working, but it's a different version.

John 33:02

Different version. This is what's amusing, because you're right, it's a very niche complaint. But it's kind of a valid complaint. I'm paying £15 a month, and this is going to make me sound awful, isn't it?

John 33:12

I'm paying £15 a month for that service, and the service doesn't work. But Apple has got this kind of status of, you know, untouchable. Now, if you bought a CD and the CD skipped, you'd take it back.

John 33:23

And that was the way, that was just the way it works. As we go into more a digital environment, there's some organisations, it becomes kind of slightly harder to complain to. It's bigger things as well sometimes.

John 33:33

I do have some examples of companies, I do think, do this well. I'd say kind of Riverford, Octopus Energy, AO.com, CityMapper all do this really well. To pick one of those, Octopus Energy, incredibly customer-led, they've come into the energy industry to trailblaze across the industry, as Anna said, to completely challenge the existing business models that were very unfair to customers and create real fairness, incredibly open, and that you can still email their CEO.

John 34:02

They've got a wonderful way of doing service where you get assigned to a service team, so you always speak to the same people, regardless of what your complaints are about. They do really small touches, like if you phone up and you're on hold, the hold music will be the number one song from when you were 14 years of age, because they know that that creates kind of a cognitive relationship with you as well.

John 34:21

They're doing a huge amount of brilliant stuff across the energy industry at the moment in a very human way, and it all comes from staying incredibly close to their customers and giving real empowerment and autonomy to the team that work with them.

Ross G 34:34

You say human, I kind of heard manipulative there with that number one song there from the foreseen. We don't have time to get into it. So the listeners to this show are predominantly leaders and managers. So if you could give one piece of advice for building a customer relationship, have we established that that's a thing that exists, what would it be?

Anna 34:58

From my point of view, it would be to get to know them, to take the time to have a conversation with a customer. So shove the research reports to one side, get out of the office or the home that you sit in to do your work and go and meet them and have a conversation with them, whether it's cooking dinner with them, going for a run with them, getting online to see how they do their shopping, but spend time with them.

Anna 35:28

Not because you're looking for answers or you want to ask them what you should do with your organisation, but to build some empathy and some understanding of what it's really like on their side of the fence.

John 35:41

Fully endorse that. I think that is the number one thing you can do. The other thing I would say for future leaders and managers is to remember that nobody cares about your business as much as you do.

John 35:51

It's very easy when you're in business to become very inside out and believe that your business is the center of your customers' lives and it really isn't. And if you can keep that humility and keep that perspective on your role in customers' lives, but everything else they've got going on, you're far more likely to be genuinely useful and build a good relationship than if you act as if you're the most important thing that exists to them.

Ross D 36:14

I think that's a good point to move on to our wrap up.

Ross D 36:16

So Ross, what will you be taking from this conversation and applying in your life this week?

Ross G 36:27

Uh, well, going back to Anna said about my relationship with my barber, I think what was interesting was she describes how my barber had earned my loyalty. So, I think I'll be thinking about how to earn my customers loyalty so that they do feel guilty if they ever go to anyone else.

Ross D 36:43

You and that barber. I think for me, it's almost the opposite. So I'll be bearing in mind that our customers don't necessarily care where they shop. So how can we make it easier for them to buy from us instead?

Ross D 37:00

Let's move on to our regular feature, one thing I've learned this week, our fun end of the show chat where we share something. Ross, do you want to go first?

Ross G 37:10

Sure. So my wife's cousin's daughter, which sounds like someone I'm distantly related to, but we actually see quite often. She's six years old and came up with this game over the weekend where she would describe characteristics of an animal and ask us to guess what the animal was.

Ross G 37:29

And I was astounded how much more the six-year-old knew about animals than I did. And so she described a lizard which shoots blood from its eyes as a defense mechanism. Have any of you heard of this?

Anna 37:42

No. No.

Ross G 37:44

Apparently it's the regal-horned lizard. So there's a... I found a video of it from National Geographic, which we can put a link to in this show notes. But it is amazing. I asked... I was trying to come up with descriptions to better this six-year-old.

Ross G 38:01

And she... Everything I came up with, she managed to guess pretty much straight away. She watches this show called Wild Crats, which is like a kind of wildlife show for kids. And yeah, I was just amazed at how much kids these days know.

Ross G 38:14

I don't think I knew half as much

John 38:15

You said she was six?

Ross G 38:18

Six years old. Yeah.

Ross D 38:20

Yeah. Anna, what did you like?

Anna 38:23

Mine actually beautifully segways from Ross because this is an observation actually that letting your kid surf Netflix actually isn't as bad as it sounds. So I have a five year old walking to school the other day and we're talking about, I think the the busman, sorry the dustman went past and she said, did they still work during the during the pandemic?

Anna 38:49

I said yes, yeah they had to. You know, somebody's got to clean away the rubbish and she said, so Mummy did they sacrifice themselves for us? And obviously at the back of my mind I'm thinking okay we've sent her to a C of E church, they've started early, she's been doing all of that, they've been talking about Jesus and the sacrifices that he made for us.

Anna 39:08

So I asked her, is that is that a word that you learned at school? She's like no, no Mummy, no, no, it's from The Floor is Lava and if you haven't seen The Floor is Lava, it's as it sounds, it's a bit kind of crystal mazesque and there's people jumping across rocks and stuff avoiding lava and she said, yeah, yeah sometimes you know they they want to win so much they sacrifice themselves on behalf of their teammates, isn't that a good thing?

Anna 39:34

So yeah that that left me realising that yeah similar to Ross, that crikey, they're little sponges and they really do pick up everything and therefore TV isn't always bad, unless it's Peppa Pig then it's definitely bad.

Ross D 39:51

Wow. The moral value of The Floor is Lava,

Anna 39:55

Who knew?

Ross G 39:57

John.

John 39:58

I've actually spent pretty much all week watching The Floor is Lava with my boys. So I'm delighted that I got a mention. And it isn't my thing that I learned, but I guess I have learned how to recreate it in our living room with various rugs and cushions to jump across.

John 40:12

I think I learned quite a lot this week about maps. I've always been a little bit interested in maps, but my son gets a newspaper called First News, which is a newspaper designed for children, but actually it's a brilliant newspaper for anyone, I think, because it gives really evenly balanced, positive and less positive news on the world.

John 40:31

And they have a little... How old is your son? He's seven. He's seven. It's designed for 7 to 12-year-olds. It's a really, really great, great paper. And there's a bit in it where they show a map of the world and they point arrows at different countries.

John 40:45

And they changed the map this week after comments from a few people because they... You may know this, we all traditionally use the Mercator projection for maps... In the 15th century.

Ross D 40:50

West Wing fans are going to love it.

John 40:50

Yeah, is that in there? Yeah, of course it was in West Wing, wasn't it?

John 41:03

So you may know, but yeah.

Ross D 41:04

It's a great West Wing scene.

John 41:07

Yeah, absolutely. And it was from the 15th century, but it kind of squashes the world up and it makes the northern hemisphere look much larger than it really is. So Greenland looks bigger than Africa, even though you can get 14 Greenlands into Africa.

John 41:20

But the problem is, as humans, we tend to associate size with power. So there's this unintentional consequence of believing the northern hemisphere is bigger, more important, more powerful than Africa, South America, Australia.

John 41:32

So they change the map and they use the, I think it's called the Peters projection, which stretches out a bit more and gives more realistic sizes. And I just thought it was a really interesting thing for the paper to do at that age, to show children from a young age a realistic picture and get their proportions right rather than reinforcing that belief that we've all grown up with.

Ross D 41:51

Yeah, Brilliant. Well, mines now child adjacent at all. In fact, I think it might even be not true, but I read a column this week by the Guardians, Oliver Birkeman. It was kind of an old column from 2018.

Ross D 42:04

And it starts off with an almost definitely apocryphal anecdote about a customer experience issue that I thought I'd share, whether it's true or not. And so, according to the story, customers at Houston Airport on one particular route kept complaining about the amount of time they had to spend waiting for their luggage.

Ross D 42:20

The airport tried to hire an extra baggage handler to solve the problem, cut down time a little, but didn't really solve the problem. So the airport operators tried something different. They sent the planes on that route to a different arrival gate so that passengers had to walk further to collect their luggage.

Ross D 42:34

So the time to collect luggage remained exactly the same, but because the passengers were walking rather than standing still, they didn't mind so much. I think that story is probably nonsense. And if the operators of Houston Airport want to contact me to tell me so, then that's fine.

Ross D 42:48

I don't think it being true or not should get in the way of it being a fun example.

John 42:52

I think it might be true. I think quite a few airports have done that. They've played around with the queuing system. Oliver Bergman's book, 4000 Weeks, came out last year and it's absolutely brilliant on time management and productivity and really dispelling most of the time management and productivity myths there are.

John 43:10

He's actually probably one of my favourite writers. He's brilliant. So I would highly recommend anyone go out and buy that

and read that. It's a brilliant read.

Ross G 43:17

We'll link to that in the show notes as well. On which topic, Anna and John, is there anything that you would like us to mention before we wrap up?

John 43:26

Well, we've got probably a couple of things. So we mentioned earlier in the podcast, we've got a book out called The Customer Copernicus that looks at customer pioneers over the last 20, 30 years, organisations that have really managed to do this successfully and then why they maybe stopped being customer-led again.

John 43:41

That's available in all good bookshops. And I've got a newsletter at johnjseals.com, which you can sign up to. And then my plan is that my book will be released within the next few months on customer experience. So you can look out for that too.

Anna 43:54

I haven't written a book, maybe one day. But definitely, yeah, check us out at thefoundation.com online where you'll find lots of articles, resources, and access to our pioneer community, where we're bringing together individuals globally who are interested in helping us help other people pioneer on behalf of customers. Also, up-to-date information on various forums and other podcasts.

Ross G 44:27

And that's it! You've been listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast with me, Ross Garner and Ross Dickey, our guests this week were John Mills and Anna Miley of The Foundation. Until next time, bye for now.