



EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS

In Conversation with:

Mary Proc
Vice President Customer Service
Metrolinx/GO Transit

Fall 2014

© Copyright 2014, Fifth P Solutions Inc. All Rights Reserved.

All information contained herein is confidential and proprietary to Fifth P Solutions Inc. It is provided for the sole purpose of evaluating the services of Fifth P Solutions and for no other purpose whatsoever. The information contained herein shall not be copied, transmitted, or otherwise communicated to any third party without the expressed written permission of Fifth P Solutions Inc.

IN CONVERSATION WITH: MARY PROC

We recently had a few moments to get caught up with Mary Proc, Vice President Customer Service for Metrolinx/GO Transit. Mary is responsible for the multi-year customer service strategy at GO and leading a staff of 700 that deliver services through Market Research, the Call Centre, Transit Safety and Security, and 64 rail stations, including Union Station.

5P: Mary, let's begin with getting your view on the definition of employee experience (Ex).

MP: Ex complements what you want your external brand to be. It would be hard to have an employee culture that was very stiff, hierarchical and "buttoned down", and then for those staff to appear friendly and approachable with the public. I have noticed that employees, whether they are new or tenured, want answers to questions they face on the weekend from family and friends about the company for whom they work. Employees who are informed and engaged are confident ambassadors of your brand.

5P: Thank you, that's a great perspective. So how are employee experience and customer experience (Cx) tied together? What role has the essence of your brand played in both?

MP: In 2009, GO undertook to define its brand essence – the one word we wanted to own in the market place – and the word we landed on was "E A S Y". We wanted that to be the

lens through which we viewed every decision in the company - Were our stations easy to find? Easy to park at? Was our website easy to navigate? In some cases the answer was yes, but in other cases, it was a lot of hard work to resolve complexity for our customers. As we adopted the brand essence of easy for our customers, employees gave us great suggestions for streamlining and simplifying things internally as well. After all, even in the case of a website design, the employee designing the website and giving direction must understand the essence of what we stand for.

5P: GO Transit has done a very good job in transforming its customer experience. What role did employee experience play in that transformation? Please explain.

MP: In 2008, we were coming out of a long period of underfunding, and gaps had opened in our technology and processes. Any time that happens, it's always people who bridge the gap – so we started with our employees. We wanted them to know they had our full support. It was important that we all had the same

“credo” to follow, and we didn't hire outside consultants to define it for us. We gathered up three different groups of employees, representing every part of GO, and asked them what we should be promising to the travelling public. To our surprise, each group came up with virtually the same set of promises, and they are the five commitments reflected in today's GO's Passenger Charter. In all the promotional posters, pamphlets and videos, we featured actual employees instead of models or photo-shopped images so that staff would continue to see themselves reflected in the Charter.

5P: There has been much discussion about purpose-driven organizations. Has your organization embraced purpose and if so, how?

MP: When we first introduced GO's Passenger Charter, some employees asked if we weren't “throwing out the rule book”. So we had to explain that GO's policies and procedures, developed over the years, probably cover 98% of all situations, but they don't cover 100% of them. So one very important idea underpins all 5 Passenger Charter promises, and here's what it is: If an employee is ever unsure about how to apply GO's policies and makes a decision in favour of the customer, GO will back that decision 100%. It has made it possible for decisions to be made by the person best equipped to do so, and that's the front-line. But even when policies are spelled

out in black and white, they still have to be followed with the customer in mind.

5P: How is your purpose tied to your brand value proposition?

MP: In order to win the trust of the travelling public, GO needed to demonstrate both competence and character. Competence meant running our service safely with high on-time-performance. Character was demonstrated during service disruptions, when GO needed to show it really cared about informing riders and getting them where they needed to go. We get about 1,500 commendations annually from customers, who write to tell us not only how their trip went, but their impression of the employee who helped them whether that was a bus driver, transit safety officer, station attendant, customer service ambassador or call centre agent. GO could spend a million dollars in advertising but it wouldn't begin to make the difference in our reputation that's created by these staff and the people-leaders who support them.

5P: How has purpose become a catalyst for customer experience improvements within GO Transit?

MP: Giving employees the freedom to decide how best to serve our customers has helped them delight passengers. From a customer satisfaction rating of 58% in 2009, GO

achieved 82% in 2013 and won the prestigious award of “Best Transit System in North America” from the American Public Transit Association.

5P: Congratulations to you and the entire GO team on such a great accomplishment. Reflecting back on this success, what were the critical success factors for creating and implementing a great employee experience across the organization? Where did the responsibility lie for this?

MP: Before 2009, many GO employees were already providing superior customer service but “flying under the radar”— helping passengers in extraordinary ways, but deliberately not flagging their actions. With the advent of the Passenger Charter, for the first time, they were given the corporate “high five” to delight customers in the way they judged most appropriate. Depending on their position all new employees are given an “on-boarding” of several days to eight weeks. All people leaders understand the need to coach and support their front-line. With GO's merger with Metrolinx in 2009, came many valuable improvements like an annual employee survey, better intranet site, more effective employee suggestion program, and much-needed leadership training.

5P: What were the key challenges you encountered in your employee experience work? How were you

able to overcome these?

MP: I think that someone will always pose a binary problem. When I worked for a bank, I was told that “you couldn't have both sales and service”. At GO, I was told, “you can't have both customer service and safety as a top priority – one has to trump the other”. And of course, you can have both – in fact, a key attribute of a customer-first transportation system is that it is safe. For every industry, that either/or will be different, but resisting that binary proposition, and understanding you can do both is key.

5P: How have you measured employee experience? Have you seen any correlation to improvements in Cx scores? If so, how?

MP: We are in our third year of measuring employee satisfaction and commitment. Our scores have remained relatively high and consistent in that period. What has emerged, however, are specific irritants that we have moved to address right away. I think that's the value of a survey. Over and above that, our executives do “skip level” meetings throughout the year to ensure we are hearing from our front-line without any filtering, and that helps us also to identify necessary improvements. I would say that we are moving to match all our external channels for listening to the customer, with internal ones that

help us tap into the experience and recommendations of staff.

5P: Can you share the best personal employee experience moment you've ever had?

MP: There used to be a widely-read commuter news sheet called "TO Night" that carried short reader comments or "classifieds". We were in the midst of migrating from GO's legacy fare system onto the new PRESTO card, and we were discontinuing the paper monthly pass. One night, I read 2 comments from customers decrying this move. But I counted 11 from customers supporting the move to PRESTO as more modern, cost-effective, and better protection against theft. Any time your customers are mobilizing to come to your company's defence, something extraordinary is going on.

I was also surprised with how GO's Quiet Zone aboard our trains was embraced. One customer went so far as to say he would have paid to sit in a quiet zone! We never considered charging for it, but I was glad that GO was the first train service in Canada to introduce this.

5P: Can you leave us with one story about a special customer experience moment driven by a great employee experience that you are most proud of in your organization?

MP: There are moments of extreme kindness from our staff. One customer couldn't get his car started on a cold, snowy January close to midnight. GO's Transit Safety Officer lent him his gloves, and called a taxi at GO's expense. In another case, a mother and father had made repeated visits to GO's Lost and Found looking for the Thomas the Tank Engine that their son had forgotten aboard one of the trains. Realizing that such an expensive toy would probably not turn up, the staff took up a collection, bought a new version, supplemented it with some GO material, and gave it to the parents to bring to their little boy.

I also like the wit of the Bombardier Customer Service Ambassadors aboard GO trains. One of them, on Christmas Eve, announced that the northern bound train would make all stops to Barrie and then be "express to the North Pole".

We also have many moments of extreme heroism — a bus driver who stopped his bus and ran towards a car on fire in order to pull the driver to safety. A plant serviceworker who saw a passenger faint and fall onto the tracks at dusk, and who jumped down himself to lift her to safety only minutes before a train would have come through. This gives you an idea of how extraordinary our staff are.

5P: If you had to provide a few pearls of advice to those embarking on employee experience or



customer experience transformation, what would they be?

MP: Improving the customer experience makes money. GO's ridership has spiralled, and the system covers over 80% of its operating expense through the fare box. Fare evasion is less than 1%. Investing in employee satisfaction has resulted in fewer grievances and better attendance. Investing in better customer service and employee experience does not only benefit a company's reputation, but improves the bottom line.

5P: Thank you Mary for taking the time to provide such rich insights into employee experience, its correlation to customer experience, and most importantly to the bottom line.

Fifth P is the customer experience agency that designs and implements ways to help organizations become who they say they are. Do you want to learn more? Let's start by saying hello.

hello@fifthp.com

