



EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS

In Conversation with:

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IN CONVERSATION WITH: ALDO GRECO

We recently had an opportunity to sit down with Aldo Greco, Vice President Business Development for McDougall Energy, to listen to his thoughts about the role “purpose” plays in their customer experience. McDougall Energy is an integrated energy company providing a range of energy products and services to home, auto, and business customers. McDougall Energy also has the distinction of being selected as one of Canada’s 50 Best Managed Companies in 2011 and requalified for 2012.

5P: Aldo, let’s begin with getting your view on the definition of customer experience (Cx).

AG: To McDougall Energy, Cx is executing on what we promise our customers both internally and externally. It is not a program but an extension of what our value set is to the markets we serve and it comes to bear wherever we execute our value proposition.

5P: Okay, thank you. On a similar line, how would you define employee experience (Ex)?

AG: Employee experience is a subset of our overall value proposition. It is each individual understanding their role in a very concise way in the context of what the company needs to accomplish and the impact they have in their role on each other and on our customers. For example, it is important our sales people understand that their commitments to customers have an impact on operations, and in turn, operations knows what their role is in supporting the commitments made by sales.

They work together as a business system and when they do it well, they get a great sense of pride and accomplishment in meeting the goals that have been set out by the company.

5P: There has been much discussion lately about purpose driven organizations. How has your organization embraced purpose?

AG: We have in fact embedded purpose in our vision statement and tightly woven that with our value proposition to the markets we serve. Purpose is that higher calling we strive for in our business, and for us it is centred on the notion of “peace of mind”. For example, our residential customers don’t want to have to worry about the reliability of supply of their home heating oil or the fact that it is distributed to them safely. So everything we do to deliver heating oil is about doing it in a way that is efficient, safe, and in a quiet manner so our customers’ homes can be comfortable, and ultimately, this brings them peace of mind. You see, when every employee grasps the

notion of “peace of mind” as their purpose, then everything they do ensures that our value proposition is delivered both inside and outside our organization.

5P: How are purpose and your “brand value proposition” related?

AG: The purpose of “peace of mind” is an aspiration of our brand value proposition and we’ve articulated this through a number of guidelines which distills the tenants of our brand – so it becomes one seamless and integrated definition. Those guidelines include bringing unique solutions that begin with the customer first: advice and education, unparalleled professionalism and excellence, no compromise for health and safety, and respecting the environment. These all guide the behaviours of our employees – in essence our people and the choices they make become closely aligned with the value proposition we promise to our customers. Doing all of these consistently well becomes a proof point for us, driving our purpose of providing peace of mind and making it easy for our customers.

5P: How has purpose enabled or become a catalyst for customer experience improvements within your organization?

AG: Let me share an example that can best illustrate this. Given the nature of the products we distribute,

we have naturally become knowledgeable experts about health and safety and regulatory requirements. This is something many of our business and home customers do not have. So we are taking this expertise and passing it to our customers through education. This, again, brings peace of mind to our customers.

In this example, what allows us to do this is tying the purpose through to our value proposition and then to our offer.

5P: What were the critical success factors for creating and implementing purpose across your organization? Where did the responsibility lie for this?

AG: Purpose began with our executive team. First, we went through a series of workshops, which I personally was engaged with. We developed and codified our values and our purpose, then built our value proposition for each market we serve and tied that to our culture, strategies, and processes.

Recognizing we needed to move beyond strategies, we stepped back and asked ourselves, “Why do we do what we do? What is the greater value we are providing” and this is when we landed on “peace of mind” as the guiding purpose for our brand.

5P: What is the significance of the “human factor” of customer experience and of purpose?

AG: I truly believe people are 90% of what matters with customer experience. Sure we need the products and they need to be moved and purchased, but it is the “way” we deliver the products, the “way” we interact with our customers, and the “way” we resolve issues that makes the difference. And internally this comes down to people who get the work done properly and all come together to bring “peace of mind”. This happens when people ask themselves, “Am I making the right decision?” and looking through the two screens of value prop and value set. Other than health and safety, which trumps everything, every decision is made to make it easy for our customers and internal colleagues – people is 90% of the customer experience.

5P: How are customer experience and employee experience related?

AG: Customer experience is a derivative of all the pieces of the value prop being delivered and our employee experience is also a result of that same group of elements coming together – how we give employees context to their job, their activities, their role, and the company. While customer experience is supported by what we do and how we do it, so too is

employee experience put through the same screens – how we train and support them, how we compensate them, what we recognize and how, how we give them feedback. So, Cx and Ex are related because it is our value proposition working together and on two levels; our value proposition to our employees and in turn, our value proposition to our customers.

5P: What impact have you seen Cx deliver on results in practice?

AG: For a year and a half, we have been implementing our guiding principles and our purpose of making it easy – and we first got everyone focused on their role being defined by those principles. So now we are at a point where everyone is beginning to understand how their role impacts our customer experience and how it supports our purpose. Whether we are developing an IT dashboard, or redefining a process a certain way, we are always using “easy” as a screen. If the customer doesn’t believe we are doing our job the way we promised them, then we must respond and look at our processes and tools to change that.

5P: Could you provide any pearls of wisdom to those embarking on activating purpose, customer experience, or employee experience?

AG: First, and most important is, you must have buy-in from the very top.

Personally, this is a subject matter that I feel many companies think is a piece of paper or a board on the wall. Ultimately, this is all about culture – and purpose is integral to culture. From culture, everything moves properly – if you look at the failure of most companies, it is not a failure of strategy. Over time, it is a broken culture where people become apathetic.

5P: Can you share the best “Purpose Activation” moments you’ve experienced in your organization?

AG: I have numerous examples, but let me share one. We have a driver who was servicing our largest customer and he realized we had 4 drivers service this customer and the customer also deals with different people from sales, credit, and service, etc. The driver could have simply ignored or dismissed this observation. But instead, matching his observation to our purpose and guidelines, he came to the fundamental understanding that we are not making it easy for this customer and we could lose them. So here is a driver that some would otherwise not put much merit in who took note of the situation, brought it forward, and we did something about it. Now the customer has a dedicated contact point.

5P: Can you share a great personal customer experience moment you’ve had?

AG: Well, that actually occurred recently. I was flying to Italy to visit my daughter and the flight from Toronto was delayed. So when we landed at the Frankfurt airport, I found myself in a situation where my cell was not working, I could not get my PC connected to Wi-Fi but I had to contact my daughter and others to let them know about the delay. My rep from Lufthansa immediately felt the need of a father and not just of a customer, a father who was anxious to get in contact with his daughter. Without hesitation, this rep took 20 minutes to get me set-up with a landline phone and ensured I was taken care of. She spoke to me in English, made me feel comfortable, provided the resources to resolve my problem, and followed up with me. You see, we have this hate for airports and airlines and many times it is justified, but in this case, this person lived up to what I would like to see in all airports and airlines.

5P: Can you share a great employee experience moment in your career?

AG: Yes, when I was the CEO of the local Community Credit Union, I reported to a 15 member board of directors, many of them hourly employees. I expressed to the board that in order for me to be “complete” as a CEO I needed more training. I wanted to go to Wharton and take a program in corporate planning and it was an expensive course for a small



organization. They didn't understand the program fully but understood that I saw the value in it and the value I saw for the Credit Union so without hesitation they approved it. I went to Wharton and was so fulfilled and humbled by the profs and the people in the course – upon returning, I used that knowledge to help turnaround the Credit Union. The board gave me the opportunity to improve myself and had faith I would use the money wisely and come back and help.

I continue to use the learning from that experience here at McDougall Energy and I am convinced that helped us to achieve the 50 Best Managed Companies designation.

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