



EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS

In Conversation with:

Grant Cobb
Senior Vice President, Casual Dining Division
Cara Operations Ltd.

Spring 2015

© Copyright 2015, 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: GRANT COBB

The casual dining business is fast-paced and dynamic, so we were delighted to share a lunch with Grant Cobb, Senior Vice President Casual Brands at Cara, to get his thoughts about employee experience. Grant is responsible for the successful growth of Canada's most iconic restaurant brands including Casey's, Kelsey's, Fionn MacCool's, and the Bier Markt.

5P: Grant, if you had to place a percentage weighting on the importance that marketing communication plays in making the brand promise versus the importance of customer experience in keeping that promise, what would the weighting be?

GC: Thanks Michael. I'd say today, and in our business in particular, that weighting is 40% marketing / brand communication and 60% customer experience, possibly even 30% / 70%. At the end of the day, the marketing messages get the customers in the door, but ultimately the brand succeeds or falls apart because of execution at store level. Unlike a consumer good, where the product efficacy is in a package on the shelf, we have many people and points of contact between the marketer and the consumer that either build or detract from our brands every day.

5P: Thank you, that's a great perspective and comparison. So if the success of the brand hinges on how well employees execute on the promise, how is this different than them just doing a good job at their tasks every day?

GC: At the end of the day, I don't believe any employee wants to do poorly. It comes down to how well we translate and communicate the brand vision and essence in a way employees understand, believe in, and can execute on the brand proposition accordingly.

5P: When we think about customer experience, we tend to focus on the brand to customer relationship. What about the brand to employee relationship – the employee experience?

GC: This is a fundamental building block. If we are not delivering the brand experience to our employees, how can we expect them to deliver that experience to our guests? It is not just about our employees understanding what to do and how, but also why. If they only get the "what" and "how", then it is difficult for them to execute the brand naturally and genuinely. While service standards are important, it is not about following people around to make sure the tasks were done, it is about ensuring the guest feels the brand in that moment – and you can only do that when the employee

understands the “why”. And, you can only get there if you are delivering the same brand experience to the employee that you expect them to deliver to your customers.

5P: In an organization with so many brands, franchise partners, and frontline employees, where did you decide to begin your Employee Experience Journey?

GC: That's a good point you raise. You cannot simply boil the ocean with an exercise like this. We decided to begin where we knew we could have the greatest impact. Our Bier Markt concept is relatively new compared with other brands we have. It has a very discernible culture where the “why” is an inherent part of the brand experience, there are relatively few sites, and the brand was poised for expansion. Bottling the culture of “why” that was created and nurtured by the leader and reflecting that in the entire employee experience was an integral part of how this brand would deliver the same experience as it grew. So we started here.

5P: How were you able to bottle this and reflect this in the employee experience?

GC: First, we had to get what was the “Intel Inside” that defined the culture written down on paper. As simplistic as that sounds, it was an

important first step. And there were many opinions and interpretations amongst ourselves, so imagine how well that would have translated as we expanded.

Then, we looked at key steps in the employee journey and challenged ourselves whether that experience reflected what we wrote on paper as the essence of the journey. And not surprisingly, there were things we were doing that didn't reflect the experience we needed to deliver to employees. So we redefined the journey and established a fresh way of implementing that part of the employee journey – one that reflected the essence of the Bier Markt.

5P: What was the part of the employee journey you found most pivotal?

GC: We still have parts of the employee journey that are being redefined, but I would safely say that it all starts with the right person – and not just the right skills or experience, but the right DNA. Simply said, for the Bier Markt, we spend more time asking ourselves, “is this the type of person I can sit down with and have a conversation over a beer?”, because the brand experience centres so much around the social aspect of beer. And, this stands true for front of house (servers & hosts), back of house (chefs, cooks), or home office – the brand lives everywhere. While we still have

much to do, I can't imagine anything being more important than this. Every other part of the employee journey will be about living up to the brand expectation for the right individuals we have selected, and who have selected us.

5P: How has this change played out where the experience lives every day operationally?

GC: The experience lives every day in our stores and every day in our home office. So, for example, for new restaurant openings, we would run job fairs – very intensive days of screening, interviewing, reviewing, and selecting candidates – but the filter was resume and interview based. Now, the filter is the brand lens and whether the individual has our “brand DNA”. As a result, we were able to launch our newest location with a much better reflection of the Bier Markt brand.

5P: Congratulations, I understand that you are well on your way with employee experience but early along in the implementation. Are there early signs you are seeing in terms of benefits and any metrics you can share?

GC: The most evident sign I can share is the success of our most recent new store launch. Being able to launch with greater certainty around the team and culture and having the right people on the team from the outset has benefits both on

the top line and of course on the reduced costs associated with turnover. Those two factors alone are telling enough and we are just getting started. In 2015, we will continue to redefine other areas of our employee journey to build upon our early success and deliver on an end-to-end branded employee experience.

5P: So Grant, where does the journey end, or does it?

GC: Hopefully it never ends. If we ever get to that point, then we are heading down the wrong path and will fall behind the curve. We cannot lose our focus on this as the world continues to evolve – we must continually adapt. The guest and the employee are different than they were a mere 5 years ago – it would be foolish to think that will change. This is a positive and good thing now that we have understood how to understand it and embrace it.

5P: A few last personal questions. First, can you share your best personal customer experience?

GC: Absolutely and it happened very recently. About a month ago, I went to Corbett's to purchase new ski equipment for my 9 and 11-year-old. The person who dealt with us, was around 20 years old, and I was impressed how well he interacted with my children and with me – seamlessly. He knew his stuff, and was not there to sell us – he was very



knowledgeable and just engaged me and my kids in a discussion about our needs and what the ideal equipment would be. It wasn't about what he wanted to sell or what he liked, it was about making sure whatever we chose was something that addressed our needs and something we would be happy purchasing. We bought!

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

GC: This may not be what you are looking for with me as the employee, so I will say that my best employee experience moment is when I walk into a restaurant and shake that associate's hand and sit and have a conversation with them. That is the moment that I realize the significance of employee experience and knowing that we made the right choice in selecting that employee. They reflect our brand and get the "why".

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

