

5 tips for growing a people-focused culture that drives customer success



People are any organization's most important resource. From a just-opened corner store to a publicly traded behemoth, people are intangible assets with a tangible impact that can't be ignored. Yet, how companies treat this valuable commodity varies widely.

The past two years have highlighted just how true this is. We saw first-hand how the worst and most challenging situations can bring out the best in human resiliency and ingenuity. Companies that prioritized the human experience—by taking the time to listen, incorporate feedback and leverage digital technologies to improve and simplify processes—fared better and set themselves up for greater future success.

Here are five tips to help you build and grow a people-focused culture.



1 Prioritize employee experience to improve customer success

When you strive to create seamless, exceptional experiences for your customers, it's crucial to ensure the same for employees.



The consequences of not putting your employees first can be dire. In [today's climate](#), employees aren't sticking around after bad experiences. Just as there are a lot of options for customers, the same is true for employees—especially with many companies now freed from geographical hiring constraints as they continue the [transition to hybrid workforces](#).

Prioritizing and investing in your people starts with equipping your workforce with the necessary tools and budget, while also empowering them to create solutions that solve customer challenges, helping to reinforce a virtuous circle of business growth and customer success. Connecting employee and customer experience helps build a company's people-focused culture, beginning with making the customer experience relevant and relatable to employees.

There are many ways to foster this connection. One approach is to position customer experience as part of every employee's role, not just those who interface with customers or have "customer success" in their titles. Leaders should frame each department's mission—whether finance, sales, design, digital, or support—as having a [direct impact on customer success](#). Make it clear how each employee is responsible for creating those positive, end-to-end experiences.

Part of creating this connection means finding opportunities to share all customer feedback with employees. The more employees understand the diverse experiences of customers, the better they can serve them—and the better they can understand their impact.

Get creative about how you directly tie employee roles and responsibilities to the end goal of achieving customer success. Employees will go above and beyond when they know their work has a direct and positive impact on customer success, the bottom line and, ultimately, on people's lives.



2 Nurture empathy to build a people-focused culture

At their core, all employee and customer experiences are human experiences. Leaders should make every attempt to humanize your company's culture around employee and customer experience. Key to any humanization effort is empathy: understanding and being sensitive to the diverse feelings and experiences of others.



You may not realize that empathy has business applications, but [certainly it does](#). However, merely approaching empathy through a business lens misses the point. It's about really getting to know your employees and customers, which will help you create better support programs, design user-friendly products and offer better services.

There's no owner's manual or user guide for empathy. You must make the effort to connect with people on a deeper level. One way to do this is to simply treat people as people; not just data points on a chart. Data gathering can be a great tool for measuring employee and customer interactions, but if used alone, it can be dehumanizing.

So how do you nurture a culture of empathy? After the disruption and personal and professional blurring of the past two years, the first place to look is to your employees. Make time to speak with them about what they've been going through and how they're holding up. Even a virtual check-in can be vital to making (or maintaining) an emotional connection. Model the behaviors with your employees that will ultimately define their interactions with your customers. Relationships should be nurtured, and that's accomplished through open and honest communication.

Of course, the same is true for your customers. Do you really understand their expectations, experiences, struggles and successes? Get to know your customers by name, and not just the name of the company for which they work. Yes, that's probably easier for smaller companies, but no matter the size of your organization, each customer interaction still comes down to individual conversations.

Learning your employees' and customers' stories—and spreading that information throughout your organization—will nurture a culture of empathy, helping build a common ground of shared experiences between leaders, employees and customers.



3 Create frictionless and memorable experiences

A culture of empathy is based on recognizing and valuing our shared human experiences. Being consumers is certainly something to which we all can relate, and central to that common ground is our desire for smooth and rewarding experiences with the brands we patronize.



Your company competes for top talent just as it does for customers. As mentioned previously, both types of consumers have tons of options, so you must provide rewarding and memorable experiences to both audiences. And those experiences need to be holistic, continuing throughout the employee and customer lifecycle, or people will shop elsewhere.

Making an emotional connection is key. Positive experiences help elicit emotions like joy, happiness and satisfaction. And negative experiences have the opposite effect. Emotions are intrinsically tied to memory, so when people have great experiences, they want to return to them.

Delivering **frictionless experiences** is one way to create positive emotions and memories. Things like seamless contract signings and job application submissions, or virtual meetings and work-from-anywhere policies go a long way to ease the burden of doing business. When you remove friction for the benefit of the consumer, the experience can become rewarding and memorable, rather than arduous and tedious.

But is that enough? A common theme in the examples above is the convenience of digital technologies. Digitally transforming your processes to simplify the lives of your consumers is critical, but it's no longer a great competitive differentiator.

What can truly set you apart as you compete for talent and business? Try thinking bigger: What is your company doing to make the world a better place? Has your company **embraced diversity** in hiring and ideas? Does it show up for employees and customers when they need you the most?

Being there when you're needed most is critical for a great employee and customer experience. These moments that matter are many, like making a large transaction or starting the job of your dreams. People trust brands that offer peace of mind, from continuing operations during a lockdown with round-the-clock uptime, to ensuring your personal information is safe from cyber attacks.

Be intentional and prescriptive about designing your products and services to account for these situations. Really get to know your customers by listening to them—gathering their input from every possible channel, understanding what they're going through and then cascading that knowledge through your organization. Find the approach that works best and stick with it.



4 Remember that good intentions don't guarantee good results

Nobody said building a culture of [exceptional employee and customer success](#) would be easy. Even with the best intentions, things can still go wrong. Your consistent responsiveness will strengthen culture and improve brand perception.



However, you'll need to stay aware of both sides of this equation. Don't allow negative behaviors to seep in, as these can have a toxic, damaging effect on your employee and customer success culture.

Lip-service leadership is one example. Avoid making promises to employees and customers that you can't keep. Words without action will always ring hollow, and lack of integrity will quickly erode brand trust and loyalty.

Sure, things happen. Sometimes you might make a promise you intend to keep, but circumstances beyond your control make it impossible. In that case, taking responsibility and accountability is just as important. Be completely transparent and explain how you'll work to fix the issue or find another solution. Turn it into a learning opportunity—for yourself as well as for your company.

This isn't a promotion for a "fail fast/fail often" mindset. It's about how you respond to the inevitable. Strong bonds are formed when employees and customers emerge from adversity in a better place.

Another pitfall to avoid is trying to be something you're not. Small companies that try to act like big ones and vice versa; mimicking everything a competitor does will often fall flat. Learn from other businesses, but remember that sometimes their best practices aren't best for you. Embrace your uniqueness and authentically build your brand identity and competitive differentiation.



5 Learn lessons from the past for a prosperous future

While we're all eager to move on from the past two years, the impact on our personal and professional lives will likely ripple for years to come. Many businesses were forced to pivot their business model, offerings, or approach. Some moved to humanitarian efforts like producing protective equipment, while others experienced sudden digital transformations that allowed them to handle remote workforces and [all-online transactions](#).



One trend took the form of companies increasingly seeking consultative help to deal with their new realities. Businesses that have long embraced digital transformation were ideally positioned to serve as experienced guides through uncertain times. This was certainly true for DocuSign, as we've been helping customers transact virtually for almost two decades.

The deeper lesson here involves finding ways to leverage your company's particular subject-matter expertise for the benefit of your employees and customers. Be there when you're needed most, when your expertise—more than just your product offerings—is exactly what customers need to guide them through new difficulties.

Although these recent global challenges have created some unwanted upheaval, we've also learned a few lessons along the way. Examining how you and your organization reacted, and what could've been done differently, can help you move forward together.

If the immediate past has taught us anything, it's that fully digital operations often translate to business continuity and resilience. Leaning into your expertise and brand point of view will help you be the guiding light people need in their darkest moments.

Put people first

Building and nurturing a culture that values customer success starts with valuing people. That holds true for any organization. It's no longer enough to treat people as simply a cost center—numbers on a screen, divorced from humanity.

Putting people first—ensuring exceptional experiences for both employees and customers—creates a virtuous circle. It takes committed leadership and a desire to embrace and drive the changes necessary to accomplish this. Change is constant, and success is measured by how well we respond to it—and continue responding to it.

DocuSign recently held an informative webinar, [The Path to Better Experiences](#), that expands on these topics. Hosted by Kim Peretti, DocuSign GVP customer success, the panel discussion features customer experience leaders John Abraham, GM, Medallia Institute and Shaun Smith, Founder, Smith+Co. Check out this [timely and helpful discussion](#) now.

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