LISTEN OR DIE

40 LESSONS

THAT TURN CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

INTO GOLD

—

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40 Lessons That Turn Customer Feedback into Gold

The book is dedicated to the people who deliver great experiences to customers every day. These CX heroes make the world a better place. Thank you for everything you do.

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INTRODUCTION

Every time your customer interacts with your company, their experience will ultimately decide what they will do in the future. Think of it as each customer having a bank account full of experiences. Delivering a great customer experience is like making a deposit for a rainy day—that customer may forgive a mistake or two based on the goodwill you built up over time. But a bad experience is the opposite. It's like a large withdrawal from the bank account, and eventually, if there are enough withdrawals, you will not have that customer any longer. And that customer may very well share their disappointing experience with their friends and even the world via social media.

What's your experiential account balance with each of your customers? How do you know? Have you asked them?

I wrote this book because I get a lot of questions from

customer experience (CX) professionals on the best way to create a customer listening program that will deliver business results, especially reduced churn, better social reviews, and increased top-line revenue.

I have sat in on countless meetings with prospects or clients asking similar questions:

How do I get leadership buy-in for Voice of the Customer (VoC)? How do I increase my response rate? Is NPS the right measure for us? How do I improve NPS? How do I get our people to understand and regularly act on customer feedback? How do I use customer feedback and better customer experiences to really drive my business results?

I always refer folks to the great book by Harley Manning and Kerry Bodine from Forrester, called *Outside In: The Power of Putting Customers at the Center of Your Business*, which provides an amazing foundation on CX. While the book is a must-read for CX professionals seeking to build foundational knowledge, it covers a lot of ground, from CX strategy to culture. Its focus on customer measurement and feedback is necessarily brief.

Given this, there is a need for a book to provide answers to the most important questions on building a world-class VoC program. This is what I am aiming to achieve here.

This book is written primarily for CX professionals in enterprise companies who are in charge of listening to customers (VoC). It is also relevant for anyone who is interested in CX or wants to learn more about how customer feedback can be used to drive business results. Entrepreneurs looking for a crash course on how to best listen to customers and use that feedback to improve their business will benefit from this book as well.

This book is organized into 40 lessons. My goal is to give you practical advice that you can implement now!

Most of the lessons are short, with some going into more detail than others. Be sure to check out (pun intended) the checklist at the end of each lesson as well. Each checklist contains four to eight items that distill the lesson into what you need to know and do right now to start or improve your customer listening program. There is also a space for you to take notes on what resonated with you the most in each lesson—or better yet, list the actions you're going to take now to start improving!

You can choose to read only the lessons or read only the checklists, though I highly recommend that you do both, as I'm sure you'll find hidden gems and additional recommendations throughout that stand out for your organization.

This book will guide you no matter where you are in your

VoC journey. If you plan to lead a new VoC program, you'll learn how to start it. If you've been collecting customer feedback for a year or so, you'll get strategies for ramping it up. If your VoC program is more mature, you'll find out how to make it ten times more effective.

My goal is for you to find answers to at least some of your burning questions, including those you didn't know to ask.

Let's dig right in.

LESSON #17

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THE SURVEY IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE SURVEY!

There is a great debate in the CX world about the future of surveys. No one doubts the importance of listening to customers; the debate centers on if the survey as we know it is the best way to enable that.

What we do know is that survey response rates are declining. It seems like people complain about being bombarded with surveys. For these reasons, it's a commonly held belief that the survey's days are numbered. But is that true?

In reality, more surveys are sent and completed than ever before due to the ease and cost-effectiveness of online surveys. Hotels, restaurants, and retail stores distribute them regularly, but so do a plethora of other industries, including banking, insurance, car repair, and many more.

Despite their challenges, surveys are still the easiest and most cost-effective way for a customer to provide feedback about their experience.

Surveys get a bad rap for two reasons. First, many are way too long. Some can take thirty minutes or more to complete and require people to be on a laptop or desktop, since completing a long survey on a mobile device is difficult. Let's be clear that a longer survey is not or at least should not be considered VoC, at least not in the way I am describing it in this book. But even VoC surveys that take longer than a few minutes are rarely successful, given that most customers taking them on mobile devices will give up after just a minute or two. Just five years ago at PeopleMetrics, almost no one completed our surveys from a mobile device. Now, 75% of surveys are completed this way. This is not just a PeopleMetrics thing; it's a major industry shift.

Second, organizations send out too many surveys to the same customer, leading to "survey fatigue." The first problem (long surveys) is not generally a VoC issue, but this one certainly is. Companies, in their enthusiasm to gather customer feedback on various touchpoints, often do not implement checks and balances that ensure that any one customer is not over-surveyed.

One strategy to prevent this is what we call the *month rule*

at PeopleMetrics. The month rule prevents any customer from receiving a survey invitation more than once every thirty days. Some clients extend this rule to every sixty or ninety days, depending on their business and volume of customer interactions.

Another strategy to reduce survey fatigue among your customers is to get control of the "rogue" survey senders within your own organization. A common circumstance is that folks in marketing, market research, strategy, or operations will commission their own survey without your knowledge. So they create a survey (usually via SurveyMonkey), make friends with IT to get a customer list (probably the same one you are using), and then send surveys to these customers. The result is yet another survey sent to the same customers you are engaging on a continuous basis in your VoC program! The solution is to make your VoC software platform the central hub and single source of truth for all customer feedback (see Lesson 3). This will require you to corral these rogue survey senders and ensure all customer feedback is centralized within your team and your VoC software platform. It is hard work but well worth it!

THE RIGHT SURVEY AT THE RIGHT TIME

While not perfect, surveys are here to stay, and they will be a key part of 99% of all VoC programs. The real ques-

tion is not "Is the survey dying?" but "Which are the best surveys to use for your VoC?"

As mentioned in Lesson 2, the two types of surveys used in VoC programs are *relationship surveys* and *transactional surveys*. A relationship survey is one that you send to all customers to gauge the strength of the overall relationship, while a transactional survey is sent immediately after a recent customer experience to understand how the latest interactions with customers are going.

RELATIONSHIP SURVEYS

A relationship survey is used to take a snapshot of a company's relationship with their customers. Questions are focused on getting customer feedback on experiences across all touchpoints.

The first question in a relationship survey is almost always NPS. Customers are asked to complete a relationship survey over a one- to two-week fielding period, and it usually takes about fifteen minutes to complete. As mentioned previously, the goal here is not to determine if a recent experience is good or bad. The focus is on where you are overall with your customers and more about *why* people are having great experiences or negative experiences with a company in general.

Perhaps the best thing about relationship surveys is that they can be completed quickly, and they don't need to involve the entire organization. Usually, the only people seeing the relationship survey results are the program sponsors—such as the head of customer experience, the head of marketing, and the head of operations. Relationship surveys can be a quick win—requiring little time and providing valuable information.

TRANSACTIONAL SURVEYS

Transactional surveys are conducted immediately after a customer experience. Typical examples include after shopping at a retail store, checking out of a hotel, or dining at a restaurant. These questions are not about the customer's overall relationship with the company, but the *most recent* customer experience. Transactional surveys are the core of most VoC survey programs.

Unlike relationship surveys, transactional surveys are brief, lasting anywhere from two to five minutes and collecting information quickly after the experience or, at times, *during the experience*! More on "in-moment" surveys is in Lesson 40.

TURNING SURVEYS INTO ACTION

In their outstanding book *Outside In: The Power of Putting*

Customers at the Center of Your Business, authors Harley Manning and Kerry Bodine do an excellent job of focusing on how relationship surveys are a key part of being customer-centric. What we are adding here is operationalizing VoC through transactional surveys where the entire organization gains access to results.

VoC is more than relationship surveys. They are certainly the beginning of a best-in-class VoC, but the operational side—the side where data is democratized so every frontline person can access it—is vital. Otherwise, you simply have a high-level overview of customer snapshots, reminiscent of market research. Without consistent action to improve the customer experience on a daily basis, you really aren't creating a modern VoC program.

Let's use an example to illustrate. Say you want to get in good physical shape and lose twenty-five pounds by the end of the year. In January, you work really hard for a week, exercising daily. But after the week is up, you lose interest and stop working out. The result is that you are unlikely to hit your goal. The only way to lose the twenty-five pounds is with consistent activity throughout the week and, ultimately, throughout the year. The customer experience works on the same principle.

Customer experience should be measured every day so that your team is empowered to not only access the data

but also to act on it to improve the customer experience and drive business results. The goal is daily improvement by fixing specific customer problems. VoC is really about consistently collecting transactional customer feedback, delivering this feedback to the people on the front lines who provide the customer experience, and empowering them to act on it. Period.

One final word: it's always better to do something instead of nothing. Exercising for the month of January is better than not exercising at all. Likewise, taking occasional customer snapshots via a relationship survey is better than never asking customers what they think—but sporadic activity will not create lasting change or create a customer-centric organization.

	RELATIONSHIP	TRANSACTIONAL
LENGTH	Longer (10–15 mins; 50 questions)	Short (2–5 minutes, 5–15 questions)
FREQUENCY	Once or twice a year	Continuous
PURPOSE	Strategic baseline	Operational improvement
OUTCOME MEASURE	Net Promoter Score (NPS)	Overall satisfaction with most recent experience
RESULTS AUDIENCE	Sponsor of program	Distributed across organization (everyone)
INCENTIVE	Individual incentive common	Either no incentive or sweepstakes
CUSTOMER TYPE	Anyone who is a customer over the past 6–12 months	Customer who has had a recent experience via any touchpoint
COST	One-time cost with (30k–50k) or without analysis (12k)	Monthly cost (2k+ a month)
ANALYSIS	Immediately after fielding	Requires a quarter to obtain enough customer responses
ALERTS	Not ideal/not timely	Live, rolling, expected

CHECKLIST FOR SURVEY GREATNESS

☐ **Remember that in the world of VoC, surveys are still** the most viable method to collect customer feedback.

☐ **The two types of surveys relevant to VoC** are relationship surveys and transactional surveys.

☐ **A relationship survey is a great starting point** to build your VoC program—it's quick (in and out of the field in two weeks), it does not require you to involve

other people/departments outside of IT or whoever can get you a reliable customer list, and there is no need to follow up on individual customer issues (unless you want to).

☐ **A transactional survey is really the heart** of your VoC program, because it allows you to operationalize the customer feedback throughout your organization. This often means following up with individual customers who have had a poor experience and holding people accountable for achieving certain levels of CX success (usually through the form of incentive compensation).

☐ **Surveys need to be** as long as they need to be but no longer. Transactional surveys should be two to five minutes, while relationship surveys should be more like ten to fifteen minutes.

☐ **Survey fatigue is real**, and you need to remember the two key strategies to avoid this. The first is the month rule, which prevents individual customers from receiving a survey more than once every thirty days (or sixty or ninety, depending on your business). The second is making VoC the single source of truth for all your customer feedback. This requires you to round up "rogue" survey senders within your organization and coordinate all customer feedback within your platform.