The Customer Experience Paradox

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Recently I was browsing through Facebook when I saw a posting that caught my eye. It was a board with clothes pins attached to it and the painted heading, "Sole Mates". The idea was to put this board in your laundry room and whenever you find a single sock, pin it to the board in hopes the missing sock will show up. Several people were delighted with how clever and useful this was. I looked at the posting and was immediately struck by its futility. **Why would you put a process in place to address the result of a regular and recurring problem instead of fixing the problem?!?** In the business world, this is the equivalent of having a customer impact issue and then addressing the problem.   The best Customer Experience is delivered by not having the impact at all!

Growing up there was a point in time that my Dad, two brothers, and I could all wear the same size socks. We had one sock drawer and it was a constant challenge to find matching socks.   This was the early 70s and long before mismatched socks were a fashion statement. We all accepted the situation as something we just had to deal with.

When I entered the United States Air force, I was put in a barracks with 45 other guys to complete basic training. We changed socks at least twice a day and did laundry every weekend. Now, imagine 45 airmen trying to match 14 pairs of socks each. It would be chaos, right? But, they taught us a better method than that. We simply PINNED several pairs of our socks together with a piece of white cloth that had the first initial of our last name and last four digits of our SSAN stamped on it. That simple approach stuck with me.   In fact, I have continued to pin my socks together daily ever since. **The larger lesson that really resonated, though, was the idea that I should look for ways to address issues before they become problems.**

Now for the paradox…

When my three daughters were 10, 8, and 3, I walked into the kitchen to find several refrigerator magnets on the floor. I gathered all three girls in the kitchen and asked which one of them had done this. They looked at me with utter confusion on their faces. "Dad, those fall off all the time," said the oldest, and the other two quickly agreed. I asked, "You mean to tell me that these just fall off and you put them back on the refrigerator?" "YES" was the chorus.   I learned two things from that… First, you

can have good people being unproductive doing things they don't need to be doing. My kids were picking something up and putting it away without being told, after all – that's good! But, was it something that needed to be done? Could we have prevented the problem? And second, unless the process fails, you won't even know they are doing it. Until I saw the magnets before one of them had a chance to return them to their spot on the refrigerator, I had no idea this was happening. Put another way, **you can have people doing a great job, but the only recognition they get is when something goes wrong.**

The best Customer Experience systems prevent problems before they happen, however your staff is lauded when they come together to correct a Customer Impact item after it happens!

In your business, what are your opportunities to "Pin the Socks"? **How can you create processes that reward your staff for preventing problems before they happen?** We have all earned the appreciation from our customers when we ride to the rescue, and that is important as long as it is the <u>exception</u>. How do you make it the exception? PIN THE SOCKS!