



Becoming a Category of One

How Extraordinary Companies
Transcend Commodity and Defy Comparison



Joe Calloway

ultimate experience that you could imagine doing business with someone in our industry, what would that be like?" Doesn't seem too difficult, does it?

Here's the bad news: According to a new study by the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council, with Satmetrix, 62 percent of companies fail to gather any customer insight whatsoever from customer engagement situations. And, it gets worse: A mere 17 percent use the opportunity of customer engagement to identify and cultivate potential customer champions and advocates, nearly two-thirds of companies do not have a formal "Voice of Customer" program in place, and only a scant 13 percent of companies have deployed real-time systems to collect, analyze, and distribute customer feedback.

How can you develop an Ultimate Customer Experience—how could you possibly rise to the level of a Category of One—if you aren't even engaged in finding out what your customer thinks, believes, and wants? And, the obvious answer is: You can't.

The organizations—and the individuals who lead them—that are identified in this book did not get here by excluding input from the very people they sought to serve. No matter the economic cycle, regardless of the technological change, irrespective of their individual personalities, customers want you to listen to them—and extend to them the same degree of loyalty that you are seeking.

Sue Remes: Capitalizing on Collective Intelligence

Sue Remes is a business consultant who has spent her career walking the front lines of sales organizations. For over 20 years Sue has helped companies create and manage their consumer message. Sue works with the nation's top retailers and manufacturers in positioning their brands to help make them number one in their retail arena. She believes that building a brand starts with the front line and that the key to any long-term product success is creating a message that employees can get behind and that

translates into a consumer experience. Sue is known internationally as a keynote speaker and regular contributor to retail industry magazines. To learn more about Sue go to SueRemes.com.

That's the official bio on Sue. Here's what I personally know about Sue. Sue brings a unique perspective to what makes business work. I have never known a person who was truly such a Category of One when it comes to seeing and understanding challenges and opportunities, and breaking them down to processes and actionable steps that can help a company succeed. I asked Sue to focus on what leaders of sales organizations most need to do to create a Category of One organization.

Here's what Sue Remes wrote:

By harnessing the collective intelligence in the room, we can make decisions that are much smarter than those made by individuals.

The idea of capitalizing on collective intelligence is often brought up in one form or another by leaders of organizations during times of confusion or significant organizational restructuring. Most of the time, the person making this statement believes it to some degree. But living it is quite a different story.

It never ceases to amaze me how many leaders of sales organizations I have met who have no connection to their field staff. This has always been a mystery to me since the front line salespeople are the ones, in good times and bad, who are literally fighting for customers to pick you. Day in and day out these people are in the trenches trying to convince customers to choose your company, and purchase what you offer. Continually seeking the input and opinions of those in the field and keeping communication channels open are the greatest consumer insight and market research opportunities available to you.

The people who stand on the front line selling your product or service simply are the smartest people in the room when it comes to gaining new information and tracking the shifts in

how customers are thinking and feeling about your company and your product or service. In terms of generating wisdom and insight, corporate meeting rooms are no match for the places where you actually sell product; they are the happy hunting grounds for enlightenment.

One of the most important responsibilities of anyone in an organization who conceives, creates, or touches the product or service in any way is to get in the field and spend time with the sales team—this is the place where all the action is happening. If you are not making at least quarterly visits to the field, begin now. Schedule your in-field days as you would any other important meeting and stick to the schedule. Let your staff know you are coming, and then go. Stand in the shoes of your salespeople and talk to customers. If you don't know how to talk to your customers, stand next to the salespeople who do. Guaranteed, you will be delighted to find out they are better at it than you ever imagined and best of all you'll be amazed at what you'll learn.

Customers are a highly tuned breed whose behavior is a constantly moving target. Based on what is learned from in-field visits, teams can make informed decisions about future marketing and sales initiatives instead of making decisions based on assumptions or untested theories. Another benefit of making field visits is that the sales team will see firsthand that you are invested in their well-being and day-to-day business. Nothing creates more employee loyalty than the feeling that one is being backed by the team at every level of the organization.

If your company is considering a major transition and you have done your own in-field research, consider hiring an outside source to do the same. An outside person brings additional pairs of eyes and ears with fresh a perspective to the table and functions as an outlet for your sales team to share their experiences and observations in a safe way. Let's face it, if you are the president of a company and you are meeting a salesperson for the very first time, chances are they are not going to share with you the fact that your customers thought your new product introduction was a complete miss. But to an outsider, they will

open up like a geyser. A good in-field researcher will go into your stores, talk to your salespeople and customers and validate or negate your assumptions about the sales process. They will help you clarify who the customer really is and how well your intended experience is translating at the consumer level.

Sitting around your office creating programs to initiate at the field level without input from your field staff is pure nonsense. It's also insulting to the people on the front lines to ask them to execute a plan or a program without first seeking a clear and concrete understanding of the obstacles they face every day. That would be like your doctor performing a life-altering surgery without first obtaining a proper diagnosis and defining the expected outcome. So go on, get out there. It may just be the most interesting thing you do all year!

Terry Turner: The Right People in the Right Jobs

Terry Turner is President and Chief Executive Officer of Pinnacle Financial Partners. In his 30-year banking career, Turner has experienced the continuum of rapid changes in the financial services sector and the impact of economic highs and lows. Until he led the effort to launch Pinnacle as a de novo bank based in Nashville in 2000, he served in various executive management roles with larger regional institutions.

Starting Pinnacle with a blank sheet of paper has allowed him to build into the front end all the components necessary to be a Category of One financial services firm. Pinnacle has sustained a remarkable record of performance and has been one of the fastest-growing banks in the United States, including 500 percent appreciation in stock price and more than \$4.8 billion in assets during its first eight years. Turner attributes much of Pinnacle's success to intense focus on the right hiring decisions, the right workplace environment, and delighting clients at every encounter.