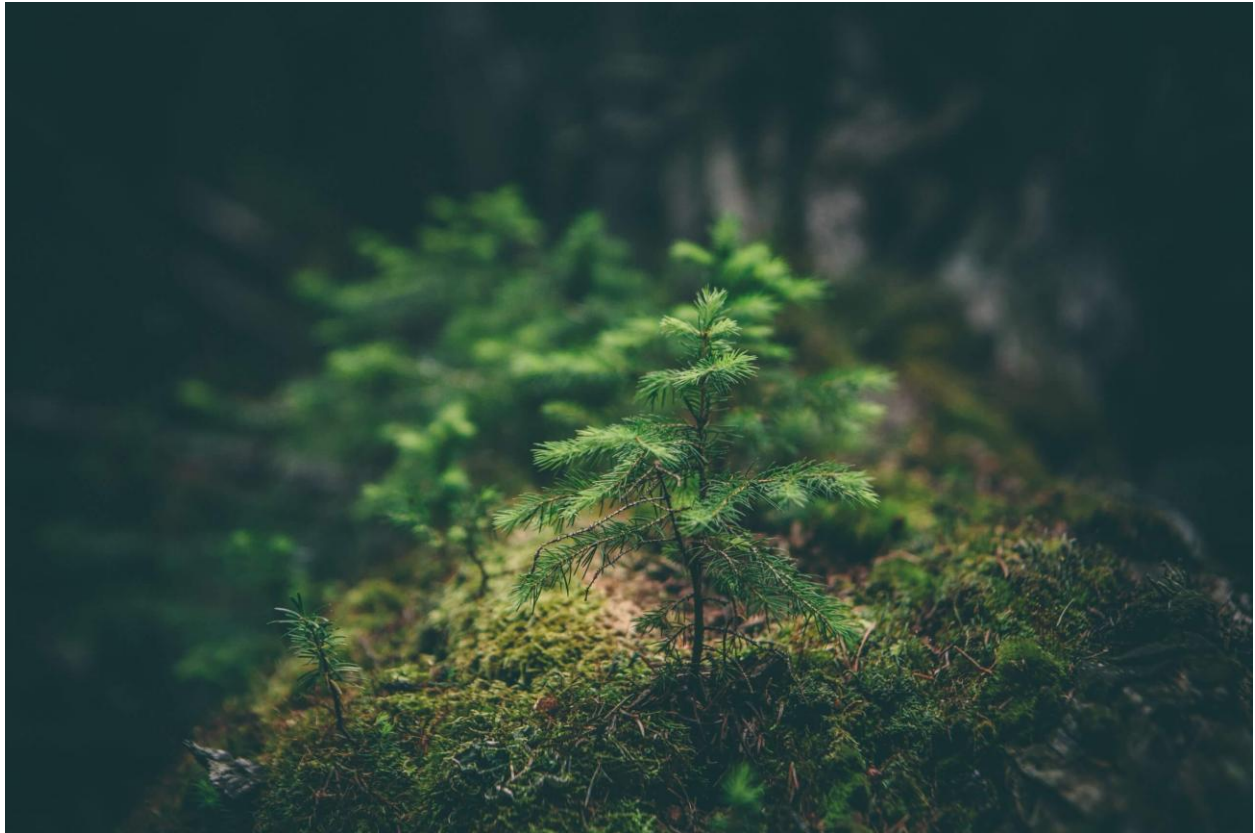# Employee Experience: Seeing the Forest for the Trees

Stacy Bolger— January 15, 2020

Let me just qualify something here before I get started: I have good kids. Really good kids, in fact. Kids that make me proud 98.7% of the time. But then there's the other 1.3% of the time, and all you parents out there know what I'm talking about. Yep, that's where we begin today…

My husband and I received an email from our middle child's teacher the other day. It began with "Cole* had a rough day today" (*name changed to protect the mostly innocent). It went on to explain challenges with focusing on the day's lessons, a heated disagreement with a friend, and some tears.

Frankly, we probably could have predicted receipt of this note, as it was a rough morning, getting him off to school. He woke up late, spilled his breakfast on his uniform, realized he'd forgotten to pack his lunch the night before, and yes, I'd gotten frustrated with him and we had a less-than-loving exchange of words. Needless to say, he walked out the door to his carpool in an already-heightened state of negative emotion.

As parents, we all know this is not the environment within which our children thrive. What we too often realize but don't grant allowances for, is that this is also not the environment within which we, as employees thrive. We tell ourselves that as adult employees, professionalism dictates that we should be able to separate ourselves from our emotions, to "leave our personal baggage at the door."

But the reality was, that day I had far less patience on my calls, felt less organized that I generally feel, and had a heightened sense of anxiety throughout the day. And indeed, much research has been done over the years proving that our emotions play a massive role in our responses, our decisions, and in just about every aspect of day-to-day life.

So, if we were to give ourselves just a little bit of grace, accepting that non-work events and emotion will play into our day-to-day professional lives and our "employee experience," what lessons can parenting help teach us as employees – and more importantly, as employers – about employee experience?

1. Outside-In Thinking

I'm not generally a patient person, and this was indeed a challenge for me, years ago, as the mom of two toddler boys. One day, following a particularly rough morning, and when I'd finally gotten the kids down for their naps, I scrolled through endless blog posts about dealing with toddler tantrums. One in particular still stands out to me to this day; it talked less about responding to the situation and more about what could be going through the head of your little one at the time of the tantrum.

My heart broke – if I was feeling this emotional about the situation with all my life experience, how must my little two-year-old be struggling?! The same opportunity applies to employer/employee situations. When efforts fail, when mistakes happen, when employees struggle with a task and need coaching, do we attempt to understand what is going on in their heads? Or do we simply react based on what is going on in our own minds?

How would responding differently change the outcomes in both the work and the trust between you and your team?

2. The Human Factor

For decades, we've known that employee experience and customer experience are linked. Put simply, if someone isn't feeling good about themselves, or is feeling out of sorts, they aren't going to be able to focus on meeting the needs

of others. Phrases like "Happy wife, happy life" and "If Mom isn't happy, no one's happy," and the recent self-care movement all reinforce this.

But what do we in the business? We focus on giving employees the right tools and technology, on developing customer-focused processes, and on training which empowers employees to do right by their customers. For all that investment and effort, we've still missed the key: focusing on the human side of the equation. Even with all the right "stuff," without understanding the hearts and minds of employees, we aren't going to be able to optimize our investment in EX.

What are you doing, as a leader, as an organization, to develop a culture of trust, communication and true connection within your workforce?

3. Trends vs. Data Points

Back to where I started this post, I have really good kids. But even really good kids have bad days. Fortunately, our kids' teachers don't judge or respond to our kids based on a single bad day. Rather, we get notes home weekly about our kids' progress, academically, socially, emotionally. We get quarterly report cards summarizing all this information, and teacher conferences to discuss trends in the data.

Do we have similar processes in place by which we can connect the dots on our employees' individual experiences? With the day-to-day busyness in the workplace, it's easy to react, and much harder to step back and see the forest for the trees.

How do we ensure that we're comprehensive in understanding trends in each of our employee's experiences and prioritize those that should have our focus?

4. Multiple Perspectives

Building upon the prior lesson, multiple perspectives are critical. In instances where we get a bad report for our kids, we don't just take the teacher's word and react (though certainly, this word carries weight!), we ask our son for his perspective, and when they are available, we look at external documentation as well, things like assignments, test grades, etc.

On a business transactional level, do you have mechanisms that take into account not just VoC, but also VoE and quality assurance or performance standards data? If not, this is something to consider, not just for the holistic view, but for purposes again of the human factor, of building trust by engaging in mutual understanding and betterment of situations for both customers AND employees.

What efforts are we putting forth to build trust with our employees?

The Final Word: Business Is People

I've been a practitioner of both CX and EX for nearly two decades. And in that time, there have been countless business challenges I've encountered. Getting it right for both customers and employees will never be easy. But when I find myself struggling with a decision or the right next action, I quickly realize that I'm over-complicating things; I'm looking at the business issue, rather than the customer or employee involved in the issue. Ultimately, each and every one of these "business issues" is grounded in "people-issues."

For some reason, my ability to see the forest for the trees when dealing with people issues comes more naturally to me as a parent than as an employer, hence the parallels I've drawn in the stories I've shared above.

Perhaps it's due to that higher-level expectation for adults to be logical, professional and certainly NOT emotional in the workplace? If indeed this is the case, having the right skills and tools with which to truly understand employee experience is that much more critical.

Remember to Ask Yourself:

How would responding differently change the outcomes in both the work and the trust between you and your team?

What are you doing, as a leader, as an organization, to develop a culture of trust, communication and true connection within your workforce?

How do we ensure that we're comprehensive in understanding trends in each of our employee's experiences and prioritize those that should have our focus? What efforts are we putting forth to build trust with our employees?