

LEADING WITH HEART

By Susan McDaniel, Execs In The Know

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HOW CULTURE AND VISION ENERGIZE THE SOLARCITY EXPERIENCE.

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YOU'VE HEARD IT A MILLION TIMES—THE ABILITY TO DELIVER AN EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STARTS AT THE CORE OF YOUR LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE CULTURE. The tools and processes must support the vision, but serving your customer with a passion comes from beyond what systems and papers can provide.

When all of the elements come together, there is an undeniable excitement, rhythm and passion that you can feel from visiting a customer support center. I was lucky enough to experience this when I visited the SolarCity Customer Account Management Group's (CAMG) center in Las Vegas.

SolarCity was started by two determined brothers, Founders and Chief Officers Lyndon and Peter Rive, and their cousin Elon Musk. The mission was simple, to find a better way to deliver clean, more affordable energy. Founded in 2006, SolarCity has since grown to become America's largest solar provider with more than 10,000 employees. Musk sits as the chairman and has brought his commitment and passion for a better, more energy-conscious world to SolarCity. Musk is also the CEO and chairman of Tesla Motors, a new all-electric American car company. A gifted visionary, Musk has long dreamed of crucial advances

in solar power, electric cars and space travel. His determination was what helped him make those dreams into a reality.

No Offices, No Barriers

The same passion and vision that is associated with the Rive brothers and Musk is embedded and visible in the halls of the SolarCity CAMG center. One of the first things you notice when you walk into the SolarCity center is a bright, open concept environment. There is an energy in the room, but one without chaos and clutter. It was here that I met with Paul Brandt, VP Customer Account Management Group for SolarCity. Brandt joined SolarCity in December 2014 after a long tenure with Southwest Airlines.

We were not able to meet in his office because he doesn't have one. In fact, there are no management offices at SolarCity and that includes C-level management. Instead, there are open cubicles to hotel at, as management moves around this office and the other offices in California. It's a concept built with a purpose: Everyone is equal in this organization and everyone is involved and accessible. "There are no barriers," said Brandt. "Every SolarCity family member plays an equally vital role in being able to deliver clean, affordable energy to our customers."

The CAMG team is composed of 800 employees (or family members, as Brandt calls his team members), of which about 700 are located in the Las Vegas facility. The remaining team members are located in Roseville, Calif., and at the

company's original headquarters in San Mateo. Overall, the team handles 4,000 calls a day.

Efficient Systems and Processes

From my visit to the center, it was clearly evident that there is a passion and drive for customer success. While this is a cornerstone for success, it has to be translated to efficient systems and processes to ensure that employees are properly trained to deliver the best customer experience. When it comes to systems, the supporting processes need to be streamlined and the data needs to be clean, measurable and accessible. You can imagine the complexity in the SolarCity operation as it involves estimators and installers across the 18 states and Washington, DC.

What Brandt showed me next was truly first class. "It really is the backbone of our business," Brandt noted. "It is our single source of truth." A reporting system so advanced that they are able to, in real-time, identify data points down to the installer teams that then updates production and financial data points. The systems allow the team to pull data immediately and to very quickly identify areas of concern and opportunity. The end result is an informed, nimble team that is able to create positive change for the customer. "We are very fortunate to have the very best software engineering team," said Brandt. "The tools they've created for us are truly world-class. In my 20-year career, I've never come across a company that has access to real-time operational and commercial data, in such an easy to use manner."

Maximizing Customer Experience

One of the true enablers to help maximize both the customer experience, as well as improve their efficiency, has been customer/system journey maps. These maps are showcased around the office, noting the stages and steps that a customer goes through during a call and the customer journey. The maps displayed in the office are the result of months of work and analysis by the entire SolarCity team. "We embrace change at SolarCity and we operate with a continuous improvement mindset," said Brandt. "We are always looking for a better way." There are two main models when it comes to customer journey mapping for the SolarCity customer—where they have been and where they are aspiring to get to. Brandt noted that, by openly discussing all



of the journey points, they were able to identify moments of inefficiency and opportunities to serve the customer better.

Another game changer for SolarCity was the implementation of their Concierge Service. Evolving from the study of their journey mapping was the need for customer ownership throughout the delivery process, to help eliminate repetitive steps for their customers. The concierge team also played a critical role in saving customers who were opting out after a home evaluation. With a great deal of time invested in the home evaluation process for each new potential customer this was a key process to improve. “The Solar Concierge team is taking an already highly rated customer experience to a completely new level, by rolling out an entirely new way of personally engaging with our customers,” said Brandt. “We are providing EVERY customer their own personal “Solar Concierge” from sale to permission-to-operate. The Solar Concierge works with our sales family to assist with post-sales duties and ensure the best experience for the customer.”

As a previous operations director, it was inspiring to see the mechanics of Brandt and his team. With only seven months on the ground, Brandt is clearly well known and admired by his team, and he addresses each member by his or her name. I took the opportunity to ask one of his team members what the best thing about working at SolarCity was. The answer was nothing short of inspiring. “I love making a difference to Mother Earth,” she said. The common goal of making a difference in the world bonds many of these team members to the vision of their company.

SolarCity goes one step further to demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility through the GivePower Foundation. For every megawatt of residential solar power that SolarCity installed in 2014, the GivePower Foundation donated a

solar power system and battery to a school without electricity. One megawatt is equal to about 160 new home installations. The GivePower Foundation is a SolarCity non-profit organization committed to extending the environmental and social benefits of clean renewable energy across the world. They have teamed with buildOn, a non-profit organization dedicated to building schools in some of the economically poorest countries in the world, including Nicaragua, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal and Senegal. Last year alone, GivePower installed solar at over 500 schools worldwide.

What's Next for This Customer-Focused Company?

SolarCity's rate of growth has been phenomenal over its short nine-year existence—\$5 billion-plus market cap and 12,000-plus employees. What makes the growth even more amazing is that it has been done without the traditional marketing campaigns and initiatives that you would expect from a new company launch. Next up, the company will be opening its new location in Salt Lake City. The company is also looking to bring all of its panel production internally to help continue to lower the production cost and ultimately the market cost, by building the largest solar manufacturing plant in the Western Hemisphere (1.2 Million square feet in Buffalo, N.Y.). The plant is in-sourcing manufacturing jobs into the United States and is on track to open in the first quarter of 2016.

When you have a solid foundation, the sky is the limit. Culture and vision are the cornerstones to creating a successful customer experience. This passion will lead to hiring like-minded people and funding and investing in support systems that will enable the customer experience. Data needs to be meaningful, and accessible, with the ability to query points in a meaningful and simple

way to ensure they are utilized and acted upon.

Companies like SolarCity are inspirational. Yes, they create a product that on its own accord is merit worthy, but they are doing it in a way that gives more people the opportunity to make a better choice for powering their homes, schools, and businesses. They also focus on the greater social good to ensure that underprivileged families and kids will also have opportunities to have access to clean power.

It should come as no surprise that a company like this is focused on making a difference in their customer experience. They are making a difference in peoples' lives and the way they interact with their customers is no exception. The core values of SolarCity are clearly displayed in their halls, but most importantly, they seemed embedded in the center's processes and work efforts. Sometimes it is the simple signs that resonate the most and move the team to outperform the rest. 🌱

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”
—Dr. Seuss



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