



Execs In The Know

KIA ONLINE COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Designing Connection: How Crate & Barrel Builds Loyalty Through Every Interaction

Kate Showalter has helped transform customer care from a reactive service into a proactive, brand-defining experience, one rooted in empathy, innovation, and the simple joy of making every home feel personal.



Kate Showalter

Vice President, CBH Services

Crate&Barrel

Nearly three decades ago, Kate Showalter began her journey with Crate & Barrel, a brand synonymous with timeless design and the art of living beautifully. What's kept her there are the people and the pursuit of connection. From the first interaction to the final delivery, Kate has helped shape a customer experience philosophy rooted in empathy, collaboration, and innovation.

Under her leadership, Crate & Barrel has turned every touch point, whether in-store, online, or in-home, into a reflection of care. For Kate, customer experience isn't a department; it's the heartbeat of the brand, where every conversation, every solved problem, and every thank-you note becomes a reminder that creating a home is deeply personal and deeply human.

Execs In The Know (EITK): What keeps you inspired and motivated in your role leading customer experience today?

Kate Showalter: After all this time, I still love that we sell beautiful, quality products that are a part of both people's homes and my own. I love our product, but in my role, what truly inspires me after all this time is the dynamic nature of customer expectations and the endless possibilities for innovation. The retail landscape is constantly evolving, and the challenge of anticipating and exceeding customer needs keeps me energized. Seeing the tangible impact of our strategies on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and knowing that we're creating memorable moments in their homes, is incredibly rewarding. It's about continuous learning, adapting, and striving for excellence in every interaction.

EITK: Customer experience often comes down to people. How do you approach empowering and motivating your teams to deliver exceptional experiences?

Kate: We foster a culture of ownership, empathy, and continuous improvement. This means providing comprehensive training that goes beyond product knowledge to encompass

emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills. We celebrate successes, learn from challenges, and ensure every team member understands their vital role in the larger CX ecosystem. Ultimately, when our teams feel valued, supported, and equipped, they naturally deliver exceptional experiences.

EITK: Crate & Barrel has a strong omnichannel presence, from in-store to online to delivery. What have been some of the biggest challenges and opportunities in creating a seamless customer journey across these touch points?

Kate: Creating a truly seamless omnichannel journey is both a significant challenge and a massive opportunity. The biggest challenge lies in integrating disparate systems and processes to ensure a consistent brand experience, regardless of how the customer interacts with us. However, the opportunity is immense.

We work hard to meet customers wherever they are, offering convenience, personalization, and choice across their personal journey. It enables us to leverage the strengths of each channel – the tactile experience of in-store, the breadth of online, and the convenience of home delivery – to create a holistic and delightful experience that builds lasting loyalty.





EITK: In your experience, what role does collaboration play in process improvement, and how do you balance process with the "human" side of CX?

Kate: At Crate, we are customer-focused from the top down. Collaboration is the bedrock of effective process improvement in CX. No single department owns the customer journey; it's a collective effort. By bringing together teams from merchandising, supply chain, technology, and marketing, we gain diverse perspectives, identify pain points, and co-create solutions that truly address customer needs.

While our goal is to reduce friction for the customer, we still strive to ensure that we are there when they need us. Balancing process with the "human" side of CX means designing efficient systems that enable, rather than hinder, genuine human connection. Processes should streamline repetitive tasks, freeing up our teams to focus on empathetic interactions and personalized service. It's about using technology to enhance, not replace, the human touch, ensuring our processes support the emotional and relational aspects of the customer experience.

EITK: Retail continues to evolve quickly, especially with shifts in consumer behavior. How has your perspective on CX changed most since you first started at Crate & Barrel?

Kate: My perspective on CX has evolved dramatically. When I started, the focus was largely transactional and reactive across retail. Today, it's profoundly relational and experiential. The biggest shift has been the recognition that CX is not just a department, but the entire business. Customers expect more than just a product; they seek meaningful interactions, personalized recommendations, and a brand that aligns with their values.

The rise of digital has amplified the need for convenience and instant gratification, but also the importance of authentic human connection. My focus has shifted from simply meeting expectations to consistently exceeding them and proactively anticipating future needs, from reactive to proactive service that makes a difference to the customer.

EITK: AI and digital innovation are transforming retail. What excites you most about these changes, and where do you see the greatest opportunities for enhancing the customer experience?

Kate: AI is a big deal, and digital innovation is incredibly exciting for CX. I believe that we need to use AI as a tool across our CX, not just as a deflection lever. What excites me most is the potential for hyper-personalization at scale. AI can analyze vast amounts of data to predict customer needs, offer tailored recommendations, and even

anticipate potential issues before they arise. We will use AI across our organization, with some of the best opportunities being:

- **Proactive Service:** Using AI to identify and resolve customer issues before they even become complaints.
- **Personalized Journeys:** Creating truly individualized shopping experiences, from website navigation to in-store interactions.
- **Enhanced Self-Service:** AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants that provide instant, accurate support, freeing up human agents for more complex issues and always keeping a human in the loop
- **Operational Efficiency:** Optimizing inventory, logistics, and delivery to ensure a smoother and more reliable customer journey.

Ultimately, these innovations allow us to deliver a more intuitive, efficient, and delightful experience for every customer.

EITK: As a CX leader, what metrics or signals do you pay the closest attention to when gauging the health of your customer experience?

Kate: While many metrics are important, I pay the closest attention to a few key indicators that provide a holistic view of the quality of our customer experience, including net promoter score (NPS), customer satisfaction (CSAT), CSAT for AI, and time to resolution (TTR) are some of the most important to me. I may use productivity metrics to ensure that we are being effective and efficient, or to plan work more strategically, but first and foremost, we care about quality indicators.

EITK: Can you share a moment, either from a customer story or within your team, that reminded you why this work matters?

Kate: I love what we do. I don't think of my CX role in the traditional view of Customer Service as the clean-up crew at the end of the line. Our role is to enable brand growth. We build loyalty and relationships with customers that differentiate our



brand from our market. And we help the rest of our organization identify opportunities to consistently improve our customer experience.

But my favorite moments are when we can really feel the difference that we've made to the customer. For example, finishing the baby nursery just in time for her arrival, making sure the delivery to a brand new home goes off perfectly, and even getting the grill there in time for the big game. It's all important. I keep every personal thank-you note I've ever received from a customer. That's how I know it matters.

EITK: When you're not focused on customer experience, what brings you joy and balance outside of work?

Kate: I find so much joy in my family, especially watching my daughters grow up to be strong women themselves. Although they often joke with me that I need a hobby, so maybe I'm really not that great at balance. And true to my brand, I love my home and entertaining family and friends. Cheers!



About Kate Showalter

Kate Showalter is the head of Customer Care and Customer Insight for all Crate & Barrel Holdings, Inc. (CBH) brands, including Crate & Barrel, CB2, Crate & Kids, and Hudson Grace. Kate brings 35 years of retail experience—30 with Crate & Barrel—spanning stores, global franchise development, customer service, and project management. The organization is revered for its customer focus and service, and Kate's teams engage with over 5 million customers each year, providing seamless support across voice, email, chat, and SMS platforms.

As former head of the CBH Program Management Office (PMO), Kate implements a wide variety of customer experience initiatives for the brands through her oversight, governance, and execution of all large-scale projects for the enterprise organization. Prior to starting in her role as leader of the PMO in 2016, Kate launched the International Operations Team responsible for the operational direction and opening of over 20 international stores in 3 years. With a background in Retail Store Leadership, Kate has a passion for creating consistently positive customer experiences. She believes that brands are measured with each interaction and strives to build and foster positive lifetime customer relationships.

Kate holds a BA in English Literature from the University of Maryland. In her spare time, she enjoys curling up with a good book or sharing game nights with her teenage daughters.



Execs In The Know

Thank you to Kate for her leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Kate or participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the Execs In The Know “Know It All” (KIA) Community. The KIA Community is a private, online community designed exclusively for CX Leaders at consumer-facing brands. Come learn, share, network, and engage to innovate.

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