

APRIL 2026 | QUARTER 2



# CX Insight

AN EXECS IN THE KNOW PUBLICATION

## The Power to Lead

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**The Growing Impact of Women  
in CX Leadership**

**The Frontline is the Strategy**

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# The Real Work Begins at the Human Level

The brands customers return to aren't always the fastest or the cheapest. They're the ones that made people feel genuinely seen.

This issue opens with a question many CX leaders are sitting with: is your customer experience truly built for all of your customers, or just most of them? Our main feature examines why DEI remains a CX performance issue. The consumers most attentive to brand commitments on inclusion represent trillions in purchasing power and are already making decisions accordingly. And yet CX leaders rate their own accessibility and inclusion efforts 18 points higher than consumers do.

Closing that gap requires the right leadership. Our women in CX leadership feature makes the business case directly: companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 39% more likely to outperform peers financially. We examine why the pipeline still narrows too early, and why fixing that is a competitive decision, not just the right thing to do.

From there, we turn to the frontline, where strategy either comes to life or falls apart. As automation absorbs routine contacts, what reaches human agents is more complex, more emotional, and more consequential. The most effective organizations aren't replacing agents; they're elevating them, shifting from rigid scripts to guardrails that give people room to use real judgment when it matters most.

Our Brand Spotlight goes behind the scenes with Grubhub on maintaining service reliability at global scale, and our KIA Spotlight features Carrier Enterprise on building a model where the customer always chooses the experience.

We're also grateful to our contributors to this issue, Transcom and Procedureflow, for their practitioner perspectives on AI's impact on CX economics and the true cost of broken service.

We hope this issue gives you both the perspective and the insights to lead with intention. As always, we're thankful for the leaders, practitioners, and contributors who make *CX Insight* possible.

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# Why DEI Still Drives the Customer Experience

As brands rethink DEI, the customer experience impact is becoming harder to ignore. Here's why inclusion still matters for trust, service, and growth.

by Execs In The Know

Think about the last time a brand truly made you feel seen. Not marketed to – seen. Maybe it was a customer service agent who instinctively understood your frustration. A support experience that felt designed for someone like you. A company that clearly stood for something, and then actually showed it in the way they treated you. That feeling, that sense of genuine recognition and respect, is what separates brands customers return to from brands they quietly leave.

It is built or broken in thousands of small moments across every channel, every interaction, and every team. And it does not happen by accident. It is the result of deliberate choices about who a company hires, whose experiences they center, what values they operationalize, and who they believe their

customer actually is. So here is the question every CX leader should be sitting with right now: Is your customer experience truly built for all of your customers or just most of them?

Our own research tells a clear story. According to the [2026 CX Leaders Trends & Insights: Corporate Edition report](#),<sup>1</sup> 68% of consumers say it is important for companies to take a public position on their DEI practices and allow that position to guide their operations. Yet, only 36% of CX leaders report that their company actually does this. That is a meaningful gap between what consumers expect from the brands they support and what many organizations are currently delivering.

**Does your company take a public position on its diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, and allow that position to guide its operations?**



2026 CX Leaders Trends & Insights: Corporate Edition report, Page 48.

This article is not about politics; it is about performance. It is about what the research shows, what the market is demonstrating, and what CX leaders need to understand right now: DEI is not separate from the customer experience. For a growing number of consumers, it *is* the customer experience.

## The Market Signal That Cannot Be Ignored

The consumers paying close attention to DEI commitments are not niche audiences. They represent a major share of current and future purchasing power, and they are making decisions accordingly.

Black buying power in the U.S. is now projected to top \$2 trillion in 2026.<sup>2</sup> Latino consumer purchasing power is even larger: the latest Latino Donor Collaborative report<sup>3</sup> puts U.S. Latino purchasing power at \$3.78 trillion, with Latino income reaching \$2.83 trillion and growth continuing to outpace non-Latino consumers. The LGBTQIA+ community represents an estimated \$1.4 trillion in U.S. purchasing power, with global spending power estimated at up to \$4.7 trillion, according to GLAAD.<sup>4</sup> And multicultural consumers continue to drive the market overall: Collage Group reports that more than 65% of U.S. expenditure growth is coming from these growth segments.

*DEI is not separate from the customer experience. For a growing number of consumers, it is the customer experience.*

And those consumers are paying attention. One-third of consumers said they had already cut back or stopped buying from brands that rolled back DEI commitments. The response was even sharper among key growth audiences: 45% of Black consumers, 45% of Latino consumers, and 58% of LGBTQIA+ consumers said they had reduced or stopped spending with those brands.

The Edelman Trust Barometer adds important context. In its 2025 Brand Trust Special Report,<sup>5</sup> Edelman found that 73% of people say their trust in a brand would increase if it authentically reflected today's culture. Only 27% said their trust would increase when a brand ignores culture and focuses only on products. In other words, silence or retreat on inclusion is increasingly being read as a signal.

Edelman noted that trust is now equal to price and quality as a purchase consideration, particularly among Gen Z consumers who are asking fundamental questions about sourcing, employee treatment, and brand values before committing their dollars. Separately, the data shows that 58% of consumers advocate for or buy from brands aligned with their values, and 63% say they purchase or advocate based on a brand's stance on societal issues.



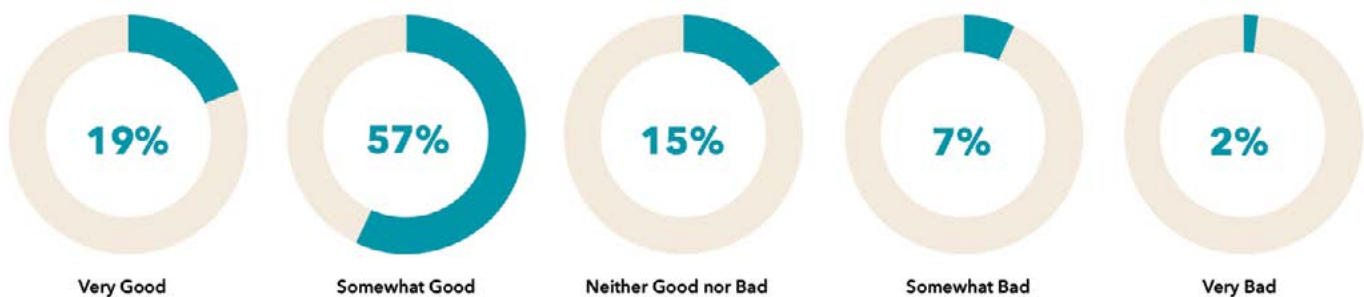
## The Contact Center is Where Brand Values Get Tested

Corporate statements about inclusion mean little if the experience itself does not reflect them. If the person a customer reaches cannot understand their needs, if the self-service journey fails non-English speakers, or if digital channels create barriers for elderly or disabled customers, the brand's values are being tested in real time.

Customer care is one of the most visible places where a brand's values are either felt or not felt by customers. And many organizations appear to be overestimating how inclusive those experiences actually are.

When asked how their company performs on accessibility and inclusion in customer support, including support for non-English speakers, disabled customers, and elderly populations, 76% of CX leaders in our survey indicated they were doing "Very Good" or "Somewhat Good."<sup>6</sup> When consumers were asked the same question about the brands they interact with, only 58% agreed. That 18-point perception gap is not small. It is a blind spot, and blind spots in CX show up in churn, negative reviews, and weakening loyalty over time.

How do you think your company is doing at making customer support accessible and inclusive for all types of people (e.g., non-English speakers, disabled customers, the elderly)?



The stakes are significant. More than a third of the U.S. population identifies as nonwhite or multiracial. When support experiences are built around a narrow view of the "typical" customer, a meaningful share of the customer base is left underserved. That matters even more in the current climate.

Edelman's 2024 Trust Barometer Special Report on Brands and Politics<sup>7</sup> found that 78% of consumers now consider recruiting diverse employees to be a political act. Whether companies intend it or not, consumers increasingly interpret visible shifts in diversity commitments as a statement about what the brand stands for.

## What the Retreat Is Costing

The political climate of 2024 and 2025 prompted a visible wave of DEI rollbacks. Across industries, public commitments made in the wake of 2020 were scaled back, reframed, or removed altogether.

The consequences have not gone unnoticed, and for some brands, they have been measurable. Walmart announced in late 2024 that it would phase out racial equity training, discontinue supplier diversity evaluation programs, and step back from its Center for Racial Equity, a \$100 million philanthropic commitment the company had established just four years earlier.

*In a market where trust now sits alongside price and quality as a driver of purchase, consistency becomes a business advantage, not a branding exercise.*

The backlash was swift: shareholders accused leadership of "bowing to bullying," and advocacy organizations responded by redirecting consumer attention toward brands that had maintained their commitments.

Lowe's disbanded its employee resource groups and withdrew from LGBTQIA+ sponsorships and the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, moves that, combined with similar actions by other home improvement and retail brands, drew sustained criticism from both employees and consumers who had come to expect visible inclusion commitments from the companies they frequented. Tractor Supply, after social media pressure led it to eliminate DEI roles, retire diversity goals, and stop sponsoring Pride events in mid-2024, became a case study in how quickly a brand can shift its public positioning, and how quickly consumers notice.

Ford, which ended its relationship with the Human Rights Campaign and scaled back diversity goals in August 2024, faced similar scrutiny, particularly among employee groups who had championed those programs internally. The broader consumer response to these shifts has been well documented.

A 2025 analysis published in [ScienceDirect](#)<sup>8</sup> examining DEI rollbacks and their implications for brand management found that retreating from inclusion commitments carries measurable risks to consumer trust, brand positioning, and corporate reputation. And that brands perceived as

inconsistent between their stated values and their operational decisions face the steepest credibility challenges.

Chatmeter's analysis provides a broader market signal: customer mentions of discrimination across retail brands increased by an average of 16.5% in 2024 compared to 2023,<sup>9</sup> an emerging reputational threat that tracks almost precisely with the wave of public DEI retreats. As [Helen Shelton, Global Chief Diversity Officer at Finn Partners](#),<sup>10</sup> has stated directly: "You cannot simply create and place ads with diverse consumers on the one hand and then pull your DEI commitment to that consumer sector and not expect backlash."

That said, the picture is not uniform. Some companies that have scaled back or reframed their DEI programs, including McDonald's, which renamed its approach and refocused on inclusion language rather than explicit DEI goals, and IBM, which restructured its supplier diversity focus, have not reported significant consumer-facing consequences, at least not publicly. For organizations primarily serving B2B markets or operating in industries with different consumer expectations, the visibility and reputational dynamics can differ meaningfully from those facing consumer retail brands.

There is no single approach that applies across every organization as companies navigate the genuine legal, cultural, and operational complexity of this moment. What the research does consistently show is that consumers, particularly multicultural and LGBTQIA+ consumers who represent the fastest-growing segments of U.S. purchasing power, are watching brand behavior carefully and making decisions accordingly.

For CX leaders, the more useful question may be less about which position to take publicly and more about whether the customer experience being delivered today is genuinely equitable and inclusive for the full range of customers being served.

According to a [Resume.org survey](#)<sup>11</sup> of 1,000 companies, only 5% have eliminated DEI programs, while 22% are increasing their DEI budgets. This suggests that many businesses continue to view DEI strategies as essential to long-term success, even as external pressures mount.

This is a conversation that is far from over, and how brands respond, in their operations, their hiring, and the experiences they deliver, will continue to shape customer trust and loyalty well into the years ahead.

### DEI as Competitive Architecture

At a moment when many companies were pulling back, Costco took a more decisive stance. In early 2025, its board unanimously urged shareholders to reject an anti-DEI resolution. [The proposal was defeated by a 98% vote](#),<sup>12</sup> marking one of the clearest corporate signals in the broader DEI debate.



Costco's argument was operational. The company told investors that a diverse employee base helps bring originality and creativity to its merchandise offerings and strengthens the experience customers value. Board chair Tony E. James reinforced that position by stating that the company's commitment to inclusion does not mean compromising merit.

“Blind spots in the customer experience show up in churn, negative reviews, and the quiet erosion of loyalty.”

The operational outcomes are hard to ignore. Costco maintains an employee turnover rate of approximately 7%, far below the retail industry average of more than 60%, with more than half of employees staying longer than five years. That is the return on a workforce that feels valued, a customer base that feels understood, and a culture that does not spend energy managing internal disconnect.

Costco is not alone. Apple shareholders also rejected an anti-DEI proposal in 2025, while Microsoft continues to tie inclusion directly to building products that meet customer needs. In Microsoft's [October 2024 Diversity & Inclusion report](#),<sup>13</sup> CEO Satya Nadella wrote, "By actively seeking diversity and embracing inclusion, we ensure our workforce represents the planet we serve, and that the products we build always meet our customers' needs."

For leaders, the signal is clear: in a volatile environment, consistency still carries value.

### DEI Is a CX Performance Strategy

The business case for DEI is supported by years of research connecting diversity and inclusion to better performance, better innovation, and stronger decision-making.

[McKinsey's 2023 Diversity Matters Even More report](#)<sup>14</sup> found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 39% more likely to outperform financially than their bottom-quartile peers. Companies in the top quartile for ethnically diverse boards were

13% more likely to outperform. The report also found, for the first time, that leadership diversity is convincingly associated with greater social impact and more satisfied workforces, outcomes that connect directly to how customers are ultimately served.



Research from the [Boston Consulting Group](#),<sup>15</sup> based on a survey of more than 1,700 companies across eight countries, found that organizations with above-average diversity had 19% higher innovation revenues and 9% higher EBIT margins compared to their less diverse peers. The most diverse companies in the sample attributed 45% of their revenue to innovation versus just 26% for the least diverse, a gap that compounds meaningfully over time. The presence of enabling conditions for diversity, fair employment practices, open communication, and leadership support added up to 12.9 percentage points in innovation revenue alone. These findings represent a consistent pattern across geographies, industries, and company sizes.

A [Harvard Business Review](#) analysis<sup>16</sup> has also reported that diverse teams make better decisions 87% of the time compared to more uniform groups. These findings matter in customer care because the work is becoming more human, not less.

In our own [CX Leaders Trends & Insights](#) research,<sup>17</sup> "active listening," "empathy and emotional IQ," and "problem-solving" were the three most important agent soft skills for the

second consecutive year. These are the capacities that diverse teams, assembled with intention across background, life experience, and cultural perspective, are better positioned to deliver. As our research notes, increased AI adoption is pushing a higher percentage of complex, emotionally sensitive engagements into assisted channels, making the distinctly human qualities of representative agent teams increasingly central to CX outcomes, brand trust, and customer loyalty.

There is also a direct link between employee experience and customer experience. [Gallup](#) research found that [employee engagement](#) reached an 11-year low in 2024,<sup>18</sup> with many workers reporting they felt disconnected from their organization's mission and unsupported by leadership. When agents are disengaged, customers feel it in the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of service.



*The consumers who care most about DEI are not niche audiences. They are a central force in where growth is coming from next.*



Inclusive workplaces help create the sense of belonging and psychological safety that keep employees engaged. And engaged employees show up differently for customers. Our research found that 92% of CX leaders agree that agent passion toward the brands they represent matters to consumers. Employees who feel valued are more likely to convey that authentically.

### **A Practical Roadmap for CX Leaders**

For CX leaders, the path forward is about closing the measurable gaps between what organizations say they value and what customers actually experience.

**Audit the real experience.**

The 18-point gap between leader self-assessment and consumer perception suggests intention is not translating into outcome. Test your journeys through an inclusion lens: Where does the experience break down for non-English speakers? Where do elderly or disabled customers encounter friction? Where do certain groups experience lower resolution or higher abandonment?

**Connect DEI to CX KPIs.**

Segment resolution, abandonment, escalation, and satisfaction data where possible to identify experience gaps that aggregate reporting can hide. As AI handles more routine work, the most vulnerable customers are often the ones most at risk of being underserved by self-service and automation.

**Ground your position in business rationale.**

Costco offers a useful model. Its defense of inclusion was framed around what it delivers: stronger retention, better customer alignment, more innovation, and better business performance. That is a more durable argument than values language alone.

**Build multicultural fluency into service design.**

Invest in multilingual capabilities across human and AI channels. Ensure escalation paths do not punish customers who cannot easily navigate digital tools. Design for the full reality of your customer base, not the simplest version of it.

**Measure honestly.**

Our research shows that only one-third of organizations believe they are using Voice of Customer and QA data productively. Inclusion should be part of how that data is analyzed. Track who is being reached, who is not, and where the experience differs across segments. That is how inclusion becomes operational.

*CX leaders rate their accessibility and inclusion efforts 18 points higher than consumers do.*



2026 CX Leaders Trends & Insights: Corporate Edition Report, Page 13.

## The Competitive Window is Open

This moment has created a rare opening. As some brands pull back, others are making something more visible to the market: what they stand for, who they are building for, and whether customers can trust them to show up with consistency when the environment gets more complicated.

The companies that will emerge strongest are not the ones issuing the loudest statements. They are the ones doing the steadier work of building inclusion into the customer experience itself through representative leadership, accessible design, thoughtful service, and decisions that reflect the people they serve.

In a market where trust now sits alongside price and quality as a driver of purchase, that kind of consistency becomes a business advantage.

**76% of CX leaders say they are doing well on accessibility and inclusion in support, but only 58% of consumers agree.**

The message for leaders is not that every company needs the same playbook. It is that customers, employees, and communities are paying close attention to whether a brand's values still hold when conditions become more difficult. That is the real test.

And right now, the brands that meet it with honesty, substance, and follow-through have an opportunity to pull ahead in ways that may be difficult to replicate later.

The 68% of consumers in our research who say public DEI commitments matter are not waiting on the sidelines. They are already in the market, already making choices, and already deciding which brands feel worthy of their trust. The competitive window is open. The question is which companies will recognize it before it closes.

## Article Links

- 1 <https://execsintheknow.com/knowledge-center/customer-experience-research/cx-leaders-trends-insights/cx-leaders-trends-insights-2026-corporate-edition/>
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# AI Exposes the Blind Spot in Customer Experience Economics

AI is reshaping customer experience economics by exposing the limits of efficiency metrics alone. Learn why outcome alignment, smarter measurement, and stronger operating models matter more than ever.

by Cortney Jonas Burnos, Vice President of AI & Digital, Transcom

## Why outcome alignment has become a strategic imperative

Most organizations are deploying AI in customer experience to reduce cost. By conventional operational measures, it appears to be working. Automation rates are increasing. Handle times are declining. Containment continues to improve. Yet these gains are not translating into business outcomes. Retention remains flat. Cost structures are largely unchanged. Customer experience remains inconsistent.

This is not a technology failure. AI is working as designed. What it is exposing is a misalignment between how customer experience is measured and where it creates value.

Estimates suggest that as many as 85% of AI initiatives fail to deliver expected business value, despite meeting technical or operational targets.

The issue is not performance. It is how performance is defined and how systems are structured around it.

AI is not improving the existing model. It is invalidating it.

AI has changed the distribution of work. The most repeatable interactions are now automated. What remains is more complex, less predictable, and more consequential. Value is no longer distributed across volume; it is concentrated in fewer interactions that carry disproportionate impact on retention, revenue, and long-term customer value.

Most organizations are still managing performance as if that shift has not occurred. As a result, efficiency improves, but outcomes remain flat.



## Efficiency gains are masking economic shifts

The assumption that automation reduces cost is rooted in a linear view of work: automate interactions, reduce volume, and lower expenses. At scale, that relationship breaks.

What changes is not the amount of work, but its distribution.

As repeatable interactions are removed, what remains carries more context, more variability, and more economic consequence. The system becomes less predictable and more sensitive to how those interactions are handled.

The impact is not visible in traditional metrics. It shows up in rework, escalation cycles, and recovery efforts that sit outside the interaction where they originated.

This is not friction at the margins. It is a structural reallocation of cost and risk.

In a global travel operation,<sup>1</sup> this dynamic surfaced not as an efficiency issue, but an economic one. Complex booking errors were driving disproportionate cost and revenue leakage. The resolution was not to process more interactions faster, but to redesign how high-impact interactions were identified and handled. Once addressed, error-related costs dropped from \$200K to \$4K, alongside measurable improvement in revenue performance.

The same pattern appears wherever resolution depends on continuity across systems. In digital retail,<sup>2</sup> automation accelerated the front end of the interaction while leaving resolution incomplete. One organization addressed persistent recontacts by reconnecting fragmented systems and restoring end-to-end visibility across the interaction lifecycle. Customer satisfaction increased by 42%. Total

cost of ownership decreased by 18%.

The system is no longer constrained by volume. It is constrained by how well it handles consequences.

What appears to be efficiency is often cost being deferred, redistributed, or hidden in parts of the system that are harder to measure.

### **As efficiency scales, control fractures**

As systems become more efficient, they become more interdependent and more difficult to control.

AI introduces dependencies across data, workflows, and decision logic that must operate in coordination. It must be aligned simultaneously with customer behavior, operational processes, and business objectives. Most organizations were not designed to operate this way.

The result is not simply increased complexity, but reduced control over how that complexity behaves.



Performance may appear stable in aggregate while becoming volatile at the interaction level. Variability increases where it is hardest to observe and slowest to diagnose. Failures are no longer isolated events. They are the product of misalignment across interconnected systems.

Customers, however, experience the system as continuous. When context breaks between automated and human-assisted interactions, resolution slows and effort multiplies across the system.

Where AI delivers measurable value, the differentiator is not the model itself. It is how the system absorbs it. In one electronics support environment,<sup>3</sup> automation reduced handle time, but performance only stabilized once escalation paths were redesigned so that context carried forward into agent-assisted interactions. Without that alignment, efficiency gains created rework. With it, resolution improved and variability declined.

AI is not introducing instability: it is making it visible.

### Workforce strategies are amplifying the gap

Most workforce models are designed for averages such as volume, handle time, and complexity.

That is not how value is now distributed.

As high-impact interactions become the primary driver of outcomes, performance depends on how consistently those interactions are handled. When workforce design does not adjust, variability increases where it matters most.

The result is not a leaner operation. It is a less controllable one. Resolution becomes less predictable, escalation cycles increase, and experienced agents are pulled into recovery work instead of driving outcomes.



The constraint is no longer capacity. It is capability aligned to where value now sits.

Organizations that adapt do not optimize for average efficiency. They redesign around high-impact interactions, restructuring roles, workflows, and performance expectations to support resolution over throughput. In one case, a technology company<sup>4</sup> shifted its support model toward long-term customer outcomes, improving consistency in resolution and reducing escalation cycles while also driving measurable gains in customer satisfaction. The impact was not driven by doing less work, but by applying effort more precisely where it mattered most.

These systems may appear less efficient on paper. They are more stable in practice.

### Why the operating model must change

Three shifts define the new operating model.

First, organizations must explicitly identify which interactions drive business outcomes. Not all customer contacts are created equal, and managing them as if they are leads to systematic misallocation of resources. High-impact interactions need to be defined, measured



differently, and resourced accordingly. This is not a refinement of segmentation. It is a redefinition of where value is created.

Second, performance measurement must move beyond activity. Efficiency metrics such as handle time, containment, and automation rates remain useful, but they are insufficient as indicators of performance. They measure throughput, not outcomes. Without direct visibility into resolution quality, recontact rates, and customer retention, improvements in efficiency will continue to mask deterioration in business performance.

Third, ownership must be aligned across AI, operations, and workforce strategy. These functions are typically managed independently, which produces local optimization and system-wide inefficiency. Performance in an AI-enabled environment is not the result of any single function. It emerges from how these elements operate together. Without shared ownership, trade-offs are made in isolation and degrade overall system performance.

This fundamentally changes how decisions are evaluated.

Automation, cost, and capacity decisions cannot be assessed independently. Increasing automation improves containment, but if it reduces resolution quality or increases

downstream effort, it degrades performance. Reducing head count improves cost efficiency at the aggregate level, but if it concentrates complexity into a workforce that cannot absorb it, it increases variability and risk where it matters most.

These are not edge cases. They are structural effects.

As a result, performance must be managed as a system, not as a set of independent metrics. Improvements in one area are only meaningful in the context of their impact on others.

Investment decisions follow the same logic. Resources must be directed toward the interactions that drive outcomes, regardless of their share of total volume. This often runs counter to traditional efficiency models, but it reflects where economic value is now concentrated.

The risk is not failure to adopt AI. The risk is adopting it within a model that cannot absorb it, and continuing to optimize metrics that no longer reflect the true value of performance.

### **This is the new reality**

AI is not simply improving customer experience. It is changing what it requires to operate effectively. Customer experience is no longer about managing volume. It is about managing consequences.

Organizations that continue to optimize for efficiency will see improving metrics alongside deteriorating outcomes. Organizations that align their operating models to how value is now created will see a different result.

The shift is already underway. The only question is whether organizations will adjust to it, or continue to optimize a model that no longer reflects how customer experience actually works.

## Article Links

1 <https://transcom.com/case-studies/generating-additional-revenue-and-boosting-performance-with-smartshoring>

2 <https://transcom.com/case-studies/a-brilliant-online-retail-company-transcom-transformed-our-customer-service>

3 <https://transcom.com/case-studies/supercharging-a-global-consumer-electronics-champion-s-customer-service-with-next-gen-ai-case>

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**Cortney Jonas Burnos**  
Vice President of AI & Digital

Cortney Jonas Burnos is the Vice President of AI & Digital at Transcom, a global customer experience company. In her role, she leads the development and deployment of AI that improves customer service outcomes and enables Transcom's global workforce. With a focus on practical innovation, she is helping drive the company's evolution from a traditional BPO to a tech-enabled, people-first customer experience partner. She is also working to launch a CX-focused women's leadership network, expanding her impact beyond organizational transformation to industry-wide empowerment.

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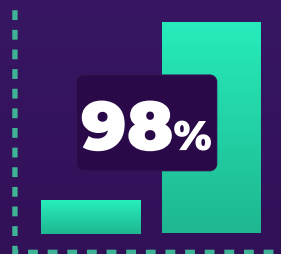
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GRUBHUB

# Beyond the App: Inside the Global Strategy Supporting Grubhub's Courier and Merchant Ecosystem



**Tanisha Parker**  
Associate Director

**GRUBHUB**

Go behind the scenes with Tanisha Parker, Associate Director at Grubhub, to discover how the food delivery giant uses global BPO partnerships and workforce strategy to maintain service reliability at scale.

# CX INSIGHT

APRIL 2026 | Q2 ISSUE

For more than two decades, [Grubhub](#) has helped shape the modern food delivery landscape. What began as one of the earliest online platforms connecting diners with local restaurants has evolved into a vast logistics network serving hundreds of thousands of merchants across thousands of cities. Today, the platform supports a dynamic ecosystem of diners, merchants, and delivery partners; each interaction is powered by a sophisticated operational engine working behind the scenes.

At the center of that engine are the global service teams that support couriers and merchants when something needs attention. Tanisha Parker, Associate Director at Grubhub, leads the strategy and operational governance behind those teams. Her role spans global BPO partnerships, workforce planning, and service performance across multiple regions to ensure the systems supporting Grubhub's marketplace remain scalable, resilient, and customer-focused.

Operating in the fast-moving world of food delivery means the experience must keep pace with constant change. Order volumes fluctuate, logistics evolve, and customer expectations continue to rise. For Parker, maintaining reliability across this environment requires a balance of operational discipline and adaptability; aligning partners, technology, and workforce strategy around clear service standards.

In this Brand Spotlight, Parker shares how Grubhub designs support ecosystems that meet customers where they are, how strong partnerships help maintain consistency at scale, and why removing operational friction (not customer value) is the real path to efficiency. Her perspective offers a behind-the-scenes look at the systems, teams, and leadership principles that help keep one of the industry's most complex service environments running smoothly.





**Efficiency should never come from removing value from the customer experience. The real opportunity is eliminating friction in the operation.**



**Execs In The Know (EITK):** Tell us a bit about your role at Grubhub. What does a typical week look like as you oversee global operations, BPO strategy, and workforce management supporting Courier and Merchant Care?

**Tanisha:** I lead global partner programs for Grubhub, which means I oversee the strategy, governance, and operational performance of the external teams around the world that support our Courier and Merchant Care experiences. Those teams are distributed across several regions and partners, so my role sits at the intersection of operations, workforce strategy, and vendor management.

A typical week involves a lot of cross-functional alignment. I'm working with our internal CX leaders on service strategy, partnering with BPO providers to ensure performance and quality remain strong, and collaborating with the workforce management team to make sure we have the right staffing models in place to support demand.

At the same time, a big part of the role is thinking about the long-term structure of our network. How do we scale effectively? Where should certain workstreams live geographically? How do we balance cost, quality, and resiliency? So, while I'm always managing the day-to-day health of the operation, I'm also constantly designing the next iteration of it all.

**EITK:** As a panelist at CRS, you mentioned that Grubhub's acquisition by Wonder and its relationship with Blue Apron have created an opportunity to unify CX platforms, partnerships, and operating models across brands. From your perspective in global operations, what does it actually take to bring different organizations and different CX cultures together into one cohesive experience?

**Tanisha:** It starts with recognizing that every organization comes with its own history and its own way of serving customers. When companies come together, the goal shouldn't be to erase that overnight. Instead, the work is about identifying the best elements from each environment and designing a shared operating model around them.

From a CX perspective, that means aligning on common standards. Things like service philosophy, quality expectations, escalation frameworks, and how we measure success. Once those guardrails are in place, you can begin to unify technology platforms, workflows, and partner strategies.

What I've learned is that integration is as much about culture as it is about systems. Teams need to understand the "why" behind the changes. When people see how the pieces fit together to create a stronger experience for customers, alignment tends to follow.

**EITK:** You also shared a powerful point: “one size does not fit all” when it comes to customer experience. How do you design service experiences that meet people where they are across different generations, comfort levels with technology, and support preferences?

**Tanisha:** One of the realities of modern customer experience is that people interact with support very differently. Some customers want to solve things instantly through self-service. Others prefer speaking with a human. And both expectations are valid!

Our goal is to design support ecosystems rather than a single support channel. That means building strong digital experiences that include help centers, chat, and automated tools while ensuring that when someone does need human support, they reach a well-equipped, knowledgeable agent quickly.

It’s really about flexibility. The best CX models recognize that the customer chooses the experience, not the company. Our job is to make sure whichever path they take works seamlessly.

**EITK:** Grubhub operates in a fast-moving, high-volume environment. How do you and your team ensure the customer experience stays consistent and reliable for couriers, merchants, and diners across such a complex ecosystem?

**Tanisha:** Consistency in the large ecosystem comes from strong operational discipline. We spend a lot of time defining what “good” looks like. For example, clear performance standards, quality expectations, and escalation protocols that apply across all of our partners and geographies. Equally important is visibility.

We track performance closely through shared reporting and governance frameworks so we can quickly identify where something is working well and where we need to intervene. When you combine those things (clear standards and real-time visibility), you create an environment where teams can move quickly without losing control of the experience.



**The best CX models**

**recognize that the customer**

**chooses the experience, not**

**the company.**





**GRUBHUB**

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**EITK:** You oversee performance and governance across multiple BPO partners. What does a strong partnership look like in that model, and how do you align external teams with Grubhub's standards for service quality and operational excellence?

**Tanisha:** Strong partnerships start with transparency and shared accountability. Our partners aren't simply vendors executing tasks; they're an extension of our organization. That means we operate with common performance scorecards, shared improvement plans, and regular strategic reviews where we look beyond daily metrics to talk about innovation, efficiency, and long-term capacity building.

The best partnerships are collaborative. When something isn't working, we solve it together. When something is working exceptionally well, we replicate it across the network.

**EITK:** Workforce planning is a critical lever in service operations. How do you approach workforce strategy in an environment where demand, order volume, and customer needs can change quickly?

**Tanisha:** Flexibility is essential. In delivery and logistics environments, demand can shift quickly due to seasonality, promotions, weather, or broader market conditions. Our workforce strategy focuses on building a network that can adapt.

That includes geographic diversification, cross-trained teams, and strong forecasting models that allow us to anticipate changes in volume before they hit the operation. When those elements are working together, we can scale up or down while still maintaining service quality.



***Our partners aren't simply vendors executing tasks — they're an extension of our organization.***



**EITK:** Many CX leaders are navigating the balance between efficiency and experience. How do you ensure cost management and operational efficiency never come at the expense of the human experience for merchants and couriers who rely on your teams?

**Tanisha:** Efficiency should never come from removing value from the customer experience. The real opportunity is to eliminate friction in the operation. Technology, workflow design,

and better knowledge systems allow agents to resolve issues faster and with greater confidence.

When we remove unnecessary complexity from the process, we improve both efficiency and experience at the same time. In other words, operational discipline should empower better service, not limit it.



**EITK:** Courier and Merchant Care are unique service environments compared to traditional contact centers. What are some of the biggest differences you see in supporting these audiences, and how has that shaped the way your teams operate?

**Tanisha:** Courier and merchant support operate much closer to real-time logistics than traditional customer care. When a courier contacts us, they're often in the middle of a delivery. When a merchant reaches out, it could be during a busy service window. Because of

that, speed and clarity matter even more. Our teams have to diagnose issues quickly and provide solutions that keep the ecosystem moving.

That urgency has shaped the way we train teams, structure workflows, and design escalation paths. The goal is always to resolve issues in a way that minimizes disruption for everyone involved.



*Technology is most powerful when it supports the human element of service rather than replacing it.*



**EITK:** You've built performance frameworks that guide decision-making at scale. What metrics or signals tell you that the experience is truly working for customers, not just that operations are running smoothly?

**Tanisha:** Operational metrics like handle time, average speed of answer, and service level tell us whether the engine is running efficiently, but they don't nearly tell us the full story. We pay close attention to signals that reflect the customer's actual experience.

That means things like repeat contact rates, repeat order rates, and satisfaction feedback

from couriers and merchants. When those indicators improve alongside operational performance, that's when we know the system is working the way it should

**EITK:** Grubhub operates in a highly dynamic industry where technology and logistics intersect. How is technology helping your teams deliver faster, smarter support while still keeping the experience human?

**Tanisha:** Technology is incredibly powerful when it's used to support the human element of service rather than replace it. Automation can handle simple requests, surface relevant

information to agents, and streamline workflows so that agents spend less time searching for answers and more time helping customers.

While done well, technology removes friction from the process and allows human interactions to focus on empathy, judgment, and problem-solving, which are the things people still do best.

**EITK:** Looking back over your career in global operations and workforce strategy, what experiences have most shaped the way you approach customer experience and operational leadership today?

**Tanisha:** Working across different operational environments has probably shaped my perspective the most. Every organization operates differently, but the core principles of strong operations tend to remain the same: clarity, accountability, and adaptability.

I've also learned that great CX doesn't happen in isolation. It requires alignment across technology, workforce strategy, partner management, and leadership. When those elements move in the same direction, the results are powerful.

**EITK:** What's something about Grubhub's approach to customer support that might surprise people outside the organization?

**Tanisha:** I think people would be surprised by



**When customers order food it feels simple, but behind that moment is an entire ecosystem working together to make it happen.**



just how many people are working behind the scenes to make the experience feel simple. When someone orders food, it feels like a quick digital interaction. But there's an entire ecosystem supporting that moment.

From couriers on the road to merchants preparing means to support teams around the world, making sure issues are resolved quickly if something doesn't go as planned. Our job in operations is to make sure that the system works smoothly for everyone involved. When it does, customers rarely see the complexity behind it. They just experience reliability. And honestly, that's exactly how it should feel.

*Execs In The Know partners with brands that provide outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges faced by today's leading brands.*

*Thank you to Tanisha Parker and the Grubhub team for contributing to this Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.*

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# The Frontline is the Strategy

As AI transforms customer service, the most important CX advantage remains human. This article explores why the frontline is the strategy, and how empowered agents drive trust, loyalty, and better outcomes.

**by Execs In The Know**

Customer experience (CX) transformation does not ultimately succeed in strategy decks, artificial intelligence (AI) pilots, or new technology stacks. It succeeds or fails at the point of human contact. Brands that embrace the understanding that human interactions enable superior CX know that the frontline is the strategy. These brands also recognize the critical balance of using technology to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

While the AI boom and rush to increase automation are reshaping contact center operations, the role of human agents is also transforming. Human interaction plays a vital role in building trust, empathy, confidence, and authentic connection with customers. It empowers employees to navigate complex or emotionally charged situations effectively, ultimately increasing satisfaction and reducing churn.

## The Frontline Matters More Than Ever

Traditional service interactions often place a heavy burden on the customer, requiring them to choose the right channel, wait for help, and repeat information or complete repetitive tasks to get an issue resolved. AI and automation are fundamentally changing this model, with the aim to make experiences faster and more efficient. AI agents are now able to effectively resolve certain contacts that organizations previously tried to deflect, shifting the goal from avoidance to resolution.

**The future of CX is not about choosing between AI and humans. It is about designing the operating model where each does what it does best.**

The result? The scale and bottom-line impacts of AI and automation in CX are unprecedented and expanding rapidly. The shift of contact volume from live channels to virtual assistants is transforming customer care. AI-driven solutions can already solve simple transactional issues with virtual voice and chat assistants using internal and external knowledge bases to deliver personalized customer service.<sup>1</sup>

Another equally dramatic result of the AI boom is the impact on frontline human agents. As automation absorbs routine tasks and transactional interactions, the nature of frontline work is undergoing dramatic change. AI excels at repetitive resolutions, while human agents are masters at high stakes, emotionally complex, and brand-defining interactions. These human exchanges are the mind-over-machine moments that deepen relationships between customers and brands.

Empowered frontline human agents are particularly important when customers need intervention to handle exceptions and recovery. Customers are increasingly judging brands by their service recovery standards.

Turning negative experiences into positive ones is a critical business priority, and research shows just how important it is. According to Qualtrics,<sup>2</sup> when a customer issue is resolved positively, that customer is likely to demonstrate more customer loyalty over time than people who never encountered these issues (service failures). This is known as the Service Recovery Paradox.

Unlike AI, human agents can address service disruptions in three steps with authenticity and empathy.

1. Actively listen to understand the recurring issue/service failure

2. Offer a genuine apology and take ownership without excuse

3. Swiftly resolve the issue, perhaps offering a make-good gesture for the customer's high effort and frustration

When executed effectively, customers leave the interaction with a sense of confidence, a positive emotion, and a resolved issue. They often won't remember the disruption, and the quality of the recovery interaction can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### What Frontline Empowerment Looks Like in Practice

One of the clearest examples of this idea came into focus at CRS Amelia Island when Kevin McDorman, Vice President of Customer Care at Southwest Airlines, took the stage and reframed what transformation really means in customer experience.

In a moment when so many conversations are centered on AI, automation, and modernization, his message was grounding: the real story of CX is still about people. Technology may reshape the environment, but the frontline is where the brand is ultimately experienced, and where strategy either comes to life or falls apart.

McDorman challenged leaders to think differently about the role of the frontline. Too often, organizations treat frontline teams as the final step

in execution, asked to carry out decisions already made elsewhere. But, in practice, the frontline is where friction becomes visible, where customer effort becomes real, and where trust is either strengthened or lost.

Customers do not experience transformation through a roadmap or an org chart. They experience it in the moment they need help, when something goes wrong, or when they are looking for clarity, confidence, and resolution. That is why frontline empowerment is not a support tactic layered onto CX strategy. It is the strategy.

What made the point especially compelling was McDorman's emphasis on empowerment as structure, not chaos. He spoke to the shift from rigid policies and scripts toward guardrails that give employees room to use judgment, empathy, and autonomy in the moments that matter most. That distinction is critical.

In an AI-powered environment where more transactional contacts are handled through automation, the interactions that reach human employees are often the ones that are more emotionally charged, complex, and consequential.



Those moments demand more than compliance. They require discernment, ownership, and the ability to recover trust in real time.

For CX leaders, the takeaway is both simple and urgent: if the future of service is being redesigned around AI, the human role must be elevated with equal intention. Southwest's perspective reinforces a broader truth for the industry: brands will not differentiate solely by how much they automate, but by how well they equip their people to respond when automation reaches its limit.

The frontline is not separate from transformation. It is where transformation is tested, proven, and felt by the customer.



### **The End of Scripts: Why Traditional Structures Fail**

The service recovery model is arguably most effective when it follows an interaction flow as described above, instead of being tightly scripted. Leading organizations use a more conversational approach with this type of interaction.

Agents are trained to follow a series of steps and have the freedom to inject their own personality as they rely on their soft skills. This is just one example of why rigid frontline operating models are becoming outdated.

As AI agents take on the more transactional contacts, human agents are freed up to handle interactions that can strengthen the relationship. Legacy contact center models were not built

to accommodate today's modern technology. Instead, these models train agents to rely on scripts, follow escalation layers, and adhere to strict permissions. These systems slow resolution and undermine trust with customers and employees alike.

**When companies design for an empowered frontline, they can expect better outcomes, stronger cultures, and more memorable customer experiences.**

To integrate AI agents and additional automation tools, leading companies are updating their operating models. A big part of this modernization effort is aimed at giving human agents the flexibility to have more fluid conversations with customers and replace scripts with recommended guardrails or talking points, particularly for tenured agents.



Guardrails set parameters that allow agents to act quickly while staying aligned with brand values. These talking points suggest key messages, important information, and tone for agents to consider during interactions. Employees are empowered to adapt naturally to the conversation and use their judgement as they respond to a customer's unique situation. What better way to handle emotionally charged or complex interactions than with authentic, empathetic, personalized service?

### Empowerment as Infrastructure

As technology advances, human agents become increasingly empowered to take on more important roles as advocates and advisors. Empowerment is not a slogan or catchy phrase; it must be intentionally embedded in the operating model and reinforced through the culture. It becomes part of the organization's infrastructure as both technology and human roles are elevated, along with the critical intersection between them.

A key contributor to frontline empowerment is AI itself. One of the most promising applications of AI in the contact center is as human agent support across the employee journey. From hiring to onboarding and training to taking live contacts to coaching, AI has an important role to play.

**As automation absorbs routine tasks, human agents are left with the moments that are more complex, more emotional, and more brand-defining.**

For example, "Simulation-led agent onboarding and training are helping address the perennial issue of high agent churn. By simulating complex customer scenarios, agents can learn how to handle these situations effectively before encountering them in real life."<sup>3</sup> This type of training builds confidence and increases decision-making authority at the frontline. It helps increase consistency and prepares agents to add more value and contribute to the organization at higher levels.

AI-led training can cover the fundamentals of the human agent's duties, but perhaps more important, its ability to develop, test, and reinforce soft skills is truly unique. Training focused on judgment, empathy, and problem-solving is more important than ever given the human agent's elevated role. AI-led soft skills training offers a safe environment for agents to immerse themselves in role plays, targeted skill development, and real-time personalized feedback, leading to enhanced outcomes for the employee and the organization.

In live environments, human agents can partner with AI as a real-time, steady, consistent source of support during interactions. These systems enable faster, more informed actions tailored to the needs of the agent, the customer, or both while streamlining problem-solving and escalation processes.

AI co-pilots assist with knowledge retrieval, next-best-action guidance, sentiment analysis, and auto-summarization, lightening some aspects of the agents' load and allowing them to focus more on the customer. "Creating a human and AI operating model is essential to positioning AI as a true contact center teammate that complements human agents, enhances performance, and enables seamless collaboration."<sup>4</sup>

## What AI Cannot Replace

Advances in AI are making it increasingly human-like, yet essential human characteristics — judgment, empathy, trust, accountability, and leadership — cannot be replicated at this time. In customer service, ethical decision-making and soft skills are critically important to resolve high-stakes issues and deliver the brand promise. Human agents excel at probing, active listening, voice tone, mirroring, and empathy, particularly when customer emotions are heightened.

In fact, simply interacting with AI can elicit negative emotions for customers. An unproductive interaction with AI can result in “disgust, potentially harming the company’s reputation. Such service failures often limit the use of subsequent services by evoking negative emotions in consumers, such as anger, frustration, and helplessness.” The same likely is true for employees.

Human application of emotional intelligence and empathy to understand a customer’s feelings and resolve the issue is irreplaceable in service interactions. Further, the connections that employees make with customers as well as leaders and colleagues are crucial in deepening relationships, understanding the human experience, and delivering value.

## The frontline is not support to the strategy. The frontline *is* the strategy.

Another key skill reserved for humans is the development, training, and tuning of AI. Human expertise remains central to work that advances AI and makes it more effective. Technology does not become valuable on its own; instead, the value emerges with human guidance, refinement, and governance. Humans have real-world experiences and understanding that AI lacks. Human work is required to improve the quality and accuracy of AI outputs, ultimately making it more useful, relevant, and precise in supporting customers and employees.



### Leading the New Frontline

Leadership will also not be replaced by AI. But, like human agents, it will be reshaped. As technology

continues to advance, it's human capabilities that define how, when, where, and why to use it. This is the future of CX leadership.

With frontline as the strategy and technology as the supporter, leaders must ensure that human agents are willing and able to exhibit sound judgment in ambiguous situations and emotional intelligence and empathy in moments of truth. Leaders need to provide training on context and nuance in complex service scenarios, ensuring that employees build trust and confidence as they deliver the brand promise and strengthen loyalty.

Leaders must clearly understand and communicate that AI will not replace human judgment, but will augment it. The most effective leaders will carry the message that AI is a tool to supplement the core human capabilities, including using active listening, handling nuanced scenarios, demonstrating sensitivity to unique issues, delivering empathy, and employing helpful problem-solving skills. They will champion AI as a powerful enabler that elevates the employee and customer experience. They will lead the human advantage in the AI-powered CX environments of today and the future, preparing for the frontline of 2030 and beyond.

## The Frontline of 2030

The contact center has always been a dynamic space, but the recent mass deployment of AI and automation tools has greatly accelerated change. While new technology implementations, product launches, and process changes will also be part of the mission, looking ahead to 2030 is promising. Ideally, a clearer picture of technology and human roles will have emerged by then; a leveling out of AI deployments may also occur.

From the human agent perspective, the workforce will have higher emotional intelligence and problem-solving capabilities due to increased training and experience with a new contact mix. They will better understand the customer perspective and have stronger skills to handle contactors' mindsets and needs.

AI agent assist and insights will support human agents on every contact and increase agent confidence, experience, and overall performance. Leaders will have addressed the balance between technology and humanity, and the interaction types will be more clearly defined and predictable for employees.

In top-performing organizations, the change in roles and responsibilities of human agents will have altered the entire employee journey. Changes will have been implemented in hiring practices and profiles, compensation structures, onboarding, career pathing, and many aspects of training, coaching, and continuous improvement.

Leading organizations will have made great progress in implementing this new workforce design strategy and culture, and leaders will be monitoring key performance indicators, the employee experience, technology stack, and other operational inputs to address any challenges that arise.

## The Culture of the Empowered Frontline

As the shift to the frontline as the strategy takes shape, organizations that deliver empowered service must design systems that include support for employees in their new roles. A culture of transparency, innovation, psychological safety,

and high performance is an integral part of this transition. With trust in leadership, updated training and development, and strong operational support systems, employees will thrive in this culture of empowerment. And the operational metrics will show it!

Ensuring that the employees that are closest to customers and have a unique understanding of the CX are listened to and nurtured will help ensure targeted support of empowered frontline teams. A new look at the end-to-end employee journey will provide keen insight into where resources should be allocated to gain further improvements and higher performance. Leaders should strive for a culture that is better at caring for the frontline than at caring for customers. It is, in fact, these employees who can make or break key elements of the customer service experience.

The future of CX and, more broadly, leadership, is not about choosing between AI and humans. It's about identifying the intersection and designing the operating model where each does what it does best. When companies design for an empowered frontline, they can expect better outcomes, stronger cultures, and memorable experiences that resonate with customers and employees. The balance of humanity and technology unlocks and unleashes the best capabilities of both, driving scale and sustainable positive impacts.

## Article Links

1 <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/the-contact-center-crossroads-finding-the-right-mix-of-humans-and-ai>

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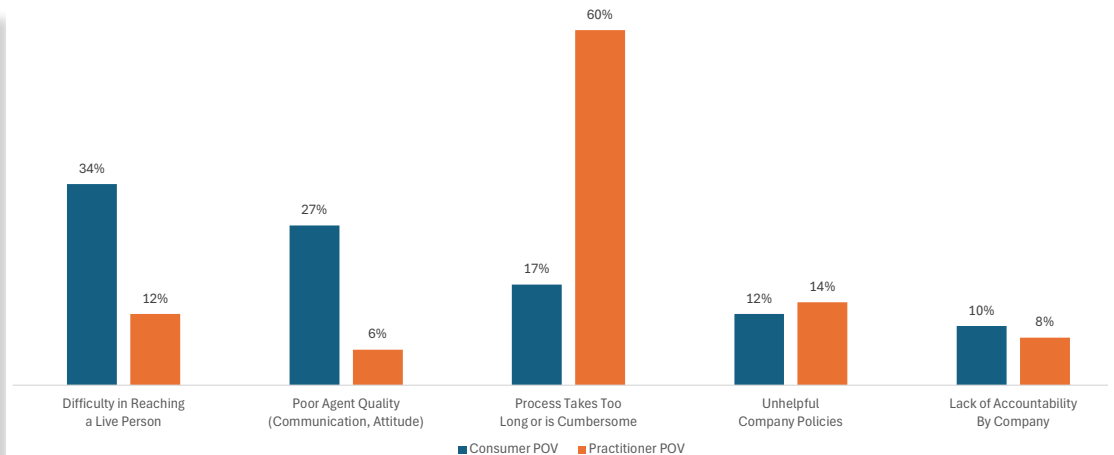
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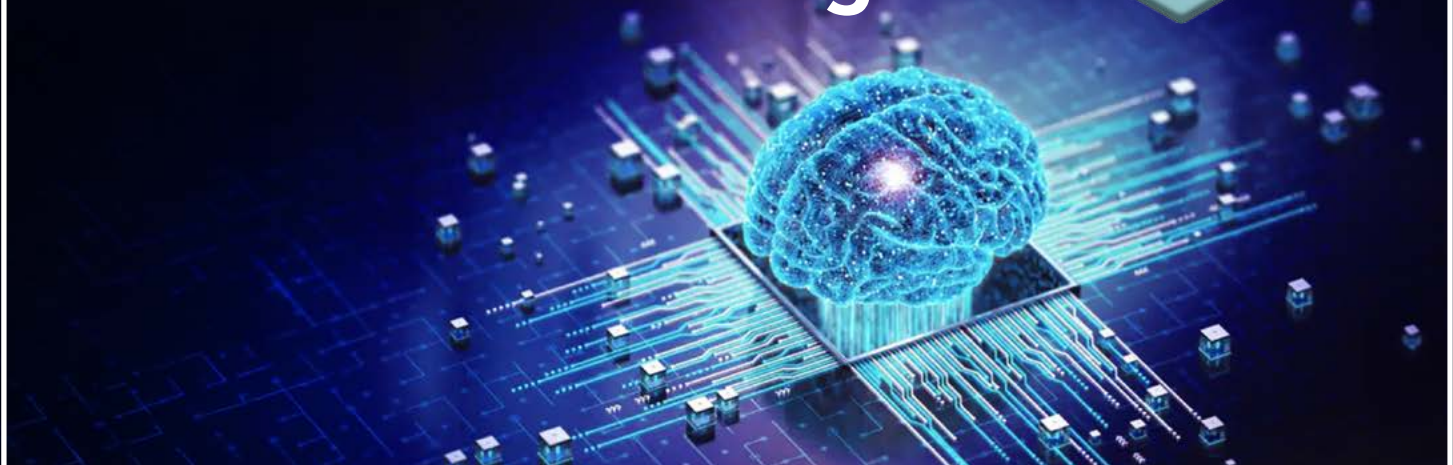
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# The \$1 Trillion Patience Tax

Every bad customer experience carries a real financial cost: churn, repeat contacts, lost loyalty, agent burnout. It rarely shows up cleanly on a P&L; but it quietly erodes revenue, year after year, at a scale the boardroom has never been forced to reckon with.

Somewhere, right now, a customer is on hold for the fourth time this week about the same unresolved billing issue. A patient is re-explaining her symptoms to a third-care coordinator. A small business owner is typing yet another support ticket, hoping this time it lands with someone who has context. Each of these moments feels like a minor operational inconvenience. Individually, they are. Collectively, they represent one of the largest silent drains in the global economy.

According to [Qualtrics XM Institute's November 2024 global analysis](#),<sup>1</sup> based on the 2025 Consumer Trends Report and World Bank consumption data across 23 countries, businesses worldwide risk losing \$3.8 trillion in sales annually due to poor customer experiences. More than half of all bad experiences (53%) result in customers cutting or stopping their spending entirely. What we're dealing with is effectively a patience tax: a levy charged to every organization that makes its customers work too hard, wait too long, or repeat themselves too often.

The cost is real. It is measurable. And, for most organizations, it remains nearly invisible on the books.

**\$3.8T**

Global Sales at Risk  
*Qualtrics XM Institute,  
November 2024*

**5-95%**

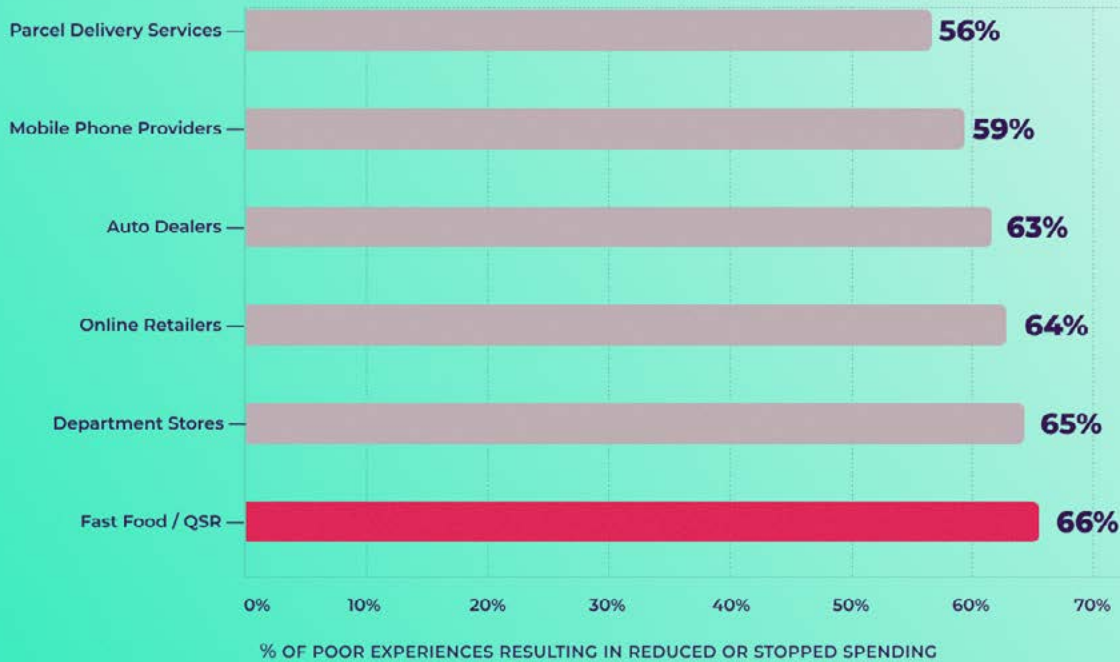
Profit Uplift from 5%  
Retention Gain  
*Bain / Reichheld*

**52%**

Avg Contact Center  
Agent Attrition 2023  
*Deloitte 2024*

### Chart 1: Revenue at Risk by Sector

Industries where switching is easy face the steepest consequences.



Source: Qualtrics XM Institute, November 2024 / 2025 Consumer Trends Report. % of poor interactions after which consumers reduced or stopped spending.

Chart 1: Percentage of poor experiences resulting in reduced or stopped spending, by sector. Verified figures: Fast Food (66%), Department Stores (65%), Online Retailers (64%), Auto Dealers (63%), Mobile Phone Providers (59%), Parcel Delivery (56%). Source: Qualtrics XM Institute, November 2024 / 2025 Consumer Trends Report.

### Why the Tax Is Invisible

Finance teams are extraordinarily good at quantifying what they can see. Cost-per-unit. Overhead per head count. Customer acquisition cost. But the revenue that never arrives, the renewal that didn't happen, the referral that wasn't made, the upsell conversation that was poisoned by a previous service failure, rarely surfaces on a standard P&L. It disappears quietly, categorized nowhere.

This accounting gap is why CX has historically been treated as a cost center rather than a strategic lever. When a customer leaves without explanation, the departure shows up in churn metrics; but the cause, traced back six months to a frustrating experience, is rarely connected to the financial outcome. Qualtrics research reinforces this blind spot:<sup>2</sup> fewer than one in three consumers now provide direct feedback to companies after a bad experience, an all-time low. Customers are simply leaving silently, and businesses discover the revenue loss after the fact.

Illustration 1 — The Invisible P&L Gap: What Gets Measured vs. What Gets Lost

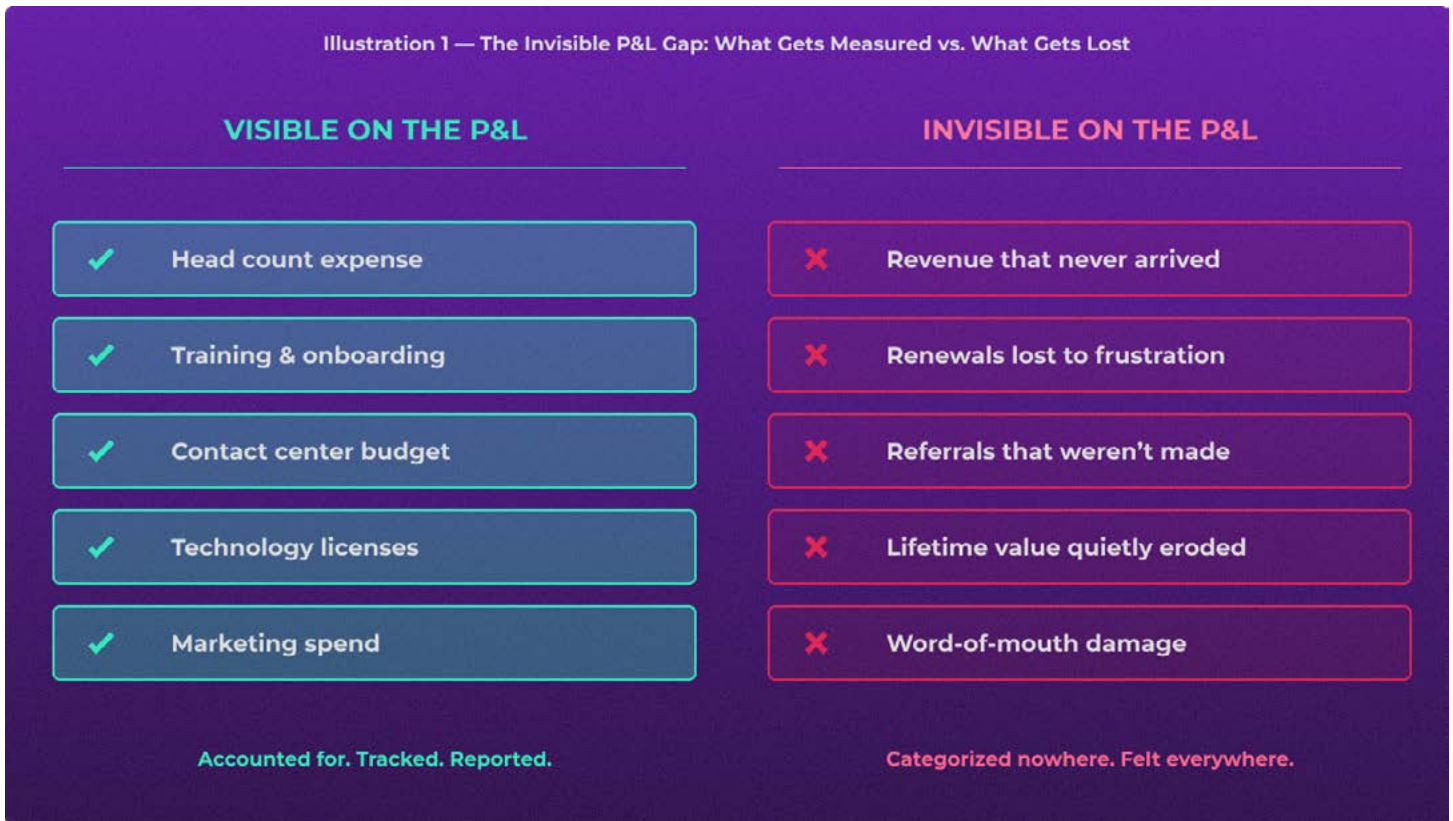


Illustration 1: The Invisible P&L Gap. What organizations measure vs. what quietly erodes their revenue. The right-hand column never appears on a balance sheet.

“The revenue that never arrives, the renewal that didn’t happen, the referral that wasn’t made, disappears quietly, categorized nowhere.”

The contact center budget is perhaps the clearest illustration of this distortion. Organizations consistently optimize for cost reduction in their service operations: fewer agents, shorter handle times, more deflection to self-service. The logic appears rational in isolation. But every time a customer contacts support more than once about the same issue, what the industry calls a “repeat contact,” the cost isn’t just doubled – it’s multiplied by the compounding effect of customer frustration, reduced trust, and elevated churn probability. A customer who contacts support three times about the same issue doesn’t merely cost three times more to serve; they are also significantly more likely to leave, to warn their network, and to never return.

### The Human Variable Nobody Budgets For

The patience tax isn’t only paid by customers. It is paid, with interest, by the people serving them.

Agent burnout in contact centers is one of the most under-analyzed financial risks in service-intensive industries. [Deloitte's 2024 Contact Centre Report](#),<sup>3</sup> which surveyed 600 contact center leaders across five countries, recorded an average agent attrition rate of 52% for 2023, among the highest on record. [Gallup's research](#)<sup>4</sup> puts the cost of replacing each departing worker at 50% to 200% of their annual salary. For a typical front-line agent earning around \$37,000, that translates to between \$18,500 and \$74,000 per departure, before accounting for the institutional knowledge that leaves with them.

This creates a vicious cycle that is as financially devastating as it is operationally obvious. Understaffed teams produce longer wait times. Longer wait times produce angrier customers. Angrier customers make the agent's job harder and more demoralizing. Harder jobs produce more burnout. Burnout produces more attrition. And the cycle repeats, costing the organization at every turn while appearing on the budget only as "head count expense" and "training costs."



*Illustration 2: The Agent Burnout Vicious Cycle. Each link in the chain compounds cost, with no natural stopping point without deliberate structural intervention.*

## The Patience Tax Across Sectors

### Healthcare

In healthcare, patient experience failures carry consequences that extend well beyond revenue, but the financial dimension is consistently overlooked. Poor communication between care teams forces patients to repeat their medical histories at every touchpoint. Opaque billing practices generate call volumes that overwhelm already strained administrative functions. Research published in the *Journal of Healthcare Management*<sup>5</sup> links patient experience scores directly to hospital financial performance: organizations with stronger experience metrics demonstrate higher margins, lower malpractice exposure, and better staff retention.

### Financial Services

Banks and insurers operate in a sector defined by long customer life cycles and high switching inertia, yet they consistently underestimate how much poor service erodes those structural advantages. Research by [Frederick Reichheld of Bain & Company](#),<sup>6</sup> foundational to the field of loyalty economics, demonstrated that a 5% increase in customer retention produces a 25% to 95% increase in profit, depending on the sector. The inverse holds with equal and immediate force.

## Chart 2 — The Retention–Profit Curve: Small Gains, Disproportionate Returns

A 5% increase in retention drives 25–95% profit uplift. The inverse destroys value just as fast.

Source: Bain & Company / Reichheld

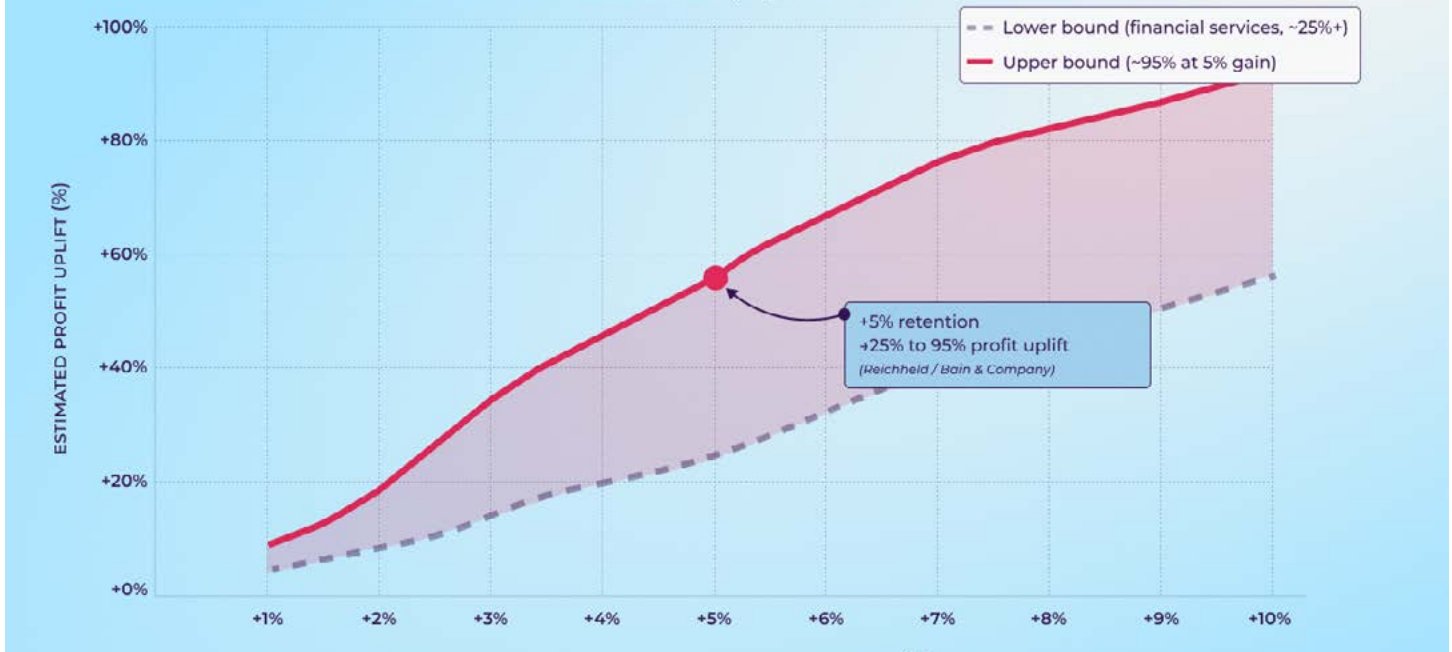


Chart 2: The retention-profit curve. A 5% retention gain drives a 25–95% profit uplift. Source: Frederick Reichheld, Bain & Company, "Prescription for Cutting Costs" (2001); HBR "The Value of Keeping the Right Customers" (2014). Both primary sources verified.

### Retail & E-Commerce

In retail, the patience tax is most acutely visible in the post-purchase experience. [Qualtrics XM Institute data](#)<sup>7</sup> shows online retailers ranking third highest for spending cuts after a bad experience, at 64%, just behind fast food (66%) and department stores (65%). PWC's "Experience Is Everything" study,<sup>8</sup> drawing on 15,000 global respondents, found that 73% of consumers say experience is a key factor in purchasing decisions, and that 32% of customers – nearly one in three – will stop doing business with a brand they love after just one bad experience. The math of customer lifetime value makes each of those departures catastrophic at scale.

### Making It a Boardroom Conversation

The core challenge is one of translation. CX leaders typically speak in the language of NPS

scores, CSAT ratings, and customer effort scores. Finance leaders speak in EBITDA, churn rate, and customer acquisition cost. These vocabularies coexist within the same organization, but rarely interact productively at the strategic level.

Bridging this gap requires building what might be called a CX income statement: a parallel financial model that maps experience quality to revenue outcomes with enough rigor to enter the boardroom conversation. This means connecting specific friction points, deflection failures, abandonment rates, and repeat contacts to measurable downstream financial outcomes. It means tracking the revenue impact of first contact resolution, not just the operational cost savings. It means modeling lifetime value in cohorts defined by experience quality, not just by acquisition channel.

**Illustration 3 — From Service Metric to Boardroom Language**

CX TEAM SPEAKS IN ...	BOARDROOM HEARS ...
NPS dropped eight points this quarter	Retention risk: est. \$2.4M revenue
CSAT at 61% — below 70% target	Churn probability elevated by ~22%
First contact resolution: 64%	36% of contacts cost double — wasted
Avg. handle time up 45 seconds	+\$380K projected annual cost overrun
3,200 repeat contacts / month	~\$190K unrecovered revenue monthly

Same data. Different language.

**Boardrooms respond to revenue — not scores.**

Illustration 3: Translating CX metrics into boardroom language. The same underlying data, reframed as financial risk and quantified revenue opportunity.

“CX leaders speak in CSAT scores. Finance leaders speak in EBITDA. Until these vocabularies converge, the patience tax goes unaddressed.”

- Sarah Jeanneault

Several organizations have begun doing this effectively. The methodology is neither exotic nor technically demanding. What it requires is organizational will: the recognition that the data needed already exists within most businesses, scattered across CRM systems, contact center platforms, billing records, and NPS survey responses. The obstacle is not information; it is integration and interpretation.

**This Is Not a Large-Enterprise Problem**

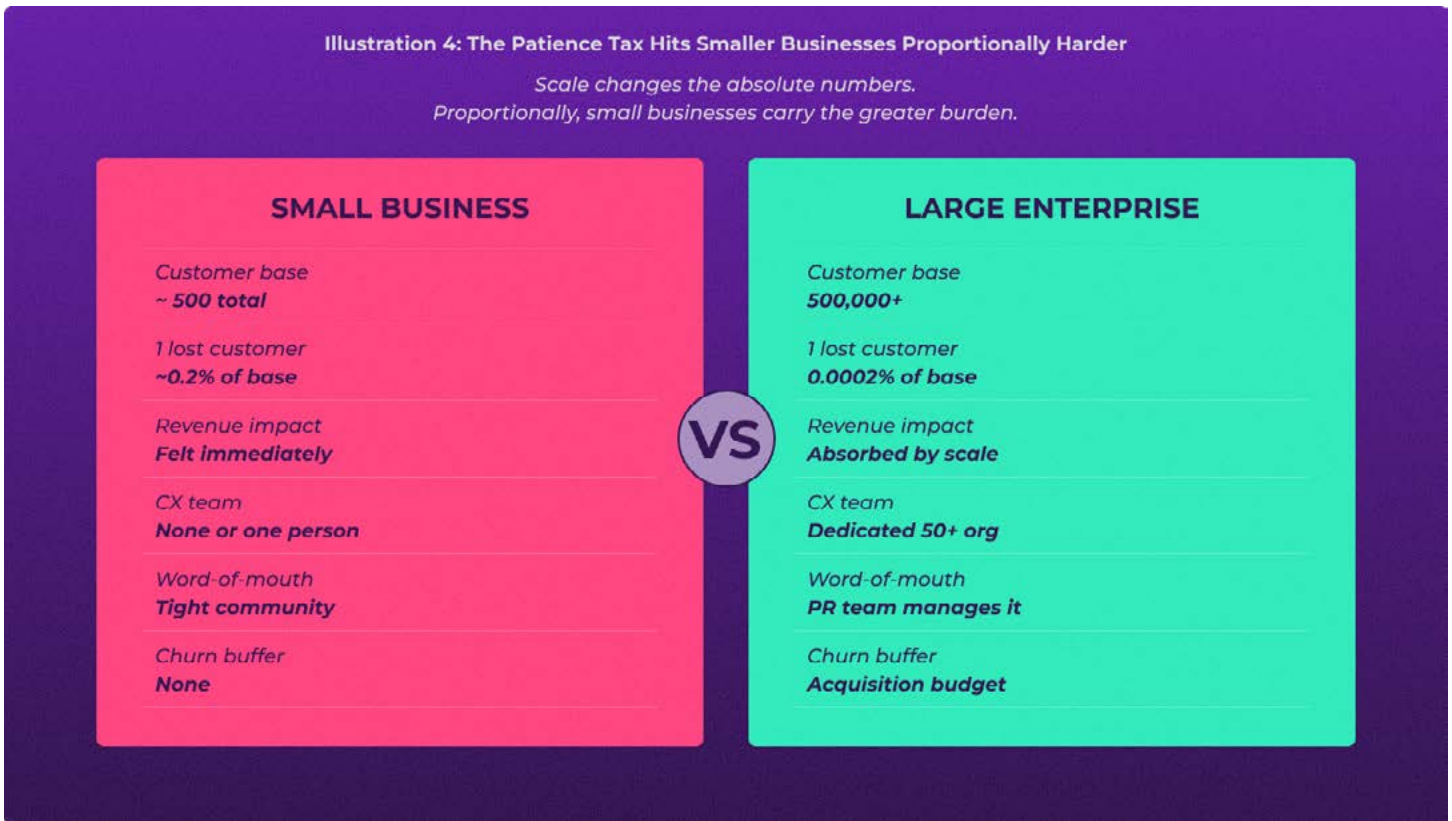
There is a tendency to frame CX investment as a capability reserved for organizations with the budget to build dedicated experience functions, run continuous listening programs, and field

research panels. This is a category error with real consequences.

For small and mid-size businesses, the patience tax is proportionally more damaging, not less. A company with 500 customers cannot absorb churn the way a company with 50,000 can. Every lost customer represents a meaningfully higher share of total revenue. Every negative word-of-mouth moment travels through a smaller, more interconnected community. The structural advantages of personalized service that SMEs theoretically possess are rapidly eroded when the basics, responsiveness, accuracy and follow-through are not consistently delivered.

**Illustration 4: The Patience Tax Hits Smaller Businesses Proportionally Harder**

*Scale changes the absolute numbers.  
Proportionally, small businesses carry the greater burden.*



*Illustration 4: SME vs. Large Enterprise. Scale changes the absolute numbers, but proportionally, the patience tax lands hardest on organizations with the least buffer to absorb it.*

Crucially, the tools needed to begin measuring and managing the patience tax are no longer enterprise-exclusive. CRM platforms, customer feedback tools, and analytics capabilities are accessible at every scale. The discipline required is not technological – it is the willingness to treat experience as a financial variable, not an aspirational brand attribute.

### The Case for Action, In Any Economy

In periods of growth, organizations can absorb the patience tax without noticing rising revenue masks attrition, and acquisition budgets can be deployed to paper over retention failures. In periods of contraction, the mathematics become unforgiving. Cost-cutting pressure falls disproportionately on the service functions most critical to retention, accelerating the erosion precisely when the organization can least afford it.

The most resilient businesses, those that sustain

margin through cycles, tend to share a common characteristic: they treat customer experience not as a function, but as a financial discipline. They understand that every touchpoint either builds or erodes the equity accumulated through years of relationship. They hold CX investment to the same rigor as capital expenditure: with expected returns, measurable outcomes, and accountability to the same leaders who oversee revenue and cost.

As [Isabelle Zdatny, head of Thought Leadership at Qualtrics XM Institute](#), stated:<sup>9</sup> "Leaders can't treat delivering excellent customer experiences as a nice-to-have strategy; it's essential to business success. Poor customer experiences are eroding loyalty and costing businesses real revenue today, showing up in quarterly results. The organizations that survive economic uncertainty will be the ones that prioritize customer experience as a buffer against financial risk."

The trillion-dollar patience tax is not a fixed cost of doing business. It is a recoverable one. The organizations that reclaim it will do so not by trying harder to make customers happy, but by being rigorous enough to understand exactly what unhappiness costs them, and disciplined enough to treat that understanding as strategic intelligence.

The boardroom conversation has been waiting. The data to have it has been waiting longer. The question is whether anyone is willing to do the arithmetic.

## Article Links

1 <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/news/bad-customer-experiences-put-nearly-4-trillion-at-risk-in-global-sales/>

2 <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/news/businesses-risk-3-trillion-sales-poor-customer-experiences-consumers-cut-spending/>

3 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e9491b0c2923c644bacc529/t/679bf01a1a47d0788fc264ea/1738272798277/Deloitte+2024+Contact+Center+Report.pdf>

4 <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/247391/fixable-problem-costs-businesses-trillion.aspx>

5 <https://journals.lww.com/jhmonline/pages/default.aspx>

6 [https://media.bain.com/Images/BB\\_Prescription\\_cutting\\_costs.pdf](https://media.bain.com/Images/BB_Prescription_cutting_costs.pdf)

7 <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/customer-experience/trillion-sales-at-risk-2025/>

8 <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html>

9 <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/news/businesses-risk-3-trillion-sales-poor-customer-experiences-consumers-cut-spending/>

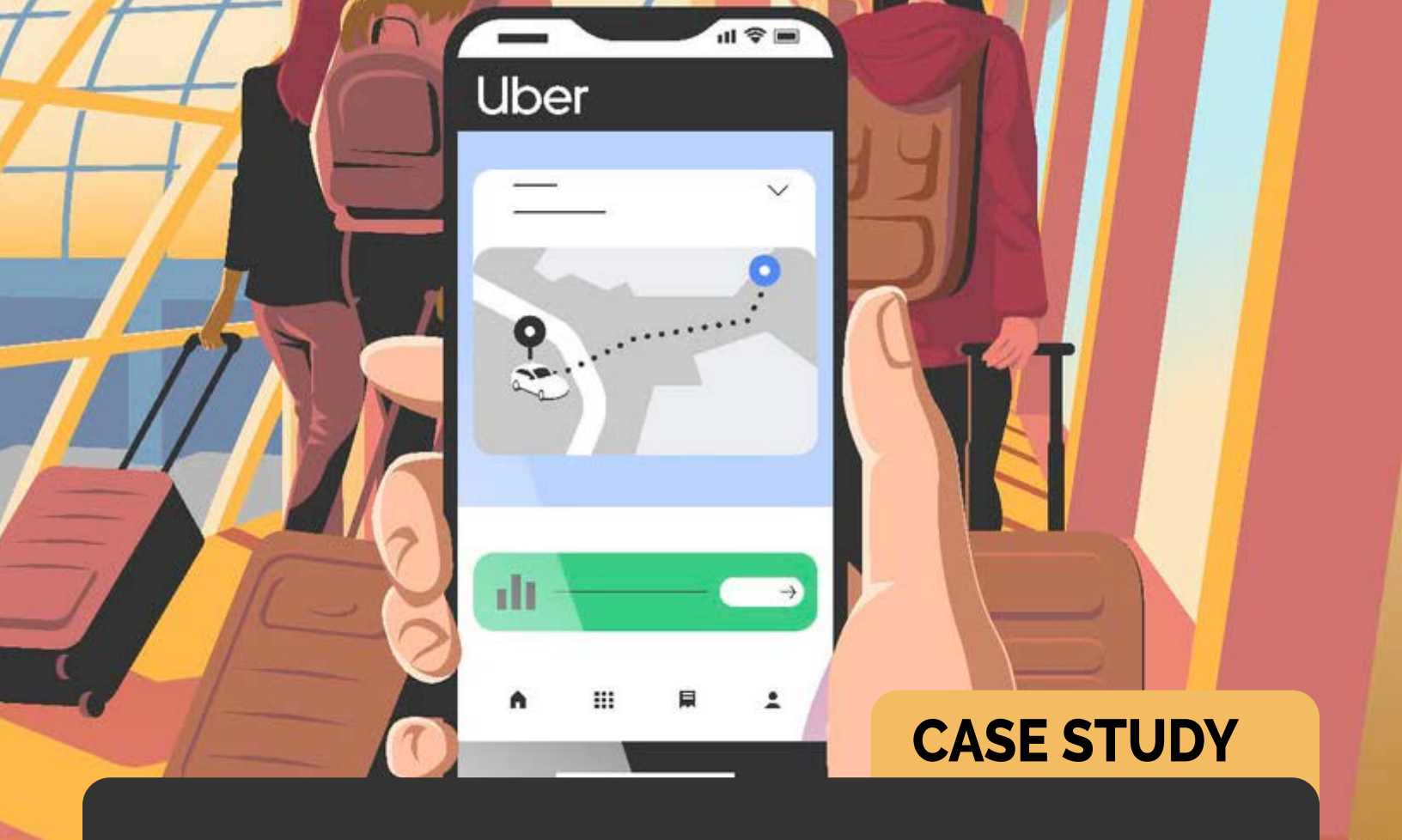


**Sarah Jeanneault**  
VP Marketing

Sarah brings over 20 years of experience leading growth-focused strategies and building customer-centric ecosystems that drive revenue, strengthen engagement, and increase long-term value. She has guided teams across startups and enterprises to achieve multi-million-dollar growth. Outside of work, Sarah enjoys skiing, biking, trail running, gardening, and baking sourdough bread.

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## CASE STUDY

# From Feedback Gaps to Predictive Insight: *Uber's Digital CX Evolution*

A real-world look at how Uber is using AI to uncover hidden customer signals, improve support quality, and build a more proactive digital experience on a global scale.

by Anindya Sundar Das, Senior Director, Head of Global Digital Experience at Uber

Uber's Global Digital Experience team deployed an AI engine that infers customer satisfaction across every support interaction, not just the small fraction who complete surveys. Structured around three core metrics (Resolution, Effort, Sentiment), the model transforms scattered interaction data into a real-time quality signal, enabling proactive improvement at global scale.

# Digital Experience at the Center of Support Strategy

The Global Digital Experience team serves as the strategic bridge between Customer Support Operations and Tech teams. We operate at the intersection of innovation and execution, ensuring that our support technology stack is not only world-class but purpose-built to drive both a superior customer journey and operational excellence.

## Our mandate is twofold:

- We collaborate directly with Product teams to architect high-impact solutions that elevate the user experience and enhance support efficiency.
- We oversee the end-to-end deployment of these technologies across all global markets. By aligning product capabilities with local market needs, we ensure we are maximizing our ROI and capturing the full commercial value of our Digital investments.

In short, we transform technological potential into exceptional customer support experiences on a global scale.

## CHALLENGE

### The Feedback Gap

Historically, we were limited by the “feedback gap” – only seeing customer satisfaction feedback from a small percentage of customers who chose to fill out a feedback survey after the actual interaction. To support operational excellence, we have launched an AI engine that analyzes every customer interaction in real time to help predict customer satisfaction with the interactions and uncover hidden insights. It’s a new way to evaluate the quality of our customer support.

At the core of our mission is a commitment to turning friction into loyalty. When a customer reaches out, it represents a moment of truth, an opportunity to rectify a disruption in their journey.



*At the core of our mission is a commitment to turning friction into loyalty.*



## SOLUTION

### An AI Model Built on Three Pillars

Our new AI model solves this by inferring satisfaction scores across all the interactions, effectively unveiling deep-tier insights even when a customer provides no explicit feedback. By proactively identifying where an experience would have fallen short of our standards, we are no longer just reacting to problems; we now have the ability to capture the intelligence necessary to take corrective action and systematically engineer a superior support experience for the future.

Our strategic approach to these interactions is built on three pillars: Resolution, Effort, and Sentiment. We designed the AI model around these three pillars:

RESOLUTION	EFFORT	SENTIMENT
<p>This is our primary goal. We are solving the problem the customer approached us for. We measure our success by our ability to definitively settle the customer’s issue and make things right.</p>	<p>Getting the resolution should be easy for the customer. We leverage the AI model to quantify the customer’s effort score, ensuring the path to a solution is as frictionless and intuitive as possible.</p>	<p>Our goal is to create a positive delta. We analyze the shift in customer emotion from the start of an interaction to its conclusion, ensuring they leave the experience more confident in our brand than when they arrived.</p>

To achieve this, we synthesize a lot of data: examples include transactional telemetry (real-time trip and order data) and conversational intelligence (interaction logs, turn count, and tone of expression). We gain a holistic view of the customer’s needs by combining these. The deep integration of these data points allows us to make informed, empathetic decisions at scale, transforming every support touchpoint into a driver of long-term value.

*“We are no longer just reacting to problems. We now have the ability to capture the intelligence necessary to take corrective action and systematically engineer a superior support experience for the future.”*



## EXECUTION

## Cross-Functional Build, Hard-Won Lessons

This initiative required strategic alignment and deep, iterative collaboration across various parts of the organization to ensure it translates into something usable and actionable. We partnered extensively with our Data Science and Analytics teams to define Resolution, Effort, and Sentiment. This wasn't just about math; it was about ensuring our definitions captured the nuanced insights necessary to empower our global operations.

The Product and Design teams had to create an architecture that is usable by human managers today but will also seamlessly bridge to an AI-driven future support ecosystem. It is important to ensure that these insights are surfaced intuitively across all platforms, creating a unified feedback loop for continuous improvement. Our Operations teams conducted extensive testing and evaluations to stress-test the product. This ground-level validation ensures that the accuracy of model outputs meets our high standards for real-world applications.

There were indeed many learnings. While we entered the initiative having dealt with years of CSAT data, we quickly discovered that traditional surveys only scratch the surface of true customer sentiment. As we peeled back the layers to define more sophisticated metrics and sub-metrics, we uncovered a level of nuance that our legacy CSAT simply couldn't capture. Each iteration didn't just move the needle; it fundamentally hardened our infrastructure and made our solutions more robust.

Aligning diverse stakeholders on a single, "composite" definition of customer satisfaction required a lot of iterations. We debated how disparate data points, from resolution speed to emotional tone, should be weighted and integrated into a meaningful KPI. In an environment as vast as ours, spanning multiple business lines, languages, and global markets, "evaluation" was incredibly demanding. Teaching the AI not just that it failed, but why it failed within a specific cultural or operational context, required a lot of effort.

Every challenge we've encountered has served as a step for improvement. We are emerging from this process with a more sophisticated understanding of our customers and a more resilient platform. In the world of AI, the friction of today is the fuel for the breakthroughs of tomorrow.



*In the world of AI, the friction of today is the fuel for the breakthroughs of tomorrow.*





## IMPACT

## What Changed and What's Ahead

This initiative is a critical catalyst for our next phase of growth, delivering two distinct benefits:

- 1** We are moving beyond anecdotal feedback to a robust, data-driven engine. We can now identify systemic friction points across our product interactions and support policies with unprecedented scale. This allows us to prioritize high-impact optimizations that move the needle for our customers.
- 2** As we pivot from the world of legacy RPA to a dynamic, conversational AI ecosystem, we solved a fundamental challenge of comparability. This intuitive insights layer allows us to normalize performance metrics across diverse technologies. For the first time, we can effectively “compare apples to oranges,” giving us a unified view of customer support efficacy regardless of the underlying tech.

In effect, this initiative accelerates our velocity of innovation, helping us deploy solutions faster and with higher confidence, ensuring that every advancement in our support technology translates directly into a more seamless, superior experience for our customers.

AI is transitioning from a supporting tool to becoming the bedrock of our customer support systems. At our scale, AI provides a level of operational sophistication that was previously unattainable. It is not constrained by scope related to geography, product or issue categories, or even languages. AI models can ingest disparate, high-volume data streams – stitching together transactional history, real-time telemetry, and natural language conversations – to render complex decisions quickly. We are effectively transforming scattered data into seamless customer journeys. The AI architecture provides superior depth in decision logic. It can articulate the why behind a resolution with greater detail than human-led processes.

# What's Next for Digital Experience at Global Scale

In the medium term, AI should be able to remove the traditional trade-offs between scale and personalization, creating a possibility of leveraging AI to deliver a gold-standard experience for every user, on every continent, every time. However, the AI trajectory points toward a paradigm shift in the longer-term future in how we serve our customers.

There are at least three ways in which this could manifest:

- 1 Anticipatory:** The world would move in a direction that is dynamic, predictive, and proactive. We won't just wait for a customer to report a friction point; we will identify and neutralize it before the user even feels the impact.
- 2 Seamless:** Through radical transparency and automated intelligence, we would strive for a near-zero-click support environment. Efficiency will no longer be just about a faster conversation; it will be about eliminating the need for the conversation entirely.
- 3 Trusted:** Ultimately, this shift should allow businesses to evolve customer interactions from a series of problem-solving transactions into an act of building trust.



The technology is in a phase of rapid evolution, but the insights we gather through experimentation today will define the market-leading solutions of tomorrow. The applications for AI in the CX context can be many. It can be deployed to identify opportunities and coach human customer support agents in real time, to make high-integrity independent decisions about customer problems, to audit decision accuracy and predict customer satisfaction, or to identify root-cause improvements to build a more robust, future-proof support architecture.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

This is a frontier technology, evolving at a rapid pace. Evaluating, training, and deploying these models is non-trivial. However, AI is much like a high-potential prodigy. It requires rigorous attention, structured support, and constant refinement. If we commit to nurturing this capability with the right resources and focus, it will mature into a competitive advantage that transforms our businesses. The goal isn't to be perfect on day one; it's to be better every single day thereafter.



## About the Author

Anindya Sundar Das is a global business and technology leader with over 20 years of experience driving operational transformation and AI-driven innovation across multiple continents. Currently serving as Senior Director and Head of Global Digital Experience at Uber, Anindya is a recognized pioneer in automation and Generative AI, having delivered massive impact through globalization and scaling of advanced Gen AI and automation platforms. Recognized in the "Who's Who in the U.S. in Tech," he has previously been COO at CK Birla Healthcare and Business Head at Orient Electric. A double-medalist and top-ranked scholar with a career marked by prestigious accolades, he was formerly Associate Principal at McKinsey & Co., leading major transformations for global automotive and mining organizations.



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**Execs In The Know**



# How Carrier Enterprise is Balancing AI and Human Connection in CX



**Michael Luyster**

Director, Customer Experience



Explore why customer choice, consistency, and trust matter more than ever in today's service experience.

*by Execs In The Know*

CX leaders face rising pressure to deliver service that is fast, dependable, and still deeply human. As expectations rise, the challenge goes beyond more channels and faster responses. It's about making every interaction easier, more consistent, and more trustworthy using technology to strengthen relationships, not weaken them.

In this KIA Spotlight, Michael Luyster, Director of Customer Experience at Carrier Enterprise, offers a practical view on balancing AI and human expertise. He discusses blending technology and people to support customers across a complex service network. This conversation explores building strategies grounded in trust and customer choice, showing how to evolve service without losing the essential human touch.

**Execs In The Know (EITK):** As Director of Customer Experience at Carrier Enterprise (CE), how do you define great customer experience in a business where reliability, responsiveness, and trusted relationships matter so much?

**Michael:** Great customer experience means making it easy to do business with us. As a customer-first organization, we listen to evolving needs and invest in the right tools and solutions. It's not just about systems. It's about trust. When contractors engage or interact vs call, they want reliability, responsiveness, and support to help them grow. That is our foundation.

Service Express is an example of the commitment to our customers. With this last-mile service offering, customers can select DoorDash for same-day delivery through our online ordering, or opt for curbside pickup via our mobile app. We've built a platform powered by people and technology that they have come to trust and rely on when on the road or at a customer's home.

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**Great customer experience starts with making it easy to do business with us.**



**EITK:** Your role brings together customer experience transformation, digital innovation, and augmented intelligence. How are you balancing technology and human connection to improve the customer journey?

**Michael:** We've built a hybrid strategy that blends automation, AI, and human expertise. Customers choose their preferred engagement. Some inquiries are suited to AI-driven support; others require a person. We always include a human, so customers can rely on technology or request expertise. The interaction adapts to whatever support level they need.

**EITK:** Carrier Enterprise serves customers across a wide geographic footprint and a large branch network. How do you and your team work to create a more consistent and dependable experience across so many locations and markets?

**Michael:** In 2021, we created a unified live chat support team that had previously been managed by separate regions. As our HVAC contractors grew their businesses and expanded across multiple regions, we recognized they needed a more consistent, dedicated support function rather than a different experience depending on where they were calling. Our approach is continuous assessment, evaluation, and iteration to stay current and accurate. We measure Voice of Customer (VOC) and Voice of Employee (VOE) data, and that feedback loop is what drives meaningful improvements across the entire enterprise. This model provides our contractor customers with the maximum possible support coverage, available online any time or mobile app 7am/5pm regardless of time zone, as well as support in CE's approximately 200 locations across the U.S.

**CHAT WITH US!**



**EITK:** What does your customer experience team focus on most today, and where do you see the biggest opportunity to make an impact for both customers and the business?

**Michael:** Our CX team manages a broad set of high-impact activities: new account setup and onboarding, eCommerce order support, specialty account management for high-value or complex accounts, and warranty support, including exception resolution and training. The biggest opportunity ahead is the strategic implementation of AI across our CX functions. AI-driven support, virtual assistants, and predictive analytics can enable personalized service across millions of interactions, but only if we deploy them in a purposeful, customer-centric way that keeps the human element at the center of our strategy.

The greatest opportunity to improve customer satisfaction and business performance at CE is to strategically implement an AI program across advanced CX functions and the organization. Deploying AI purposefully and with customer focus lets us address diverse needs at scale. AI-driven support, virtual assistants, and predictive analytics enable personalized service for millions while keeping the human element central to our strategy.

**EITK:** In an industry like HVAC, where timing and service can be critical, what are customers expecting most from CE right now, and how is your team evolving to meet those expectations?

**Michael:** Customers expect immediacy and seamless first-contact resolution. And here's what's really changed: they no longer compare us to other HVAC distributors. They benchmark us against the best service experience they've had in any industry.

That sets the standard. We're meeting it in three ways: by integrating advanced AI, reinforcing technical expertise, and constantly refining service processes. These steps ensure we deliver the speed and quality customers expect everywhere.



**EITK:** How are you thinking about the relationship between technology and human contact center agents, and what does the right balance look like at CE?

**Michael:** When evaluating the relationship between technology and human CX associates at CE, the objective is to achieve a balance that capitalizes on the strengths of both. Technology, especially AI-driven tools, can efficiently manage routine activities like processing pre-qualifying information, routing inquiries, and analyzing customer sentiment.

That frees our agents to focus on the more complex or intricate matters that demand

emotional understanding, nuanced judgment, and real problem-solving. We identify low-risk AI interactions through direct customer feedback, while more complex issues still rely on our team's historical, intuitive knowledge and greater analytical skills.

But, regardless of how much technology is involved, the customer can always reach a human. That's non-negotiable. The HVAC industry is rooted in personal, authentic relationships; striking the right balance between technology and our people is crucial to maintaining trust in those relationships.



***They no longer compare us to other HVAC distributors. They benchmark us against the best service experience they've had in any industry.***



**EITK:** As technology continues to reshape service, where do you see human Customer Experience Advocates adding the most value in the customer experience?

**Michael:** Our team has embraced the understanding that AI is not primarily a cost-reduction tool. Deploying AI will likely require us to increase head count and invest in upskilling

and training to teach the system, measure its performance, audit its outputs, and continuously enhance the AI experience.

Many associates remain on the front line because they value direct customer contact, and so do our customers. Customers can choose not to use AI or automation. Honoring this choice completes our customer-first approach.

**EITK:** How does the contact center support the broader CE brand experience, and what role does it play in building customer trust and long-term loyalty?

**Michael:** Rather than a traditional contact center model, our CX team takes a more dynamic, comprehensive approach to supporting our customers across every channel, leveraging a robust suite of digital solutions, tools, and resources to meet their daily business needs.

Our mobile app, "CE HVAC Pro+," gives customers in the field instant access to everything they need, including System builder, order management, warranty support, live chat, Service Express, and technical product assistance via our Wingman link. This ensures our customers are never without the support they need, wherever they are.

We build relationships with intention. Every interaction has purpose. Partner+ customers in CE Rewards get elevated access and top-tier support. We recognize their commitment through our partnership, products, and resources. This personalized service builds loyalty and long-term trust.



***But, regardless of how much technology is involved, the customer always has the option to reach a human. That's non-negotiable.***



**EITK:** You have a background spanning advertising, marketing, sales, and CX strategy. How has that cross-functional experience shaped the way you lead customer experience today?

**Michael:** That diverse background built a curiosity in me to understand the customer's entire business and goals, not just the service interaction. It's helped me break down organizational silos and take a holistic view of the customer journey, which is essential for empathetic, data-driven decision-making.



When advertising, marketing, sales, and CX teams collaborate seamlessly, you get a unified experience that not only meets, but anticipates, customer needs.

Treating CX as a companywide responsibility, not a department, is what makes that possible.

**EITK:** When you think about the strongest customer-centered cultures, what does that look like inside CE, and how are you helping build that mindset across teams?

**Michael:** The strongest customer-centered cultures start from the inside out, and that means actively involving the teams who engage with customers every single day. Those frontline voices carry invaluable insight, and building a culture that listens to them is just as important as listening to customers directly.

To build that mindset across teams, we focus on several key pillars:

-  **Voice of the Customer (VoC) Events:** Hosting dedicated sessions where customer feedback, accolades, pain points, and patterns are brought to the forefront. These events create shared ownership of the customer experience across teams, not just within CE.
-  **Active Feedback Loops:** Continuously capturing and elevating customer feedback, both praise and friction, so teams can learn in real time and course-correct quickly.

- ✓ **Marketing Journey Insights:** Leveraging marketing journeys as a data source to better understand customer behavior, intent, and sentiment, providing a fuller picture of the customer experience end-to-end.
- ✓ **Human-in-the-Loop AI Engagement:** Ensuring that every AI-driven customer interaction has a human oversight layer. This is not just a quality safeguard; it is a trust safeguard. Customers deserve to know there is accountability behind every touchpoint.
- ✓ **Continuous Learning Culture:** Embedding a mindset of ongoing education and curiosity, so teams are always evolving their understanding of who our customers are and what they need.

Regarding AI specifically, it is worth noting that not all customers have a bias against it. In fact, for certain sensitive situations where a customer may fear embarrassment or judgment from a human interaction, AI can offer something uniquely valuable: an anonymous, consistent, and safe space to get solutions, resources, and support. Protecting the customer's dignity and concern is part of the experience, and AI, when deployed thoughtfully with human oversight, can be a powerful tool to do exactly that.



**EITK:** What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned about leading CX transformation, especially when driving change across people, processes, and technology?

**Michael:** We're at a pivotal moment where we have to learn to protect our uniquely human strengths while embracing the inevitability of AI. It's not new, and it's not coming. It's here. So, our focus must shift from "if" to "how" – ensuring that coexistence with AI enhances rather than diminishes our human nature.

Our responsibility as leaders is to steer this integration thoughtfully within our organizations. A prior colleague shared insight that stuck with me: AI should function as a supportive collaborator rather than a commanding authority, a silent partner that offers assistance only when requested. My team has embraced this concept. AI isn't about cutting costs. It's about augmenting what we do. Especially, for the people on our team who thrive on direct customer interaction, that's not going away. Customers have the right to choose a human, and we respect that fully.



***AI isn't about cutting costs.  
It's about augmenting what we do.***



**EITK:** Looking ahead, what excites you most about the future of customer experience at CE, and where do you believe your team can continue raising the bar?

**Michael:** The most exciting thing is the opportunity to reimagine how we support both our customers and our internal associates. By grounding every initiative in a people-first culture and positioning AI and automation as supportive collaborators, we can build a service model that's both highly personalized and exceptionally efficient.

We're working toward a choice-driven approach where every interaction begins with a clear, respectful invitation for the customer to choose

the level of AI involvement, and intelligent routing delivers that experience without friction.

Trust and comfort are the pillars. The customer and the associate must feel confident that technology is honoring their relationship, not diminishing it. To raise the bar, we're empowering associates with real-time analytics, knowledge-based integration, and AI-driven recommendations that enable faster, more personalized resolutions.

The result is an environment where trust, collaboration, and a shared mindset define every interaction, and where both customers and associates thrive together.



# Upgrading How We Support You with AI

**EITK:** As a member of the KIA Community, what value have you gained from being part of a peer network of customer experience leaders, and how has that shaped your thinking or approach?

**Michael:** The KIA Community has been a space that reduces the isolation that comes with leadership. It's a sounding board for validating strategies, a way to access the best practices quickly, and a genuine network of people who share knowledge and care about each other's growth.

It's shifted my thinking from reactionary problem-solving to proactive, strategic leadership. Having a judgment-free setting where you can share challenges and leverage shared experiences is rare, and it's made a real difference for me. I also see how I can lend my knowledge and expertise to support others at any stage of their journey.



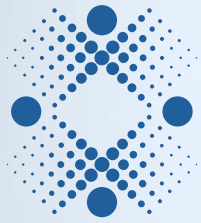
**We're at a pivotal moment where we have to learn to protect our uniquely human strengths while embracing the inevitability of AI.**



*Thank you to Michael for his leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Michael or participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the "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.*

*Want to learn more about the KIA Community? [Click here.](#)*

*Interested in being featured in a future KIA Spotlight? [Visit our Get Involved page.](#)*



# KIA

## Join the Online Community Built for CX Leaders

The Know It All (KIA) online community is a private, trusted network for corporate customer experience professionals.

Free to Join

No Dues

1,400+ Members

### In KIA, you'll find:

- Peer-led discussions with CX leaders
- A vendor free environment with no vendors or business partners
- Year-round connection with the community beyond events

For me, what sets the KIA community apart is the opportunity to network with experienced CX leaders who are very willing to collaborate and share real-world insights. That peer learning has helped me cut through the noise, validate our direction, and make smarter, more confident decisions in an ever-evolving CX and technical landscape. I'd recommend it to other CX leaders looking for perspective, credibility, and real-world guidance.

-**Dari Damazo** | Sr. Vice President of Support Services | Atlanticus

Questions? Contact our Digital Community Manager,  
Tyler Ainge at [tyler@execsintheknow.com](mailto:tyler@execsintheknow.com)

Request to Join KIA



# KIA Champions Program



The Know It All (KIA) Champions Program recognizes select CX leaders who contribute to the community by sharing expertise, leading discussions, and helping shape the future of customer experience.



**Diane Haluszka**  
Associate Director, Performance  
Excellence Internal Operations  
Novartis



**Jessica Patel**  
Senior Director, Customer  
Experience  
Belk



**James Glover**  
Vice President of Customer  
Experience & Quality  
CHEP



**Stephanie Stafford**  
Senior Director, Customer  
Experience  
YETI



**Daniel McFadden**  
Customer Success Manager  
Par, Inc.



**David Zimmerman**  
Director of Customer Experience  
QVC



**Michael Luyster**  
Director, Customer Experience  
Carrier Enterprise



**Amanda Sherry**  
Director, Guest Care  
Panera Bread



It is a privilege to belong to the Know It All community; the leaders arrived exactly when I needed them. They helped me turn the impossible into reality by supporting me on a project in which I had little expertise and was starting from scratch. I am grateful to be a part of a group of leaders who graciously share their knowledge.

**-Michael Luyster** | Director, Customer Experience | Carrier Enterprise

## Expert Network

This curated group of respected CX leaders with deep expertise and proven experience is available exclusively to KIA members, serving as a trusted resource for the community. Join KIA today to access and connect with our Expert Network.





# The Growing Impact of Women in CX Leadership

Why women are succeeding in customer experience leadership, the barriers that remain, and why advancing women is one of the smartest business decisions a CX organization can make.

by Execs In The Know

Great customer experience (CX) leadership begins with people, not process, policy, or metrics.

The most impactful CX leaders know that culture shapes outcomes long before any dashboard can measure them. The way a leader builds trust, creates clarity, encourages accountability, and makes people feel genuinely seen affects everything that follows. It shapes how teams work together, how customers are treated, how problems are solved, and how organizations respond under pressure.

So, here is the question worth asking: In an era defined by artificial intelligence (AI) adoption, rising expectations, and relentless change, what does it actually take to lead well? The answer, it turns out, is deeply human.

The strongest leaders, regardless of gender, blend discipline with empathy. They build environments where people speak honestly, think clearly, and perform at a high level. They understand that exceptional CX is not delivered by technology alone, but by people who feel trusted, supported, and equipped to do their best work. That kind of leadership is showing up across the industry. And, increasingly, it is being shaped and modeled by women.

Research consistently shows that the qualities that define high-performing CX organizations (psychological safety, empathetic leadership, systems-level thinking, and trust) are in high demand and are measurably linked to better outcomes. These are not soft traits; they are the engine of retention, engagement, and customer loyalty. And they are showing up prominently among women leaders across the industry. Within the Execs In The Know community, this impact is visible in the leaders driving change, in the cultures they are building, and in the growing recognition that women in CX are helping define what modern leadership looks like. Industry research reinforces this, underscoring the strategic importance of trust, adaptive systems, and human-centered AI in the future of CX leadership.

This article spotlights that leadership. It examines why women are succeeding in CX, what practices drive their effectiveness, what barriers remain, and why advancing more qualified women into leadership roles makes real business sense, well beyond simply doing the right thing.



### **The Gap Is Real, and It Shouldn't Be**

Before examining what strong CX leadership looks like in practice, it is worth noting a structural reality: women make up a significant share of the CX workforce, yet that representation does not translate proportionally into management and executive roles. The result is a leadership pipeline that narrows too early, too often, and at exactly the moments when more women should be moving forward.

For all the progress women are making in CX leadership, the representation gap remains too large to ignore.

Women make up a significant share of the CX workforce, yet that representation does not carry through proportionally into management and executive roles. The result is a leadership pipeline that narrows too early, too often, and at exactly the moments when more women should be moving forward. [McKinsey & Company's Women in the Workplace 2025](#)<sup>1</sup> found that only 93 women are promoted to manager for every 100 men, with the number falling further for women of color.

At the highest levels, Fortune reported in June 2025 that [women held just 11% of CEO roles in the Fortune 500](#).<sup>2</sup> [The 2025 Women's Power Gap CEO Report](#)<sup>3</sup> adds that women hold only a fraction of common CEO pipeline roles and are appointed to the top job at even lower rates from those same positions.

For many women, the challenge extends beyond advancement. It is about visibility, sponsorship, and being recognized as strategic leaders who belong at the decision-making table, not just operators managing the work. That is a structural problem. And the following section makes clear it is also a solvable one.

### The Best CX Leadership Starts with People

Walk into any high-performing CX organization, and the signs of strong leadership are usually felt before they are measured.

There is trust, ownership, and openness. People feel safe asking questions, raising concerns, and discussing what is not working. Teams are more aligned, decisions are clearer, and customers feel the difference, even if they cannot see it directly. That connection between internal culture and external experience is not incidental; it is the mechanism. How a leader builds trust inside an organization shapes how customers are treated and how problems get solved.

Research on high-performing CX organizations points clearly to the leadership behaviors that drive these outcomes. A Boston Consulting Group survey of approximately 28,000 employees across 16 countries found a direct and powerful relationship between empathetic leadership and

feelings of psychological safety, and that [when psychological safety is high, retention risk drops from 12% likely-to-quit down to just 3%](#).<sup>4</sup>

O.C. Tanner's [2024 Global Culture Report: Practical Empathy](#)<sup>5</sup> found that employees who perceive their leader as empathetic are significantly more likely to be highly engaged. [Catalyst's research, The Power of Empathy in Times of Crisis and Beyond](#)<sup>6</sup>, connects that same quality to stronger retention, more inclusive cultures, and higher performance during disruption. In CX, those internal outcomes flow directly into the customer relationship.

And customers are raising the bar. Today, they want more than fast, frictionless transactions. They want clarity, confidence, and experiences that feel human and trustworthy. PwC's [2025 Customer Experience Survey](#)<sup>7</sup> underscored how directly trust shapes loyalty, engagement, and retention. Meeting that bar requires leaders who understand not just operational efficiency, but the full arc of how a customer feels doing business with a brand.

These are exactly the leadership traits that women in CX are demonstrating at high rates – driving stronger cross-functional collaboration, designing more thoughtful escalation paths, building more inclusive experience strategies, and making sharper decisions about where and how technology should be deployed. That last point is increasingly critical. As AI takes on a larger role in customer interactions, the question of how to preserve human connection at scale is one of the defining leadership challenges.

**Only 93 women**  
are promoted to manager



for every **100 men**, with the  
number falling even further for  
women of color.

Women in leadership are helping teams navigate complexity without creating more fear, building trust while driving accountability, and asking sharp questions about what customers actually need, what employees need to succeed, and what responsible leadership should look like under pressure. They are bringing judgment, adaptability, operational discipline, and a broader view of what long-term success requires. Publications like [CMSWire's \*Bridging the Gender Gap in Customer Experience Leadership\*](#)<sup>8</sup> have also highlighted women leaders' strengths in building stronger customer experiences through collaboration, systems thinking, and people-centered leadership.

"Women are succeeding in CX leadership because CX has shifted from a support function to a strategic driver of growth," says Maureen Barnett, Head of Global Fan Experience at Fanatics. "Modern CX sits at the intersection of operations, technology, data, and human behavior. This space requires emotional intelligence, systems thinking, and the ability to translate human needs into business strategy. These are areas where many women leaders naturally excel. The impact is significant. Women are helping organizations move from transactional service models to experience-driven cultures. They are reframing CX from handling issues to end-to-end journeys that shape culture and strengthen loyalty that directly influences business outcomes."



*We were hired to drive business results. But leadership today carries a weight it was never designed to hold. We've inadvertently become therapists, conflict mediators, and emotional shock absorbers for every political, social, and economic pressure our teams are feeling, while quietly carrying those same burdens ourselves. The strongest leaders, the ones who will make the difference, are those who accept that reality, invest in themselves, and show up better prepared to lead people through it.*



**TRAVELZOO**

**Lisa Oswald**

Senior Vice President and Global Head of Member Services

The future of CX will not be shaped by automation alone. It will be shaped by leaders who know how to balance efficiency with empathy, innovation with responsibility, and scale with genuine human connection.

Jessica Patel, Senior Director of Customer Experience at Belk, notes that "women are successful in CX leadership because the role naturally requires empathy, adaptability, and strong communication – helping shift organizations to be more customer-focused and driving more thoughtful decisions that directly impact loyalty and retention."

Dima Cichi, Global Customer Success & Service Transformation Leader at Microsoft, brings a similar perspective. "CX is not just about fixing issues – it's about seeing the whole system: the technology, the process, and the human emotion flowing through it," she says. "Women tend to lead with that systems-level view, balancing analytical rigor with empathy. We're seeing more intentional journey design, more inclusive experiences, and organizations that listen first and optimize second."

### The Barriers Are Structural, and They Are Solvable

The obstacles holding women back from senior leadership are not usually about readiness. They are about structures. And understanding those systems clearly is the first step toward building organizations that are stronger for everyone.

The first barrier is often the earliest one: the move into management. When women are promoted at lower rates than men at that initial stage, the pipeline narrows before leadership trajectories have a real chance to develop. McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org [identify this as the "broken rung,"](#)<sup>9</sup> and it remains one of the most persistent structural barriers in leadership advancement. Over time, that early imbalance compounds.



*Women are succeeding in CX leadership because CX has shifted from a support function to a strategic driver of growth. Modern CX sits at the intersection of operations, technology, data, and human behavior. This space requires emotional intelligence, systems thinking, and the ability to translate human needs into business strategy. These are areas where many women leaders naturally excel. The impact is significant. Women are helping organizations move from transactional service models to experience-driven cultures. They're reframing CX from handling issues to end-to-end journeys that shape culture and strengthen loyalty that directly influences business outcomes.*

**Maureen Barnett**  
Head of Global Fan Experience



Beyond the broken rung, there are subtler but equally powerful forces at work: biased assumptions about what executive presence looks like, uneven access to high-visibility assignments, leadership norms that reward a narrower style of authority, and sponsorship gaps that leave talented women doing the work without anyone actively opening doors for them. As Barnett has observed, CX leadership is still too often viewed as an operational function rather than a strategic one, which means women in those roles can struggle to be seen as candidates for broader enterprise leadership, even when their scope and impact clearly qualify them.

"Women need advocates at the executive table who actively open doors, expand their exposure to enterprise-level decisions, and position them for broader leadership roles," says Barnett. "Increasing visibility and sponsorship is essential for advancement."

These are not impossible problems, but require organizations to stop treating leadership advancement as something that unfolds naturally on its own. It does not. When companies invest intentionally in development, sponsorship, visibility, and more equitable promotion practices, they build stronger pipelines and better outcomes. When they do not, they continue reproducing the same imbalance and calling it meritocracy.



*For many women, the path forward requires more than opportunity; it requires active investment. "We need to move beyond mentorship and invest in intentional sponsorship that opens doors for women in senior leadership roles," says Patel. "When women are valued as equals and have a seat at the table where decisions are made, organizations thrive." That same philosophy shapes how she thinks about leadership itself. "Strong leadership isn't about titles; it's about being open, flexible, and committed to people. The most effective leaders influence rather than command, earn trust, grow others, and drive performance through teamwork and accountability.*

**belk**

**Jessica Patel**  
Senior Director, Customer Experience



## Advancing More Women in Leadership is a Business Strategy

The business case for gender-diverse leadership is well-documented. [McKinsey & Company's Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters report](#)<sup>10</sup> found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity in leadership are 39% more likely to outperform their peers financially. Even more striking: there is a 48% difference in the likelihood of financial outperformance between the most and least gender-diverse companies. That is not a marginal edge. That is a structural advantage, and it widens every year organizations fail to act. In CX, that advantage is especially tangible.

Customer experience is one of the most cross-functional disciplines in the business. It requires leaders who can connect teams, align priorities, navigate ambiguity, and keep the customer perspective present even when organizational pressures mount. It requires strong communication, sound judgment, and the ability to build cultures where people feel motivated to contribute at a high level. Women leaders are delivering in those areas every day.

The cultural impact of that leadership is measurable. "Women leaders tend to create more people-centered cultures where employees feel heard, supported, and empowered," says Patel, "and that directly translates to better engagement, stronger performance, and improved customer experiences and satisfaction scores." Looking ahead, she adds, "I would love to see more women move beyond leading CX teams and start influencing strategy across the business."



*When I lead teams, I focus on creating psychological safety — an environment where people feel trusted to think out loud, experiment, and learn. Teams become more collaborative, cultures become more open, and customer experiences become more authentic. Strong CX outcomes are rarely accidental; they're the by-product of healthy teams and thoughtful leadership.*



**Dima Cichi**  
Global Customer Success & Service Transformation Leader

They are helping organizations design better experiences, lead stronger teams, and build cultures that support both performance and retention. They are not only contributing to business success, they're helping expand the leadership bench and strengthen the future of customer-centered business. Broader reporting from sources like [CXM Today](#)<sup>11</sup> also reflect the growing visibility and influence of women shaping the future of CX leadership.

"I hope to see more women in CX move into enterprise leadership roles where their perspective shapes overall business strategy and not just customer strategy. CX leaders understand customer behavior, operational realities, technology enablement, and workforce engagement – exactly the combination organizations need at the highest levels influencing the future of the organization," added Barnett.

## What Comes Next is Up to All of Us

Women leaders in CX are not exceptions to the rule. They are part of a broader movement shaping where leadership is already heading.

The organizations that will lead in CX over the next decade are not waiting to see how this plays out. They are actively building leadership pipelines that reflect the full range of talent available to them, investing in sponsorship, removing structural friction, and making room at the table before it becomes urgent. Advancing women in CX leadership is not a diversity initiative. It is a competitive decision. And the companies advancing the leadership model CX now requires already have an edge.

## Article Links

1 <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace>

2 <https://fortune.com/2025/06/02/fortune-500-companies-run-by-female-ceos-women-2025/>

3 <https://www.womenspowergap.org/corporate-report/>

4 <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/psychological-safety-levels-playing-field-for-employees>

5 <https://www.octanner.com/global-culture-report/2024-practical-empathy>

6 <https://www.catalyst.org/en-us/insights/2025/empathy-work-strategy-crisis>

7 <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/business-transformation/library/2025-customer-experience-survey.html>

8 <https://www.cmswire.com/customer-experience/bridging-the-gender-gap-in-customer-experience-leadership/>

9 <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace>

10 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

11 <https://cxmtoday.com/featured/meet-the-women-at-the-helm-of-the-most-loved-brands/>



# ***Leading with Impact Starts with People***

At Execs In The Know, we know mental health is not separate from workplace culture. It shapes how people lead, connect, perform, and feel supported every day.

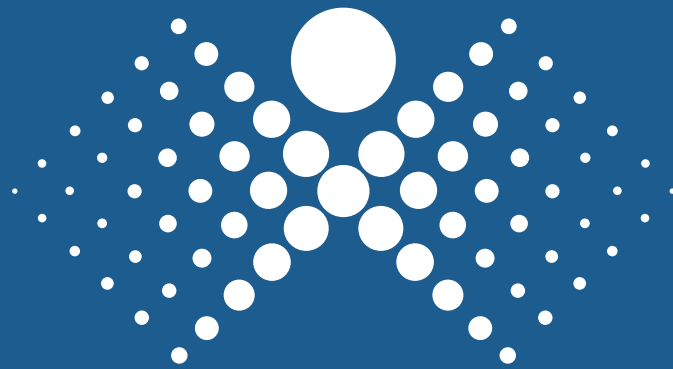
That is why we proudly partner with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to support their important work advancing mental health awareness, education, and advocacy. We are equipping CX leaders with curated content, event programming, and resources to build more empathetic, resilient, and human-centered workplace cultures.

*With support from our CX community, we have donated more than \$100,000 to NAMI to date.*

We believe real leadership means helping build workplaces that are not only high-performing but deeply human.

Learn more about Leading with Impact.





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