

From the Valley to the Mountaintop, Seeing the Brilliance of Our Future

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My customers are brilliant. They invent the future every day.

I am Lumen's Vice President and General Manager for the Bay Area, one of the most innovative regions on the planet. My customers include some of the largest names in Silicon Valley, along with lots of companies

you may not even know of yet – but their ideas will change your life in the near future.



I was born in Silicon Valley. I went to college in San Diego, but even the majesty of those beautiful beaches couldn't keep me. I came back to the Bay Area as soon as I could. Once the adrenaline of the valley gets in your blood, you can't stay away. Now, I help these companies build the platforms that enable them to innovate and turn their ideas into reality.

Being confidently curious

Of course, it can be difficult to keep up with all these brilliant people. They are moving a million miles per hour and are often focused on a vision of how the world might work if they are successful. I work to build a culture of "confident curiosity" on my team. Confident curiosity is a combination of deep knowledge of our own Lumen capabilities, the willingness to lean in to learn what customers are doing, coupled with the confidence to ask probing questions so we can marry our architectural solutions with their vision. I've seen this combination turn these visions into tangible, innovative technologies.

Questions are an important part of our relationships. Sometimes conversations start over a specific technology or usage model. Yet, their needs are actually built on bigger initiatives or entail more complexity once you understand what they're really trying to accomplish.

For instance, one of our customers is working to enable a completely touchless retail experience for consumers. You just pick up your items and leave. Everything else is automatic. It's easy to start with what must happen in the store with sensors, Wi-Fi etc. But the actual solution can't end there.

To achieve the "pick up your items and leave" or "just walk out" experience, the store systems become part of a much larger architecture that must sync up a lot of applications and data in real time - and those resources might be located in different places. The customer needs to be identified. Payment systems need to be engaged with all the security protocols the banking and credit card industries require, and their customer bases expect. The items need to be tracked and placed into some sort of shopping cart. What if one item is returned to the shelf before departure? That item needs to be tracked and accounted for. All of this must happen in a certain sequence in real time.

Latency is a huge problem to overcome to make this vision a reality. And we're not just doing this for one store, it needs to scale to multiple stores. So, our conversations quickly turn to Lumen's extensive edge computing capabilities. We can move the applications, security protocols and other resources much closer to the stores to reduce latency, while maintaining coordination with centralized databases in the cloud.

Together, we figure out the complexity, so the consumer has that simple, seamless experience.

Climb every mountain

Working with the innovators in Silicon Valley gives me a view of where we're all headed. I can pass some of that insight and perspective on to my colleagues at Lumen.

Silicon Valley gets its name in part because it is surrounded by mountains to the east and west. On weekends, you can find me cycling up those hills. I might not be the fastest downhill, but I will always be the first up the mountain. It's why I'm here. I like the view from the top when you can see down toward the horizon.

Do you have a mountain to climb? A future to create? I'm curious. Let's talk.

Raul Contreras, Vice President and General Manager Lumen Technologies

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