

Why we need to be curious about our customers

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Last year, I had an opportunity to participate in a podcast about women in leadership. I was asked what motivated me to find and take on roles in so many different areas—from Sales to Marketing to Global Operations to Human Resources. My answer was curiosity. I wanted and needed firsthand knowledge about what the company did to help me understand how to prepare myself to become a leader.



Maintaining our curiosity may be our best defense for staying ahead of change and seizing the opportunities that it presents. But individual curiosity is not enough. Successful enterprises need to cultivate an institutional curiosity to effectively navigate the challenges of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Back in the 1990s, Peter Senge introduced the term “learning organization” in his management book, *The Fifth Discipline*. He noted people are born with a “curiosity to learn,” and he sought to show that a state of constant learning helps people work at their best. As it turns out, this same idea can be applied when it comes to providing a superior customer experience.

We are doing that. One of the most interesting and essential aspects of Lumen’s own transformation from a traditional telco to a technology company involves a new partnership model with our clients called Customer Success. In the Customer Success model, we supplement our sales teams with dedicated consultants who take the time to understand their clients, find ways to get the most out of the solutions they use, and anticipate and adjust these services. This way we can seize opportunities and avoid surprises.

Ultimately, every company wants to forge long-standing, deep partnerships with their customers. It requires a commitment to **listen, learn, and act**. In an interview a few years ago (which you can watch [here](#) on YouTube), Senge outlined three core learning capabilities, which I have paraphrased below **in bold**. Each can be directly applied to the customer experience:

- **Always know what your customer wants to do:** And then be ready to adjust when those objectives change. That's the partnership part of the equation. But equally important, you add value when a client knows you have their best interests at heart, not their wallet, so that your recommendations are authentic.
- **Use reflection to inform decisions:** And then take calculated risks. Perfect answers don't exist in a beta world and knowing how to fail fast is just as important as knowing how to drive mutual success. But data helps us be "roughly right" most of the time, so the best bet is to build an infinity loop around learning, adapting, and executing.
- **Understand how everything fits together in a complex environment:** And then deploy the right expertise to achieve progress. I learned early on that it is counterproductive to try to be the smartest person in the room. It's better to mobilize intelligence from across an organization to deliver the best answers. People genuinely want to help people, which is why I try to always assume positive intent when I seek outside counsel.

Curiosity offers a conduit that helps lead us to achieve the very best for our clients. It ensures we never stop asking questions or finding new ways to do things. "I have no special talent," Albert Einstein was fond of saying. "I'm only passionately curious." That's a passion we should all embrace.

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