

# Introduction

As humans, we know that our experiences matter, are meaningful, and can inspire us to do and become things we never thought possible. Every experience counts and over a lifetime we accumulate an incredible collection of moments, memories and feelings that serve as a guide for our life. They affect us deeply and determine the way we think, what we believe and how we go about our business. Our experiences define us, shape us and cultivate the outcomes we seek to achieve.

It's very much the same for companies too. The moment someone hears about a company, the experience has begun, and every interaction contributes to the core purpose and mission of the business. Results, both business and human, are powerful indicators along the way that the experience is flowing and offers valuable lessons that provoke action to either correct course or double-down on successful practices and developments. Immersing the five senses, organizations have amazing opportunities every day to connect at a deeper and more meaningful level with people and deliver memorable, business-growing interactions.

What must we do then if we are to provide an exceptional experience for customers? The compelling answer coming back from the world's leading brands is definitive – we must also take great care in delivering an exceptional employee experience. An experience that nurtures high-quality human-centred interactions that resonate with all that we are as human-beings.

*In short, experience is everything.*

We are only human, but being human is our greatest gift. The opportunity to feel, to love, to learn, to connect and to create are the hallmarks of human society. To be human in this world is to access our profound ability to emphasize and care about the world around us. It's not all about profit. It's about people and purpose. Our values and our principles. What we stand for and what we stand against.

The freedom to be unapologetically human. It has taken a very long time for workplaces to embrace the humanity within their walls. There are exceptions, but it still feels like the world is trying to find its feet in creating companies that bring out the best in us, and enable us to fully embrace the experiences we are having to deliver more and become more.

People inspire and amaze me constantly. Not the icons or celebrities, but ordinary people. This is one of the reasons I started a career in business through HR. I certainly find joy when working directly with employees, and continue to do so. I used to run development programmes in my spare time for people in real need and for those who were losing hope or wanted some support. What I witnessed during those programmes was genuinely remarkable. Not because of me, but because of them. Their ability to support, help and connect with each other. The role of the company then, in my mind, is to facilitate a strong sense of belonging and community as a priority. It's amazing how good, happy and inspired we can feel at work when we know we belong. But we know when we don't, which can be some of the most challenging times in our lives.

In this sense, it is clear we derive a large part of our identity from what we do, where we do it and why we do it. Our role in life and work. Wise and progressive companies have started to realize that to unleash the potential of the workforce, they need to thoughtfully, and strategically, develop the employee experience (EX). This I define as the intentional design and engineering of a high-value, integrated and end-to-end experience. From pre-hire to retire, using the holistic employee experience as a lens, we can maximize all the interactions an individual has with an employer over the long term to create a deep sense of belonging and co-create high performance and stronger business outcomes. This definition, co-created with colleagues on the front line of EX, captures many of the elements that we think are critically important when thinking about and building experiences that positively impact business and humans. And when I say experience is everything, I mean it.

Exceptional experiences can create highly engaged people and communities with the potential to deliver astounding business results. Poor-quality experiences prevent high performance from occurring

and can send businesses into bankruptcy and ruin. EX has recently gained serious traction at all levels of the economy because companies are immediately seeing the benefits of placing humans at the centre of their business strategy, and co-creating well-designed experiences that generate positive feelings, emotions and connections. But where has all this come from and why is EX such a hot concept for companies worldwide?

To truly understand this, we need to understand the progress of humanity, business and society-at-large, and at no time in history have we seen a greater pace of change and transformation within the economy and society. In the first chapter, we will explore some of the reasons why employee experience is being positioned as a primary path to high engagement, performance and productivity outcomes across the economy. HR has a key role to play within EX as do leaders and employee-facing functions within a company. For HR, the next few years will prove to be a defining moment. Indeed, EX is lending great credibility to the thought that HR's best time is yet to come, and this relentless focus on the 'experience' of work for employees is inspiring all generations to rethink what work is and how to get the best personal, professional and business results.

Much of what the best companies and the best individuals out there espouse is automatically claimed to be common sense. This in turn leads to the false perception that it is easy to do and apply. *Treat your employees well, and they will treat your customers well.* Simple. Yet, here's the truth. It's not easy to do at all. In fact, for many organizations, it is one of the biggest challenges of all. This book then aims to help, guide and support you on your journey with EX and is an outcome of my experience of being immersed in this field for several years across over 15 countries, contexts and cultures. While I am a practitioner at heart, EX has been transformative for me on a personal and professional level – it has fundamentally changed my life. I am now fortunate enough to be able to share my work, ideas and research with audiences all over the world, and advise and support some of the world's leading organizations as they establish and continue to elevate their own global and local EX strategies.

It is an honour to share this journey with you – welcome, and enjoy the experience.

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