Let's Talk Voice of Customer

Guest was Robin Lawton

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ROBIN LAWTON: Author, Customer Strategist, Keynote/Motivational Speaker, Consultant, Teacher and Coach

Robin ***inspires, motivates, educates and equips his audiences and clients to do what they never thought possible.*** His passion, practicality, and interactive presentation style create an unusual intellectual, emotional and genuine connection. His thought-leading principles are combined with humor and entertaining style to thoroughly engage his audiences. It's probably why he was ranked #1 of 88 speakers by an international organization and rated a top speaker at every multi-speaker event where he presents.

For over 25 years, clients that have applied his paradigm-busting system have wowed their customers, risen to best-in-class, made dramatic improvements in business growth, saved millions of dollars and strengthened their leadership practices. Those clients include many from the Fortune 500 as well as leaders in firms from Asia to South Africa and from many industries and government agencies. Rob coined the term " customer-centered culture" (C3) with his 1993 best-selling book, _Creating a Customer-Centered Culture: Leadership in Quality, Innovation, and Speed_. Unusual for a business book, it is 5-star rated on Amazon.com. His work has been published in the U.K., Brazil, China and referenced widely. Mr. Lawton has been named Guru by American Society for Quality, is listed in Who's Who in Business Leaders and recognized by others as a leader among leaders.

Transcription of Podcast

Joe: Welcome, everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Robin Lawton. Rob coined the term 'customer-centered culture', with his best-selling book, Creating a Customer-Centered Culture, which I have to say is a book I still reference 20 years later. Rob is the president of International Management Technologies and considered an international expert in creating rapid strategic alignment between enterprise objectives and customer priorities. Rob, I'd like to welcome you. Could you give me the elevator speech about your company and yourself, to start out?

Rob: Joe, it's a pleasure to talk with you. I guess there are two aspects to the elevator speech if you'd like. One is on me, personally. The other is about my methodology. Let me start with me, personally, part. Most people, especially people looking at leaders in businesses, as I've been fortunate to be called, would hardly expect those people to tell you about their time in prison. That is where I started my career, surprisingly. I began my career in the psychiatric ward of a maximum-security facility, which at the time, was the largest such place in the US. Now, I know that there are some folks who are listening to this who are thinking "Oh, for crying out loud. We finally got somebody willing to tell the truth about their misdeeds."

No. Not exactly, of course, those who know me are not surprised to hear that I spent time in prison. Actually, I was there as an employee. Without going into all the details here, I will tell you that anybody who talks

about how difficult change is has nothing to compare with my experience when I first began. When I was 23 years old, I was a college trainee 07 in state government, as an employee in corrections. I was in an administrative position. Because I felt very strongly that I could make a difference, I actually attempted to do so. Some of that is written up in my book. Much of it, I don't talk about too much. It will be in my next book, which, hopefully, will be out within the next year.

Basically, what I was able to do was apply what I call common sense. I saw people sitting around in a temporary facility where I worked. They were supposed to be sent to a receiving facility to start serving their sentence. I saw them wasting their time, meaning they were there for typically a month and a half to two months, not doing anything. What I saw as a result of that was a lot of bad stuff. People were being victimized and at the same time the system incurring great expenses. There were a variety of things needing change.

It wasn't rocket science. I hadn't been trained in this stuff. I basically said, 'You know what, guys? If we could organize this system a little bit differently, we could probably shortcut all of this and eliminate a lot of the problems. I wrote up a proposal to the warden and gave it to him. His first response was basically, "Gee. You know; we've never had any problems like this until you got here." It was my introduction to the nature of change. Fortunately for me, I quickly got a new boss, not because of that experience with the warden, but it was independent of that, which led to some enlightenment. He came to me one day, and he said, "Things suck around here. Do you think you can do

something about finding some alternatives?" I gave him my report. He loved it. We executed it, and a year later; we had shortened the cycle time from an average of 45 days to 15 days. We saved about 40% of the budget of the facility. We did a lot of other things that improved the life of people there, as well as for the staff. That was my start in my career. I got turned on by that. I ultimately changed careers a few years later. I went from corrections to, of course, kind of a linear path; I went to computers.

Joe: That's a role change.

Rob: If you think about it, the skills that one has are transferable. Fortunately, I was hired by a guy who was a certifiable genius in this computer business. He recognized that I didn't fit the mold, to put it mildly. I had some skills that he thought would be of good value. Sure enough, I did some things there which included improving productivity in one division of the business by about 50%, in a two-year period. That got me some notoriety as well, which was positive. Ultimately, I went and started my business in 1985, trying to teach others the methodology that had taken me a few years to develop. All of this was developed in a non-manufacturing environment. That's really about me.

Joe: What does the International Management Technologies do? Are they a consulting/coaching organization? What do they do?

Rob: We have several products. Probably the most popular, most frequently provided product right now is Keynotes. I am a Keynotes speaker. I speak all over

the world. My audience is typically senior leadership and management, those people interested in making their organizations more customer-centered than they are today. That's one key area. We also do training. We have workshops. I have numerous publications on this C3 methodology, most of which are on our website. Also, I have what's called a C3 mentoring program, where I will guide specific change agents within an enterprise, whether they're master black belts or whether they're VPs. In some cases, they're CEOs. I'll guide them, just by phone. We set up regular interaction to do that. I give them a set of tools which are not available anywhere else. Tools, Keynotes, workshops, publications, and the mentoring program would be our core products.

We also have a program on project management. This project management approach is one for where the solution is unknown. Most project management is based on the idea that we know we want to build a bridge from here to there, and your job as project manager is to go do it. However, people in the improvement world, that's not their situation. Their situation is that they have some kind of a problem they're trying to solve, and they don't really know what the solution is. That is the program that we have that is really superb at helping them find what the problem is actually, which is really not what they usually think it is. What are the best solutions to solve it? We have seen savings for organizations, like over $20 million in two years. Things like that, along with dramatic improvement in customer engagement.

Joe: Before we start with some of the things, you're doing presently; I can't miss this opportunity to talk about

your original book for a few minutes. You were one of the first people that I know of that highlighted the internal services that we do in an organization, and started talking about them as products.

Rob: That's a great question. Really, the way it was received then is the same way it's received now, very frankly. That is, for those 90% plus of us in the industrialized world, or the post-industrialized world is really more accurate to say, we do not personally make widgets. We do not produce something personally that is a manufactured device. In the mid '80's, shortly after I started my business, I began work with Motorola. I worked with Motorola for about 10 years. Motorola, at that time, was not unlike any other manufacturing firm in the sense that they viewed themselves as manufacturers of certain devices. However, you will not find any manager who will tell you that they manufacture something. Their big problem there, like it is with every organization today, is that the vast majority of people in the enterprise do not know how to apply the 20th century thinking about quality, productivity, leadership, management, and things related to their own work, because they're busy trying to find widgets to apply things to.

What I did was I took a look at the linguistics involved because that's part of my background. If we look at the word "service", it has a lot of ambiguity to it. In fact, if you line up any 10 people at random and ask them, "What does the service mean?" you will not get agreement. You will get 9 or 10 different responses, which means that when an organization's leadership says, "Our aim is to have excellent service," everyone, on the one hand, will agree to that being a good thing,

but no one will agree on what it means. I saw that. This is not rocket science. We all know this, but nobody actually worked with it, and I did. I said, "If widgets are products, and all the literature and all the expertise for the last hundred and so years has been built on the concept that we have to build quality products that customers want, but we don't know what our product is, what would that be? What would that stuff be?"

I discovered that if we describe our work as consisting of products that you can make plural with an S, it does a whole bunch of wonderful things. One is it removes the ambiguity of how we describe our work. Secondly, it describes what we do, in terms of deliverables we can count, we can make plural with an S, and every one of those deliverables has customers associated with it. It really provides an opportunity to, for the first time, really focus on customers. In fact, you cannot figure out who your customer is explicitly, without first defining products.

A service product is one of about five unique kinds of products. There is a difference between a service product and most of the other kinds of products, as manufactured products, information products, etc. A service product is different in that; it requires the customer's involvement in its production. Appendectomies are service products. If you are not, as a customer, involved in its production, you don't get it.

At Disney, rides are products. If you are not on the ride, engaged in its production, you don't get it. The idea is that with service products, unlike manufacturing products where you're not engaged in its production, you are involved with its production. But you may not

wish to be, in some cases. For example, answers are another kind of potential service product. Often, we try to get answers from organizations, and we're not necessarily terribly successful in doing that. The experience that customers have in acquiring and using a service product is immediately improved. That is; the ability to improve that becomes much, much easier, once we describe work as products.

Joe: We really need to understand it this way, before we start designing a customer experience. Is that true?

Rob: Yes. Absolutely correct, in fact, usually what we find is that organizations are busy working on improving processes. That would be activities. We often assume that whatever that process produces as a deliverable, which we call a product, is, in fact, what somebody wants. Often that assumption never gets tested. Then, we improve the process for delivering it. That's very much like not questioning that anyone might want something other than a buggy whip. What we do is we work on the process of improving the buggy whip to make the buggy whip less expensive, meet some kinds of standards, and occur in a shorter time, a variety of other things like that, without actually questioning, "Why is it that people actually want a buggy whip?" We want to start asking the "why" question first, because what we find is in almost every case, answering the "why" question causes us to rethink whether that product is really the best product for the purpose that it's intended for.

Joe: When we're thinking of service as products, do we continue that feature and benefit thinking that we use to market products, and move it to services? Do we

think in that same mentality?

Rob: Firstly, I would even back away from just talking about service products and talk about products in general. What we really want to do is broaden our thinking about all work and say, "All work needs to be described as products." Service products are only one kind of them. If we even drop that as a qualifier, and we say, "Products are what we want to produce," now what happens is we can see that the vast majority of products produced by an enterprise are actually used internally. That is; they're consumed internally. When we think about reports, plans, strategies, policies, procedures, charts, those are all products. Those things are consumed internally by employees. We often talk about employees as being customers. It's a great concept, but it's poor on execution because we haven't had the specificity and the rigor required to make it work. When we start looking at work as products, now we can make the specificity appropriate, so it works for not only internal consumption with employees when they're users of a product, but also externally.

Your question regarding benefits and features is an interesting one. The place to really begin on the dialog of thinking about benefits and features is what you might call benefits, but the problem is that benefits are an ambiguous term. We can make it a little better than that by talking about desired outcomes. Desired outcomes are the ultimate purpose. If we get it properly articulated, they are the ultimate purpose that customers have for using any product. The ultimate desired outcome that a customer has is generally not articulated.

Joe: Instead of features and benefits, we really should be discussing outcomes.

Rob: You got it. As soon as we do that, what happens is that it opens the door to innovation. We can go two directions. We can say, "Ah. If we know the outcome is X, and users or customers want it, and this is the product we've been giving them to get there. Are there things we should do to improve that product?' If so, we're going to use what I call convergent thinking. That is; we're going to take an existing product, and we're going to make some kind of either incremental or radical change in that product. But, we don't significantly change the product as a concept in itself. We still have that particular product. We may have a buggy whip, for example, that doesn't have a flexible end on it. It's actually got a battery in it, and it buzzes. You hold it against the horse, and it buzzes, and that causes the job to occur. We've still got a buggy whip, but we've made incremental improvement in it.

On the other hand, we could use divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is focused on outcome. We could say, 'Shoot. The buggy whip is a product, but what other products might achieve the same or better outcome for the customers?' That's what we want to do. If we think about innovations that we know of, I'll give you one that's a great example of how focus on outcomes can actually explain the success of certain companies. All of us are familiar with the iPhone from Apple. The iPhone started with the iPod. The name of the product itself is very important because there was no history on that name, iPod. The beauty of it is that it did not cause us to think of a specific thing when it was introduced. That meant we didn't have intellectual,

emotional, or experiential history regarding this brand or product. It's not that the product didn't exist in some form prior, because the iPod is simply a mp3 player. If we think about the iPod, then as a product, and we want to connect to outcome, we say, 'Can we identify what the customer's desired outcome was, regarding the iPod?' In a second here, I'm going to tell you what it is.

Before we do that, let's talk about the predecessor for mp3 players. We know that iPod springs from that. It's a kind of mp3 player. Prior to the mp3 player, we had a company called Sony that had a product called Walkmans. The Walkman actually addressed the same desired outcome as the iPod. Prior to the Walkman, there was the boombox. All of these are products that have exactly the same outcome wanted by customers. That is, "feeling like I'm there." That outcome, feeling like I'm there, like all outcomes at the strategic and macro level does not change. They are stable over time. If we think of all the things, customers care about; this is the only one that doesn't change over time. In our world, when we have change everywhere, we desperately would like to find something that doesn't change. This is it. Desired outcomes don't change over time.

What the iPod did was enabled the experience of being there to be far more inclusive, because of what else the iPod brought to the party, which is iTunes. There's a whole other set of things we could talk about. That's how we connect products and outcomes. We can ask ourselves, and we should, 'Is the product today the best product we could provide for the outcomes we have uncovered those end users of this product want to

achieve?' If the answer is no, then we need to pursue that and say, 'Great. What else could we provide as a product?' In fact, if we eliminated this product and started from scratch, what would we create?

Joe: Is this the C3 model you talk about, the customer-centered culture?

Rob: Yes. The C3 technology, if you will. The original model that I put together was in the mid '80's when I started the business. It has evolved over time. The C3 model and the technology related to it, the tools or methodology related to it, have stayed pretty constant from the late '80's. Although, they've changed in form, basically, it's a system that integrates. If you know something about teamwork, for example, and you're an expert in that, you will find that it is embedded in the C3 methodology. If you're an expert in Lean or process improvement, you'll find that it's there. If you're interested in product design and innovation, you'll find it's there. C3 methodology is an integrated approach that doesn't require any technical knowledge, although there're lots of technical stuff under it. It is embedded in everything that I talk about, everything we do.

That has evolved, however, to something around 2000 or 2002. I created a new version of how I present it. That is called the Eight Dimensions of Excellence. The reason I did this was; I found that executives, in particular, really do like to have a very short, and if possible, visual explanation for what is your idea. They want to see that. That's not just true for executives. It's true for anybody. It's true for the person who is a janitor. It's the same thing. What I did was created this Eight Dimensions of Excellence framework, under which

is the C3 methodology. That Eight Dimensions of Excellence framework is in English or whatever your native language is. It enables you to organize both graphically and sequentially, how we can transform ourselves from where we are today to where we'd like to be, related to customers.

Joe: Robin, I'm looking at a picture of that model right now, and it's backwards. It's got the customers first and efficiency last.

Rob: You think that's backwards, do you? Yeah. The interesting thing, Joe, is that you would be hard-pressed to find a CEO or a president of any organization or any enterprise, whether it's government, industry, health care, education, whatever that top person is. It would be hard-pressed to hear them say something like, " Our customers are last." They are just not going to tell you that. In fact, whether they are there or not in practice, they're likely to tell you, " Our customers are the reason that we exist." What that means is when we look at the graphic (you're referring to what's on our website) we see three icons in the middle of it. That's the simplest way to look at that.

The first icon is on the left, of course. In our culture, we tend to read things from left to right. That way of looking at it is embedded in the graphic. That first icon says "process" on it. The icon in the middle is called "product". Then, the icon on the right-hand side is called "outcomes." When we think about those three topics, and I've asked thousands of people this question, I've said, 'Of the three topics, where does your organization put the most improvement energy

today? Where has it been putting the most improvement energy, and where is it doing it today?' If we think about improvement energy, I'm thinking about the number of times the word comes up in discussion every day, the number of meetings, we hold on it, the hours of training we provide on it, money we spend on improving it, measures related to it. Where is it? We spend the most of those resources on these three topics? They will tell you it's process.

They're right. That is where all that energy is going. I'll ask them, "Okay. When you look at the graphic, there are actually two issues involved with improving a process."" There's above the line. I have a line running horizontally from left to right, cutting through those three icons. Above that line are customer priorities. Below the line are producer priorities, which should be the things we care about internally. I'll ask them, 'Dimension four, which is above the line for process, and dimension eight, below the line, which of those are you spending the most energy on improving?' I will tell you that roughly about 98%-plus of people responding to that question will tell you it's dimension eight. That is; we focus on improving our own internal processes. I'll ask them, "why do you do that?'" They'll say, "That's what we've been trained to do." Or they'll say, "That's what our measures are related to," or "That's where our costs are incurred," or "If we do that, then customers will be happy." As soon, as they say, that, I'll say, "Oh. Do you know that? Do you know, in fact, do you have the data that shows when you made a process improvement, a customer became happier?" Now, we get to the truth. We find that overwhelmingly, there is no evidence for that relationship.

It's not that there couldn't be, but it's not being collected. In fact, when you ask them, "Why do you do this?" They will say, "The ultimate purpose is to improve what customers get from us." I'll say, "Great. Then, why don't we start with what they want?" That would be dimension one, which is the furthest right-hand upper box of the eight dimensions, and that is customer-desired outcomes. When we start with that, the Earth-shaking observation that occurs for most folks is that within our enterprise, we don't have a known and written, articulated description of what our customers actually are trying to achieve as an outcome when they work with us. When they say that, that's a wonderful insight, until we have that insight; we're not going to change our behavior. Once we have that insight, my next question is, "If we don't describe it, what is the likelihood we have measures of success?" The answer, of course, is, "Not too much. We don't have measures of success for that." I'll say, "Okay. If we don't have measures of success, do we have any goals for improvement on this?' The answer is no.

Joe: You say that, but how can you really tell if your initiative is customer-centered?

Rob: That's the $64,000 question, and it's extremely easy to get the answer for that. What I would do is, looking at the Eight Dimensions of Excellence, the very first thing we would do is say, "If you have initiatives called Lean, or Six Sigma, or teamwork, or innovation, or whatever it's called, let's acknowledge that the fact you have some formal effort for improvement is a good thing." If you have such a thing, and you want to know whether it's customer-centered or not, the very first thing to do would be to say, "Have you got a written definition for

desired outcomes customers want, based on what it is you have uncovered from them?" If the answer is yes, then I would say, "Great. Then, you can say you have one element of customer centeredness in place." Then, of course, I would ask my next two questions on that particular desired outcome thing, which is, are we measuring it? I will tell you that in most cases, the answer is no. Then, I would say, "We probably don't have the customer centeredness we could have." Implied here in the question is, what would those measures be?

A good example of this is in health care. This is an industry that increasingly, many Americans are experiencing with greater and greater frequency as we age. Of course, it's had a tremendous effort by the federal government and in politics, this whole health insurance industry. If you took the whole health insurance industry, and you thought about your customer desired outcome personally, in terms of what you'd like to achieve, the most important outcome for close to 100% of people that I've asked say it's good health: My desired outcome is that I get good health.

When you hear it, it sounds so obvious. Yet, having worked with many, many health care providers and others in insurance and elsewhere within the health care community and industry, I can tell you that day one, when I begin working with a client and I start asking this question about desired outcomes, 100% of the time they discover in their discussion with me in just a few minutes, that they have no written definition for good health. But they do have written definitions for the undesired outcomes customers want to avoid. That's dimension two. Those undesired outcomes they

want to avoid, the worst case would be death. Second case would be morbidity. That means you go in for one problem, and while you're there, you contract another problem. Both of those things, death and morbidity, are well-defined in the health care industry.

There are measures of success, and there are goals for improvement. The problem is that if people don't die, and they don't get sicker, do they, therefore, have good health? The answer is no, not necessarily. You can be hooked up to tubes and wires. Technically, you're alive, but you are not in good health. The problem we have is that if we're trying to look at our initiatives, and we think our initiatives are already helping us be customer centered, take the eight dimensions framework, and ask questions related to dimensions one through four, regarding this. Have we articulated the definitions for each of the dimensions for our customers, based on what the right questions would be to ask? Secondly, do we have measures for improvement? Thirdly, do we have numerical goals for improvement? Fourthly, do we have strategies for closing the gaps between what they want and what we're giving them?

Joe: This all seems pretty basic. I buy into it. I like the outcome based things. Why do we continue with this process thinking, when the keys are, for lack of a better word, in the marketplace?

Rob: I guess there are some simple answers to that. I'm going to give you what I think is the simplest: self-interest. This is not something that's a judgment. It's just a fact that when we tend to do anything, as individuals or organizations, we generally do that with

self-interest. Meaning, what is it that we will benefit from if we make a change? It is very easy to make a change in processes internally, and measure, quantify, improve those things. We will directly benefit from those things when we make them. Unfortunately, we then may assume that those benefits we receive are somehow or another transferred to our customers. That is not necessarily the case at all. In fact, frequently it's not. Self-interest is, I think, one of the things that are a driver. I would say most people, when presented with the opportunity to simultaneously satisfy others and be other-directed and benefit ourselves as well, will seize that opportunity and go do it. I think the reason that they don't is because they don't know about this methodology.

Joe: You talk about two failures in QFD, which is quality function deployment. They're determining who the customer is, and I think, how to define and separate customer desired outcomes from product functions and features. Can you just touch upon that a little? Because I have a lot of people listening that looks at Voice of Customer, QFD as the answer to understanding customer outcomes.

Rob: The methodologies that were developed by Yoji Akao and what is referred to as the Kano model, which is simply a graphic, are helpful and were helpful when they were developed 60 years ago. They were developed for engineers, primarily. In QFD, quality function deployment is really a very systematic, highly structured and highly complex system for translating what are believed to be customer priorities into product design. That is manufactured product design.   That system is so complicated that the average mortal is

simply not going to go through it. You have the issue of complexity of the system to begin with. Then, you have the basic assumptions behind the system, which is that the customer wants the product we are going to be asking them about.

Again, that gets back to this issue of the buggy whip. We assume that. Nowhere in QFD do you actually have the requirement that you have to test that assumption. That's a flaw. It's a weakness in the system, and it can be a fatal flaw. That's one. There's also an assumption that we know who the customer is. Unfortunately, that's not true. We don't know who the customer is.

There are three roles customers can play for any product. There are end users. They're the people who actually use the product to achieve some desired outcome. There are brokers, who pass the product to the end user. Then, there are fixers. Those fixers have to modify, correct, or change the product at some point in its life cycle, for the benefit of end users. In the QFD methodology, you will not find any differentiation like this for customers. They don't use that terminology. As a result, it is not applied anywhere. The result of not having it specifically defined and segmented in this manner means that by default, we are likely to satisfy the interests of the customers who have the most power. That power is primarily held by brokers, not by end users.

A good example of this is that QFD was used in the automobile industry and has been used in the automobile industry. If we think about the car as the product, Jimmy Carter as President went to the automakers in Detroit, and he said, "You guys need to

build fuel-efficient cars." He was speaking to them as a broker, acting on behalf of all of us who drive cars as end users. The car manufacturers in Detroit, when they heard this, basically responded with, "He's not our customer. Let's go find out what our customers really do think. It may be worth checking out." This was a time that the Japanese were starting to eat our lunch on cars. What they did was, they said, "Let's go to the people who buy our cars from us and talk with them." The people who buy the cars from the manufacturers are not the drivers. They're the dealers. Those are brokers. They went to the dealers. They said, "Dealers, should we build fuel-efficient cars?" The dealers said, "Uh-no, please send us those big babies." The reason they would do that is because there's more profit in that. The brokers did not have, and still do not have today, a methodology that is used regularly to uncover what the end users want. They have not, historically, done a very good job of talking with 51% of the end users of their cars that are called women.

You have all sorts of things going on here. QFD doesn't help you with that issue. It doesn't help you to identify that you must talk with end users. You must segment the end user population, according to key demographics that are related to changes and expectations regarding the product. When you ask questions of them about what they want, you must be dealing with outcomes. What are the desired outcomes they are trying to achieve with the product?

Joe: Would you say that when we're looking at outcomes, even more so than we'll look at indirect customers and all these other things, but really we should be looking more so towards the user to determine outcomes?

Rob: Yes. We want to have a win-win. That is, in some businesses, having brokers that may distribute the product in some way are very important. You may wish to continue the relationship with those brokers, which means you have to make sure you understand what they're interested in. But that should not be the principle driver of your design for the product. In fact, if you look at one of the elements of Apple's success, it has been their passionate focus on end users. For a long time, you couldn't get something from Apple unless you bought it directly from them. Their bias, until relatively recently, has all been about the end user. That is the secret to many organizations' successes. Yes, you want to satisfy the end user's priorities first, no matter what. Then, you make sure that you're also understanding and doing your very best to satisfy the interests of brokers and fixers.

Joe: I think Amazon played that off perfectly when they did the Kindle, but they still protected the publishers and the way they went to market.

Rob: Yes. That's a very interesting thing to bring up. That's a good observation. Amazon has done a superb job in collapsing and eliminating the broker category. In fact, you could say the same thing about eBay and Craigslist. These are companies whose whole model for business is to put the user as close as possible to the producer. Not only that, but when you have that model, you're automatically cutting the cost to deliver the product because if you don't have all these brokers involved, you automatically cut out a lot of the basis for cost.

Today, Amazon is going to continue to be successful, as long as they keep that perspective. Amazon is unique in the fact that they have the strongest system of encouraging and facilitating end users for a product talking with other end users of that same product. Today, when I go look for anything, I'm going to start with Amazon. I'm going to start with Amazon because I can go get end-user reviews of the product. I'm going to find out what they experience. If it doesn't have five stars, I'm probably not looking at it to get, as long as there are other ones that have five stars. I'm willing to pay more if the end users say, " This is really, really good," than if I don't have that information.

Joe: Rob, is there something you'd like to add that maybe I did not ask?

Rob: You asked a bit about what C3 is, and what the methodology is. That's described on our website. There are suites of tools that I've developed over the years with my colleagues, and those tools help the users to take these concepts and apply them. Everything that somebody would see with the C3 methodology will have a look and feel of common sense. Underneath that, common sense is an interdisciplinary approach which uses economics, psychology, quality management, linguistics and many other disciplines. There's a lot of technical stuff underneath it.

Very much like the iPhone, you don't have to know all that. What you'd like to do is be able to understand the concept quickly. You'd like to be able to apply it to your own work quickly, and if you did it multiple times, you'd like to be able to get consistently good results. That's what the C3 system is about. The Eight Dimensions of

Excellence framework is really the place to begin introducing these concepts. The one page on our website which tries to summarize what these eight dimensions really mean, is an effort to very simply communicate that if we want excellence, and we had an eight-cylinder engine driving our organization; it would be really good to have all eight cylinders working together at maximum performance. That's what the Eight Dimensions of Excellence is intended to do, help you to identify where you're weak and strengthen those areas. They're going to primarily be areas above the line, which are the areas that customers care about.

For somebody who really wants to know in five minutes, am I customer-centered, which is one of the questions you asked, what they'd want to do is go to our website and under articles, look for something that's called "C3 Self-Assessment." That takes about five minutes to complete. It gives you a score right there, instantly. There are 105 points possible. The average for people doing this is a score of about 60. That tells you how close you are to being customer-centered. If your aim is to be around the 90 and above score, and you're not there, we can help you get there.

Joe: That sounds great. What is upcoming for you?

Rob: Most of the work that we do as you might imagine, is private. Our clients generally are very protective of what they're learning from this, because it's giving them a competitive advantage. I do occasional public workshops, one of which is coming up May 2nd and 3rd in Indianapolis. That's sponsored by the American Society for Quality. If you were to go to their website, Asq.org, you'd find information on that. That's called

"Achieving Eight Dimensions of Excellence." It's the first course in the two-course program. The second one is "Mind and Voice of the Customer." If you went in and looked at the workshop itself, the program itself, it's called "Achieving Excellence and Customer Focus.

Joe: What's the best way for someone to contact you, Rob?

Rob: Personally, I like the phone, just like we're doing when we talk like this. It's 800-729-1468 or email, which is ROB@Imtc3.com, or they could go to the website and browse around, see what's there, which is www.imtc3.com.Those are three ways to get a hold of me.
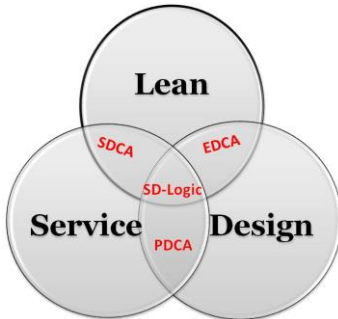
Joe: I appreciate very much. I enjoyed it tremendously. This podcast will be available on the Business901 blog site and the Business901 iTunes store. Thanks again.

Rob: Thank you, Joe. It's been a pleasure. Wish you well. Have a great week.

Business901 *Podcast Transcription*

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Joseph T. Dager

Business901

Phone: 260-918-0438

Skype: Biz901

Email: jtdager@business901.com

Website: http://www.business901.com

Twitter: @business901

Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

Visit the Lean Marketing Lab: Being part of this community will allow you to interact with like-minded individuals and organizations, purchase related tools, use some free ones and receive feedback from your peers.