

Flying Solo podcast – Milton Collins

The customer service secrets that will build your business

*Automated transcript

Cec Busby ([00:01](#)):

Hi everybody. I'm Cec Busby, editor of Flying Solo. Welcome to our weekly podcast where we step inside the minds and lives of soloists and small business owners.

([00:10](#)):

When it comes to perfecting the customer experience, Milton Collins is an expert. As the author of Delight, Disrupt, Deliver, Milton is on a mission to ensure business owners provide the best customer experience possible. Milton doesn't just talk a good game, he walks it too. As a serial business owner, he's headed up multiple operations. He's the former CEO of Federation Square, where he spent his days running the Transport Hotel Group. He's headed up an importing and distribution business and even spent time as the owner of a horse and cattle stud. Plus, he's renowned for his business nous and is a sought after and award-winning business coach. He drops by today to share how you too can delight your customers and deliver on your promise to create a customer experience that keeps people coming back for more.

([00:57](#)):

Welcome, Milton. Thanks so much for joining me on the show today.

Milton Collins ([01:05](#)):

Thanks Cec. I'm delighted to be here.

Cec Busby ([01:08](#)):

Now you are someone who is very passionate about customer experience and customer service. So much so that you wrote a book about it, Delight, Disrupt, Deliver. What is it about customer experience that you find so fascinating and why is it really important to a business' success?

Milton Collins ([01:27](#)):

I think there's a whole lot of different areas there, but mainly people want an experience and it's important that you think that you're not just selling a good or a service, you're actually delivering an experience. And if you can surprise people and delight them with that experience, then they're more inclined to be impressed and to come back, but more importantly, tell their friends and refer you.

Cec Busby ([01:50](#)):

Yeah, I think there's a stat that says something like 86% of consumers are happy to pay more for a good customer experience. So it also makes good business sense, investing in your customer experience, doesn't it?

Milton Collins ([02:06](#)):

Absolutely critical, because I always think that to deliver what they expect is only part of the journey. It's far more important to do those small little additional things they don't expect. And that gives them the real wow factor that makes them then become a more loyal customer.

Cec Busby ([02:24](#)):

And that's what we really wanna build on, isn't it, that customer loyalty, because getting repeat business is the cornerstone, isn't it? It's the holy grail <laugh>.

Milton Collins ([02:35](#)):

Absolutely. When I look at business, I look at five areas. I say one is lead generation - where people hear about you first. Then you need to convert them to a customer. Then you need to look at trying to get repeat business from them, and then increase their average dollar spend with you. And finally, so they become a real disciple for you and they actually sell for you, by referring other businesses.

Cec Busby ([03:02](#)):

So if we're trying to create that great customer experience for our clients or and customers, what kind of things should we be looking at first? Is it things like their pain points?

Milton Collins ([03:16](#)):

Yeah, it's finding out ... often, you hear so many stories about bad customer service, especially in restaurants or in bars, but also worse online, where you go to a call centre. Typically with the bank at the moment or Australia Post et cetera, or any government bureau - often you've gotta hang on for 30 minutes plus, sometimes an hour, which is just appalling service and anything to try and change that would make a huge difference.

Cec Busby ([03:44](#)):

So where do we go to find that feedback? To see where our customers are not having the greatest of experiences?

Milton Collins ([03:51](#)):

I'm a great believer in surveys - and ask. We need to ask our customers - one, what they expect, what they would like, and then make sure we deliver that. But also think beyond that and say, okay, what could I do to delight them? What is something additional I could do?

([04:08](#)):

For example, when I owned the conference centre and we had many large corporate groups there, mainly boards of directors. I overheard one night the team around the bigger table after dinner, chatting, and they were talking about how they hadn't seen Kool Mints for years and they all had stories about Kool Mints and how it was a fond memory as kids, et cetera. Overhearing that conversation, I didn't see anything. It was about 10 o'clock at night. I rang a friend of mine who owned a local store in a country town, Woodend, where I was, and said, have you got any Kool Mints in stock?

([04:41](#)):

And he said, yes, but why? I said, I need them urgently. So he knew what I was like with my customer service and delivering to my clients. He met me at the store at that hour of the night. I raced down, picked them up, brought them back, walked into the room on a tray with these Kool Mints. They were

blown away. To think that someone had, one, just overheard the conversation and, two, reacted straight away at that hour of the night. But they dined out on that story for years and of course became very loyal clients. Even though we'd done everything else right, it was something simple like that that really surprised them, cause it was totally unexpected.

Cec Busby ([05:20](#)):

So that was kind of a bit of a happy accident; you overhearing the conversation at that point. What is something that's perhaps a little more concrete? You did mention surveys. So when is the best time to survey your customers, or is there even a good time? Is it something you should constantly be doing?

Milton Collins ([05:39](#)):

I think it's something you need to make also easy. We often get surveys sent to us and even if we do want to do it, often just haven't got time or yes, I'll get back to that. You're better off asking at the time and it's much better verbal, rather than trying to send out emails, et cetera, or letters. If you could have some short questions that you know you want to know for your business, and also you probably know what some of the pain points are - if you could bring them up with the client as soon as possible. Cause the best time is when you've offered that service or they've bought from you, cause then it's front of mind. There's no point during a week later; it's too late.

Cec Busby ([06:18](#)):

Now what about if you have a business that's online only? Because we often think about customer experience as that face-to-face interaction with a customer. But it's equally important when you have an online business. So how can business owners that are online only make sure they're getting the customer experience and their customer service right?

Milton Collins ([06:41](#)):

First, they need to test it. They make sure they keep testing it to make sure it's operating on how they believe it should. Also, you need to make buying easy, make it as easy as possible. If it's too complicated, you have to go through too many processes to purchase, then it just puts people off. And I know with online services, so often people get through to almost the paying point and then stop for some reason, because it's got too hard or it's been taking too long. Once again, make sure you look for that feedback and if you can measure your own system online, see when people are dropping out and seeing what level you need to change to get them beyond that point.

Cec Busby ([07:21](#)):

I think oftentimes as well, it's shipping or postage - maybe that's something businesses could identify right at the front. Like we do, 'it's X amount shipping' is something that's mentioned right at the beginning of the customer journey, because I think people go all the way through sometimes and then they go, 'Oh, what? It's gonna cost me \$15 to buy this? What? No.' <laugh>

Milton Collins ([07:51](#)):

You're actually right there Cec. So I think it's the surprise you want to do away with. So if you be upfront about that, or better still, price it so that you include the shipping, so that it's not a surprise at the end and it's all wrapped up into the product you're selling.

Cec Busby ([08:05](#)):

Yeah. Or they go, 'What? It's gonna take two weeks, I want it now.' <laugh>.

Milton Collins ([08:11](#)):

That's true. But also I always like to say it's going to take two weeks, but try and get it there within the week, so you over-delive. Rather than say it's two weeks and it takes a month, there's nothing worse than that. It's better to extend the period and get it there earlier. That will impress them.

Cec Busby ([08:28](#)):

What about if your business is a bit of a hybrid? So you do have a physical store, but you also sell online. How can you make sure that both types of customers are getting a matching level of service?

Milton Collins ([08:43](#)):

It's easier in the store because they're there. You can read body language, you can talk to them, you can see how they react. And how long they stay in the store of course, which is important. Online it's much harder. It comes down to what stage they get through to the buying plan or if they buy at all. But once again, systems - it's all about having good systems or checklists that your team follow to make sure it's consistent.

Cec Busby ([09:11](#)):

And how important is that very first interaction that you have with a business?

Milton Collins ([09:16](#)):

Absolutely. We've only got one, only one time to create a first impression. And that first impression is so critical, and you need to make sure that it's a warm welcome and people feel special, not just another number. There's nothing worse than walking into a shop and me saying just, 'what are you looking for? Can I help you?' It's much better having a story, or pointing out something, or being that warm, friendly approach. So there's no pressure on the person walking in, but also they're being looked after.

Cec Busby ([09:50](#)):

So how do you train up your staff so that they aren't just doing those glib responses?

Milton Collins ([09:57](#)):

Once again Cec, it's about having good systems. This is how we do it in our business, this is our metho. And role playing. Lots of role playing so people, so your team can learn and also be comfortable. I find that if they've got a system to follow and they've given samples of what to say, of course they need to put in their own language, but if they know how to respond, then they're much more comfortable and they're more confident. And then if they practise, of course then it becomes second nature to them.

Cec Busby ([10:29](#)):

Would you suggest that there's almost a handbook, that you create a customer service handbook for your employees, so that before they even start the job they've got something they can look at?

Milton Collins ([10:41](#)):

Absolutely, Cec. It's all about training too. So, good training you can see when you walk into a store or deal with a business, how much training they've had. The more training they can be given and information, that might just start with a checklist, but then as you improve that over time in your business, it becomes a manual. So it then becomes the office or the shop manual, that follows procedures that all your team have to know. When I was at Taxi Kitchen, any of the team members, they were not eligible for any tips until they could pass our questionnaire on customer service. And often that mightn't be till the third month. But they had a whole series of questions about, certainly about our systems, our greetings, our farewells, the procedure at the table, et cetera, but also some knowledge too, about food and wine. And until they passed that, they weren't eligible for tips. We never had one complaint. In fact, they were so keen to get on with it, of course, that they learned much faster and could see the point of why it was important. Because also it increased the potential of tips too.

Cec Busby ([11:49](#)):

Yeah, I love when you go to a restaurant and the staff is really knowledgeable about the menu and the wine and the experience, because that's one of the reasons you go out to a restaurant, you want a nice experience, don't you? And you want the staff to be able to go, 'oh, you know, the chef's created a beautiful special today', it's whatever it may be. And you can tell whether they've tasted the food or not, or whether they're just reciting something that they've learnt by rote.

([12:18](#)):

So did you also make tastings something that you did at Taxi Kitchen?

Milton Collins ([12:24](#)):

Absolutely. I've always been pedantic about changing our menu at least quarterly, so we go with the seasons. So we're serving what's in season and suits also the weather and climate. And also as we change the menu, we have all the team there and have a full tasting of all dishes. And then when there's a special on the night, there's a briefing before each service, where there's a taste of that new whatever the dish might be for that night, or full explanations, so they understood that too.

Cec Busby ([12:55](#)):

And the tips that you're giving, they apply across the board, because our listeners, they'll know from the intro a bit of a background about you. But you have run massive businesses in many different areas, from convention centre style businesses to you had a horse stud or something at one point, didn't you?

Milton Collins ([13:19](#)):

<laugh>? That's right, yeah. I've had a mixed background. I went to boarding school, then off to university in Canberra, which I loved. And although I wanted to do hospitality management at school, but going to a conservative boarding school in Geelong, they and my parents said, 'oh no, that's not a real job. Why would you wanna do that? You better off going to university, get a degree first and then if you wanna do something else, you can', which is typical. So I went off to university to commerce degree. First job was Price Waterhouse, which was fantastic, great training ground. But I was also a competitive horse rider and I rode at elite level throughout Australia and I wanted to combine the two. So I moved to the country and became a partner in an accounting firm at 25.

([14:05](#)):

And I could travel around Australia competing on weekends, and also work very hard in the profession. And I learned a lot then too about dealing with people and most of those horse riders and businesses

behind that became my clients because, one, they knew me, they trusted me and I was one of them. And being able to relate was really important. And I learned that at an early age, how important it was to be able to talk to people on their level to make them feel comfortable, to build a relationship. And that's what all sales is about. It's all about building a relationship.

Cec Busby ([14:43](#)):

And so how do we get a real understanding of what our customers want from the relationships that they have with our brands?

Milton Collins ([14:52](#)):

Ask them, always ask them. We don't do enough of the right type of survey with our customers and potential customers. People, if you do it at the right time, people like being asked their opinion. And it doesn't mean a rote, just an email sent out it, as I mentioned before, it's much better to try and do it personally where possible, harder online of course, or impossible. But where you can, that asks people what they want and then deliver.

Cec Busby ([15:22](#)):

How do you feel about chatbots? Cause there's been a lot of talk about, you know, ChatGPT and the way it's changing how we do business and how it will change how we do business over the next decade or so.

Milton Collins ([15:40](#)):

Yeah, I must admit, I've just started using ChatGPT and I'm amazed how incredibly good it is. Being asked questions and difference responses, in different ways, and to come back so quickly. I don't think I wanna be a copywriter in the future. I mean, it's quite amazing how it fine tunes. And I think that's something we need to adapt to and use in the right sense, but we can't lose that personal touch and that relationship.

Cec Busby ([16:10](#)):

So if a business might not have the money perhaps to employ staff for that customer experience role, but they do have an online presence, would you recommend that they use a chatbot to automate some of those simple customer service questions?

Milton Collins ([16:29](#)):

Absolutely. I think that's great. But I also think that that should be an option and there should be other options too, so that that's not the only thing they can do. Because that I think's even more frustrating.

Cec Busby ([16:41](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, although I kind of do like the fact that it does make it 24 7. If you've got a simple query, like you can just jump online and ask the bot and they're available around the clock rather than a poor person that's stuck doing a night shift. <laugh>

Milton Collins ([16:59](#)):

<laugh>. No, I agree Cec, you're spot on there. That 24/7 now, because we are a 24/7 economy and worldwide, of course, there's more global. But also, people have got time at night to search and do that and purchase of course. So they need to have that information ready when they're ready to purchase.

Cec Busby ([17:19](#)):

All right, we'll be back with more from Milton after this short break.

([17:23](#)):

And we're back with Milton Collins and we're talking all things customer experience. Thanks again for joining me, Milton.

Milton Collins ([17:34](#)):

My pleasure.

Cec Busby ([17:35](#)):

Now, customer experience. How can we personalise our customer interactions better across the whole customer journey?

Milton Collins ([17:46](#)):

Once again, it's about a system. You need to make sure that from the point of interaction, from the first lead that you've generated for your business, that then there's a good follow through procedure to make sure you deliver that. It's not just haphazard, that is consistently giving good quality service, and of course, trying to get feedback wherever you can. And also have your team and friends go in and do purchases from you too, to see what their experience is and get good honest feedback on that too. Plus, I love mystery shoppers. I think mystery shopping's a fantastic thing both online or in person.

Cec Busby ([18:31](#)):

So when, say someone's a first time visitor to our website, what should we be encouraging them to do to make sure that they convert, that the sale converts? What kind of approach should we be taking?

Milton Collins ([18:48](#)):

Firstly, the website needs to have an offer. Because a lot of people visiting websites spend amazingly small amounts of time. So unless you capture their attention, they'll move on. So you need to have an offer, be it either via landing page or be it by your main website. So there's an offer there that attracts their attention. If you've been doing marketing about a certain product you're trying to sell, that should be linked to a landing page, so as soon as they go in there, it gives them further information to help guarantee that sale. Because people don't want to waste time. They want to get straight to the point. And I think that's really important. If you then get their attention there, then they're more inclined to look further through your website to see what else you might have to offer.

Cec Busby ([19:37](#)):

And what about if they come to the site and you can see that they've browsed around, they've clicked a few things, but then they actually haven't made a sale. How can you encourage them to come back?

Milton Collins ([19:48](#)):

Yeah, good question again. Once again, if you could have, and your system will have this of course, to be able to follow it up too. You've seen they've been to your site, you then need to follow them up to either make an offer or let them know there's something else that's happening or coming up in the future.

Cec Busby ([20:03](#)):

Yeah. Or 'Oh, you left that, that shampoo in the shopping cart, come back and get it.' <laugh>

Milton Collins ([20:10](#)):

Exactly. Yeah, absolutely. Or a special offer about that too. Or some story about the shampoo that's gonna help. Once again, you're trying to build a relationship too. And that's the important part because people do business with people they know, like, and trust. And the same online. It's not just in person, it's online too.

Cec Busby ([20:31](#)):

Yeah. So how can businesses better explore that then? So that customers are clear about who they're purchasing from?

Milton Collins ([20:41](#)):

They need simple information about you. I love testimonials. Testimonials to me are so powerful and I think that is critical, to have good, strong, to the point testimonials from respectable - they need to be real testimonials too, of course. And people look at that I think far more than anything else.

Cec Busby ([21:03](#)):

What about if it's a repeat customer, how do we make sure we keep that loyalty? That we keep the customer engaged.

Milton Collins ([21:13](#)):

Yep. Knowing their information so that once you've captured their address and what they've purchased before, even refreshing that, that you're aware of that. So there's not just something special - that's talking about online there. But, you know, the great thing too is in retail for a coffee, remembering how you have your coffee if you're a regular customer or remember what you had last time, that's tough. But the good businesses do that and do it very well.

Cec Busby ([21:39](#)):

Yeah, it's quite funny. We do these funny little polls every week at work. And once we did one that was about whether you would go back to the coffee shop if they didn't remember your order or your name. And people were very passionate about it. Like, you know, if after a month they'd been to a coffee shop and they didn't know what their order was or didn't know who they were, they were like, no. Even if it had the best coffee in the neighbourhood. So it really does say something about how people want that sense of familiarity, that you know them and you're selling just to them, that you're like a special customer.

Milton Collins ([22:24](#)):

Absolutely correct. As we mentioned earlier, it's all about the experience. Because it's not just the coffee, it's that experience. It's the welcome, it's the recognition. It makes 'em feel a bit special if that happens. And especially now, especially in tourism, that the market now they're wanting tourism experiences and they wanna meet the locals. They wanna know whether the locals eat and stay, et cetera. So it's all about that experience. It's not just looking at the obvious sites. It's that welcome. And also people are often choosing travel on food and wine now, which is fantastic if you're in that league.

Cec Busby ([23:04](#)):

But you have quite a few great stories about customer experience from your hotel slash convention days. Would you mind sharing a few, because I remember you telling me one about some little tricks that you did for the reception people to know who the hotel guests were. Would you mind sharing?

Milton Collins ([23:23](#)):

Certainly, yeah. At Campaspe Country House, what I bought was a rundown conference centre. So we built it up very quickly. It ended up winning Telstra Business of the Year and lots of other customer service awards. But what we did was simple things. We had a lovely long driveway coming in, so you could see guests arriving by car easily and they'd pull up at the front door. The rule was to all team, and didn't matter who the team member was, the door was always opened for them and they were greeted at the door. And it wouldn't matter if it was the gardener walking past or the chef, in fact even nicer if they did it than the receptionist. They were made welcome straight away. And then at reception, as soon as they left, the reception would write down a description of each guest and their name, and any other information they may have gleaned on the arrival.

([24:15](#)):

That was then circulated to all team members so that we knew every guest's name. Now because we only had 24 rooms, it wasn't that hard. Although big numbers, but often guests, especially conference guests, were staying two or three days. So we got to know them. And even team members that they'd never seen before knew their name, it just blew them away. Just something that simple, cause we went to that effort to remember their name, but also meant that the team members tried harder to look after them just by going through that process.

Cec Busby ([24:51](#)):

That kind of plays nicely into the delight section of your book. So what are some other ways that we can delight our customers?

Milton Collins ([24:59](#)):

We used to find out what our, especially our regular, we had a lot of facilitators that came and liked our venue and they'd bring back different companies. So we found out what they liked and we had one facilitator who was quite difficult, but we got on well with her because we listened to what she wanted. And we found out that she loved her golf. So when she arrived we'd have the latest golf magazine beside her bed. She loved licorice but didn't like - there was one type she didn't like - but we found out what she liked, and we had licorice sitting in her room for her too. We had a favourite flower. We also knew which colour she liked too. So, and she used to say to us, you know, you do what all the textbooks tell you to do. You not only ask what people want but then you deliver. And she said, you've almost created a new level of service here because we know what we should be doing, but some businesses just don't do it. And the extra little touches that we did for her, sure we made sure she was well looked after and was great food and the all the conferences were were spot on. But she loved those little extra touches and hence, kept coming back and bringing companies all the time because she felt special there and knew that we would deliver.

Cec Busby ([26:15](#)):

I think what you're touching on there, that delivery portion of the customer experience journey, that can often be where customers feel let down, isn't it? Because there's a lot of promises made with a service

or a product. And unless you deliver on them, then you're gonna have a disappointed customer. So how do we make sure we're delivering on our promises?

Milton Collins ([26:39](#)):

Once again, good systems so we don't leave it to chance. But also, I have to say to my team, I love it when something goes wrong. And you know, they look at me puzzled. I said that's our chance to build a relationship. Cuz if something goes wrong and we show how much we care and fix it and deliver, then the client is far more impressed than if it just happens as expected. And it's not a matter of giving away free food or free wine. Number one is listening to their complaint and then reacting to it. That listening is the most important part.

Cec Busby ([27:15](#)):

It goes back to that feedback, doesn't it? Because there's not really any bad feedback. Even when it is bad feedback, it's an opportunity to learn more about how you can do things better.

Milton Collins ([27:27](#)):

We used to find that our best customers were, in some cases, something had gone wrong and we'd built a relationship. And they then became very loyal after that because we cared so much.

Cec Busby ([27:41](#)):

Yeah, there's a lot of problems with negative reviews online about businesses and services, and oftentimes fake reviews, where a competitor has put something dodgy. But just leaving them and letting them sit there is not the the thing to do. You can't ignore that, can you? You need to be responsive.

Milton Collins ([28:05](#)):

Certainly not. Always respond and respond positively. Always thanking them for their comments. And in some cases, I've seen reviews like that, as you said, some are false, where they said, thank you for your response, however, you weren't here on those dates, or we don't have any record of your <laugh>, of your stay stay. People are quite amused by that. But as long as that's real, it's gotta be real. It can't be, you know, your way out. But if something has gone wrong, take the blame. Take it on the chin, thank them for pointing it out and what you're gonna do to try and minimise that in the future. And invite them back to see how you've changed on their recommendations or on their comments.

Cec Busby ([28:48](#)):

What about, then, that emotional impact? So the customer's gone, oh, this wasn't quite right and you've responded and it's ended up being turned the negative into a positive. Is that also really important that you, when you're training up your staff as well, that you talk also about that empathy to the customer and the emotional impact of the customer journey?

Milton Collins ([29:17](#)):

Absolutely. I used to do a lot of work on emotional intelligence with my team, for them to understand the empathy. And I used to say that, especially in the restaurant industry, that I don't mind if people have come here to spend money and have a good time. We are in the entertainment business. We are here to entertain and we do it through our food, our welcome, our warmth, our knowledge. The greeting is so important and of course the farewell is critical. The first and last impressions are

absolutely so important. And we do training in that too, so that the team would understand that and that emotional connection and the warmth, and when to use it and when to back off and when to be visible, through training and once again, role playing, made a huge difference.

Cec Busby ([30:05](#)):

So how can you show your appreciation to customers as well, if say, it's a repeat customer? Should you be showing your appreciation to start with?

Milton Collins ([30:15](#)):

Oh absolutely. Number one, thank them. Or sorry, recognise them first. Thank them. Anything else you've gleaned from the past - with databases now, it's so easy to put in some favourite things that they might like and make sure we can offer that. Especially if you know the wine they had last time and they enjoyed, do we even offer that again. Or say perhaps this time they might like to try this, it's something similar. Once again, it's that relationship and creating an experience that they're treated as a valued return. Not just a customer, but almost a friend. And in the country we found that very easy. They became friends and that was a great accolade for us too, that they were that comfortable.

Cec Busby ([30:59](#)):

And you were talking about you've got the data and stuff these days, where it's very easy to segment your customers. And is it also about creating personas for these particular customers, this is that particular customer, that they have different journeys and different expectations? Is it as kind of regimented as that?

Milton Collins ([31:25](#)):

It needs to have a structure like that Cec, but it also has to be fluid. So that here is our structure of our system, but I used to love to encourage people to step outside that, to even break the system to improve it. Because if they weren't trying to challenge it and trying to do things differently, than we'd never improve. So whilst we had systems, if they could step outside, over and above, then they were certainly rewarded for that too.

Cec Busby ([31:55](#)):

And would you encourage businesses to have software like a CRM, a customer relationship management system?

Milton Collins ([32:02](#)):

Critical. Yes. CRMs I think now are mandatory. For any numbers, especially for online. But even retail, restaurants, the more information you have about a client to actually then, especially if you know they're dietary, that's really important - if they're gluten free, et cetera. I remember when I first had the restaurants, we used to complain about, discreetly, vegetarians! Because they were the only thing that was a bit different. <laugh> We never came across gluten free and dairy and all the other intolerances. But now that's almost the norm. So you need to have a good system there. And especially if people could have anaphylactic reactions to it, it's critical from a legal point of view too, you know that information.

Cec Busby ([32:47](#)):

So if I'm wanting to improve my customer experience, what kind of goals should I be setting?

Milton Collins ([32:53](#)):

What's the 'wow' factor? I'm not just delivering a service or a product. How am I wowing my customer? What's going to, what's that something unexpected, that small surprise that will make them think, wow, that's not what I expected. How good's that? And that's what they'll talk about. That's what they'll tell their friends about that extra something additional that you've done for them that wasn't expected. And I used to say to my team, after say a big conference group there, we'd always have a debrief, cuz debriefing is very important. And always, you know, we were good at what we did cause we worked hard at it, had good systems. But always I said, okay, that was great but how do we make it better next time? What's something else we could do? What's the wow factor that we can do? And the team loved that cause we always came up with different ideas, or how about this, how about that? Some were dreadful ideas of course, but we workshoped it and the team loved that idea. Not that I was always expecting more. It was more about, okay, what else can we do that's different? What don't our competitors do? What makes us unique in the market?

Cec Busby ([34:01](#)):

And how would I know if my customer experience might be going down the gurgler. What would be some signs? <laugh>

Milton Collins ([34:09](#)):

<laugh>? Well number one, they stop coming back. <laugh> Two, obviously if there's any online. But so many people will not do anything, they just won't come back. They won't tell you about it or they won't, it's easy to go somewhere else. And I think you need to be aware of that too - who's not coming back. But also how they leave. And that's why that farewell is so critical. Now even on online, farewell is important, but especially in retail and and tourism and service industries, that farewell is critical. And you can tell by their reaction whether they're happy with it, better still, if they're blown away by it.

Cec Busby ([34:48](#)):

So where does trust factor into the customer experience?

Milton Collins ([34:54](#)):

Absolutely critical. It's that, as I mentioned, people do business with and purchased what they know, like, and trust. And that trust, you have to build. You can't expect that. Be it your product or your service. People need to be able to trust in that or they won't purchase, or they may never purchase again. So to build that trust element is about the relationship. Whether it's about making it easy to purchase, the quality of the product at the price point, but also the service and how they've had a great experience.

Cec Busby ([35:30](#)):

And is it also, do we need to think that it's not just about in terms of the business, that they're not just thinking about selling the product or pushing out a service, that it's also about, oh we're doing this thing or selling this thing because we believe it's great for the customer?

Milton Collins ([35:49](#)):

Sure. The best sales people build relationships. And they talk to the customer and let the customer do the talking. In fact, they listen. They just listen, by asking the right questions and then listening. And the customer will usually sell themselves, if you go to that trouble and build that relationship, and ask the right questions and listen.

Cec Busby ([36:11](#)):

And how good does my customer experience need to be these days? Is it everything <laugh>?

Milton Collins ([36:21](#)):

You've gotta have the right product, of course. Cause sometimes, I mean, I still buy the odd product where I don't get good customer service, but the product's so good. Now that's rare though cuz there's so much competition, especially online and globally. But you wouldn't wanna rely on that. If you've got the best product but then can back that up with the best service, then it's a no-brainer. Then you're gonna purchase more of that and refer more of that. I mean, there are products that I buy that I say it's the worst service, but the product's good and I put up with that because of the product, but it's not the way to go at all.

Cec Busby ([36:58](#)):

And you spoke a bit earlier about always surveying your customers. The best is that anecdotal feedback that you get on the day-to-day. But if I'm creating an actual customer survey that I wanna send out to people, what sort of questions should I be considering including?

Milton Collins ([37:18](#)):

What I've done in the past is, so many surveys, one that I've received, but two, just on online or Google it, and pick out some questions from other surveys that are going out that's relevant to your product. But it's gotta be relevant to your product. And once again, it's building the relationship and making it, finding out what the client, customer, what they want. Not what you are trying to sell - it's what they want, what they expect, and react to that.

Cec Busby ([37:51](#)):

What about customisation? We're all expecting a much more personal experiences these days, so is it difficult to create kind of that customisable experience?

Milton Collins ([38:04](#)):

I think very. I think we all want good customer service, but in other cases though, we are moving away from that too. By one, online; two, supermarkets, where you now do your own checkout. And so much now you do yourself, you know, the banks are closing so many agencies, it's all online. Post offices are closing now and others are trying to sell other products to the post offices. So, and I don't call that good, that's not good customer service. So I hear more complaints at the moment about customer service, more so than good stories about it. So I think in some ways we almost accept that customer service is not great. But I think after Covid, people enjoyed getting back into stores and restaurants and their spending went right up enormously, cuz people wanted back to have that experience. And I know that any events that were being held were booked out, cuz people were dying to get back out again for that experience, rather than just all the online.

Cec Busby ([39:12](#)):

So you mentioned things like, you know, bank branches closing and the human side of customer service and customer experience kind of slipping away in certain areas. Is there a case though for creating a great digital customer experience?

Milton Collins ([39:30](#)):

Oh absolutely, and I think that's important. You have to, if you're gonna be closing your banks, et cetera, you've gotta make the digital experience really easy. But there are so many times, though, where people want to talk to somebody. They want to be walked through it, they want to be helped out. And that is not just a minority of people. That's really important. And yes, you have your chatbots, that helps to a point, but once again, that personal interaction. So if the digital experience is not meeting your need, you need to be able to then get some personal advice online at the time. Or better still, they ring you back or contact you at a time you've given them, or they've given you an idea so that there is a complete experience. Not just, 'this is how we do it, full stop'.

Cec Busby ([40:22](#)):

And so when it's a hard question, you get referred to a real person as opposed to a bot.

Milton Collins ([40:29](#)):

<laugh>. Absolutely <laugh>, yeah.

Cec Busby ([40:33](#)):

I really like your whole delight the customer approach to customer experience. But what if I'm a bit of a one man band - how can I make sure that I'm always delighting my customers?

Milton Collins ([40:46](#)):

It should be easier because if you are the one main person that's dealing with people, be it a service or your own retail shop or whatever you're doing, then there's no excuse. But you still should have a checklist, a system, to make sure you are consistent in your offering and you're genuine, and you listen to the customer. That's probably the biggest take-home should be: listen to what the customer wants by asking questions and even probing gently what they want. They'll tell you. They're only too happy to tell you what they want and what's important to them. And if you can fulfil that need, then you'll have a sale.

Cec Busby ([41:25](#)):

And should it be a one size fits all approach or do valued customers get more value from you or <laugh>?

Milton Collins ([41:35](#)):

Oh, it should be personalised. It's about empathy, it's about emotional intelligence. It's about - the listening should provide you with how to react in that situation. Once again, listen to what they're asking and then provide what they've asked for, not what you are trying to sell. And sometimes it's a 'we really can't help you, that's not what we can do here, but we could refer you on'. That can also build loyalty too, because you're so honest about it.

Cec Busby ([42:06](#)):

Yeah, don't try and make up something that you can do that's not gonna fit the bill.

Milton Collins ([42:12](#)):

Certainly not, because it'll be returned anyway. Or if they don't return it, they'll speak very badly of you and certainly won't refer. Because the greatest customer or client is a referred customer or client, because already their friend or other business have done the selling for you, and they've come along wanting to buy from you. So it should be an easy sale.

Cec Busby ([42:36](#)):

How do you cultivate that word of mouth, that great word of mouth?

Milton Collins ([42:40](#)):

Ask for it. I ask for referrals. And I use lines like, 'thank you, I've really enjoyed working with you, it's been a great experience. Do you have any other friends or associates that I'd also enjoy working with?' And that way you compliment them, number one, so you make them feel good. And two, you then ask for the referral. The important part is asking. Don't expect people to refer. You need to ask for it. Sometimes build incentives in there, but not always incentives. Just even asking at the right time, when that client's totally happy, which is usually just when you provide the service or the product - that's when you compliment them. Genuinely though; it's gotta be for real. And then ask for the referral.

Cec Busby ([43:29](#)):

Thank you so much Milton. I think that's probably all we've got time for. It's been so great chatting to you today. You've had such valuable insights for our listeners on customer experience and customer service and how you can really up the ante on how you're delivering what you promised to your customers.

Milton Collins ([43:47](#)):

Thanks. It's been my pleasure too. Thanks for the probing questions. It's fantastic. Thank you very much <laugh>.

Cec Busby ([43:53](#)):

Thank you.