
Guest Column: Anne De Hauw

By **Anne De Hauw** on March, 17 2020 | People



As Covid-19 continues to have an existential impact on the global economy, this time is unprecedented and extremely challenging for our industry. How can airlines and their suppliers navigate the rough terrain, minimize damage and ultimately, when the dust settles, come out stronger?

We are in a global crisis of a magnitude that has never been experienced before. People stop moving around, stop traveling, stop going out, stop spending: money stops circulating. All sectors face unparalleled disruption and travel and hospitality are on top of the list.

Chances are that, once the virus is under control, we will be facing a new reality. We will have to reinvent the system, possibly by considering new opportunities for human creativity, a lighter environmental footprint, more conscious consumption and by optimizing local manufacturing.

In difficult times, it is vital to be there for your people, your customers. You serve them by making sure your products and services are available. Minimizing job losses should be every organization's primary objective.

Human engagement, health care, clear communication and transparency are critical factors for survival. More so, keep your high-performing employees (your company's greatest asset) close, by motivating and managing them carefully. The outcome will often be creativity, improvising skills and higher customer engagement.

Listen to your customer

During a time of disruption, a company's top strategic priority should be to focus on, and listen to, customers. The result of listening with empathy and emotional intelligence, trying to fulfill their needs in this critical period usually makes the difference between whether that customer ultimately, when the dust settles, chooses to continue to work with you or not.

Another big benefit of really listening is stronger customer relationships and loyalty building. After frequent interactions to support them as much as you can in this time of disruption, these customers start to view you as reliable partners, sometimes even friends.

And frequently, through this intense engagement, customers will discover and reveal needs — your inspiration for future product or services — that they didn't even know they had.

Innovation acceleration

Resilience and adapting to the situation are key drivers to identify opportunities in the midst of the chaos. Redirecting and restarting will require a lot of insight and audacity to build a new economy with refreshed values and ways of handling production, transport, distribution and retail.

Endless manufacturing of nice-to-haves will be replaced by fewer and more desirable need-to-haves: less but better!

Entrepreneurs and visionary leaders will turn their customers into innovation partners and accelerate the creation of solutions that not only solve their problems, but also provide an exceptional experience that they'll keep coming back for.

They will be creating solutions that combine digital innovation, environmental sustainability and customer-centricity. For the ones that will get it right, they will stand out from the competition and define the new reality.

A time of crisis can be an existential threat to current efforts, or a real opportunity to create value-driven innovation. Listening to your customers, positioning your organization to be more flexible, responsive and socially oriented. Dedicating resources to accelerate customer-centric innovation, are critical to helping your organization effectively navigate this unmatched social, sanitary and economic disruption.

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