

Customer Experience Crossroads

A newsletter on customer experience for clients, associates and friends

Managing a great customer experience is not a set-it-and-forget-it exercise. It requires constant monitoring and adjustments. Not unlike riding a motor scooter.

Lessons learned from riding on two wheels

By Susan Abbott

This spring I entered the fraternity of people who move on two motorized wheels -- I bought a Vespa.

I quickly learned that riding a Vespa is not much like driving a car. It's possible to let your attention drift when you are driving four wheels without seriously risking your safety. It may not be a great idea, but people read maps, talk on the phone, fool with the stereo and generally multi-task.

In a car, you are isolated from the environment around you. The wind may be blowing, but you hardly notice. The sounds and smells of the city are distant.

When riding on two wheels, however, you must be constantly diligent. Anything more than a brief lack of attention can lead to problems. All aspects of the environment, from a bit of gravel to exposed maintenance covers requires thought to navigate. It's a lot like managing experiences. Here's what I've learned that might help you in your challenges.

Rules of the road for managing brand-building experiences

1. Pay attention. If you let your attention wander, you'll find that you're no longer on track. The business press is filled with examples of organizations that stopped paying attention to the details and turned into a train-wreck.
2. Plan to make constant adjustments. That's part of the joy of riding, and part of the joy of creating world-class experiences. You can't just point your organization toward the goal and hope for success -- conditions change far too often for that.
3. Having a route plan really helps. You have too much to do to be searching for street signs while navigating traffic. You might have a great ride, but you're unlikely to reach your intended destination on time.
4. Don't ride when you can't keep your head on the bike. If you are distracted, frustrated or angry, that's not the time to engage with either customers or staff.
5. Ride according to your skill level. I avoided the streetcar lines until I felt I was ready to handle them. Likewise, you need to leverage the things your organization is good at, and build on those skills in a deliberate fashion. Don't tackle too many new things at once or people will feel overwhelmed.



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6. Lean into the wind. In difficult environments, you need to adjust your approach or you will fall off your path or worse.

7. Some things are counter-intuitive, but they're the only thing that works. When you are going faster, you can't steer by turning the handlebars. You have to learn counter-steering, where you push right to initiate a left turn. Human behavior is often counter-intuitive too. It's better to study it carefully, then do what works. Some people call that evidence-based management.

8. Powering through obstacles is not a good plan. Customers don't respond well to force, and neither do employees. Building experiences is a game that calls for finesse and precision. Raw power is for strip-mining, not brand-building.

9. Smile at all the kids in strollers. This is a business for people who love their work and care about people. If you don't, you'll never create a magical experience.

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Susan Abbott is author of the book, [The Innovative Organization](#), available through [Schulich Executive Education](#).

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