

Experience This! Show Podcast
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ExperienceThisShow.com

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Episode 94: The COVID-19 Experience

- Joey Coleman: Welcome to Experience This.
- Dan Gingiss: Where you'll find inspiring examples of customer experience, great stories of customer service, and tips on how to make your customers love you even more.
- Joey Coleman: Always upbeat and definitely entertaining, customer retention expert Joey Coleman.
- Dan Gingiss: And social media expert Dan Gingiss, serve as your host for a weekly dose of positive customer experience.
- Joey Coleman: So hold on to your headphones it's time to Experience This. Welcome to a special episode of Experience This. Depending on when you first became aware of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and its impact on individuals, businesses, and society at large, chances are better than not that you're now 100% aware of this pandemic situation.
- Dan Gingiss: After fielding dozens of emails, calls, and text messages from listeners of the Experience This show, our clients and past audience members, Joey and I thought it was important to deviate from our regularly scheduled programming, and do a special episode all about COVID-19 and its impact on customer experience.
- Joey Coleman: Friends, this is a serious topic with serious implications that we don't fully understand just yet given the speed at which this virus has spread around the globe, and the fact that scientists worldwide are working around the clock to understand what's happening. Our comments and discussions are based on the best information we have at the time of this recording, on Saturday, March 21st 2020.
- Dan Gingiss: Our goal in the episode, as in every episode of the Experience This show, is to discuss customer experience from a positive light. Telling the positive customer experience stories as a way of inspiring and encouraging our listeners to think deeper, wider, and more expansively about the role of customer experience in their organizations.

Joey Coleman: For the first time in human history, everyone, regardless of your age, your gender, your race, your nationality, your culture, your creed, your socio-economic standing, everyone on the planet is dealing with the exact same issue at the exact same time. Even if you're in a place where the coronavirus COVID-19 hasn't spread as much as some of the other places in the world, you're still reading about it in the news, you're seeing it on TV, you're seeing posts about it on social media. The good news is, we're all in this together. And as we've said many times on this show, the businesses that take care of their customers now will have customers when things get better, because the businesses that show empathy, that show care, that put customer experience as a primary focus will succeed.

Dan Gingiss: Now this episode is going to run longer than our usual episodes as we have a lot to cover. Instead of three segments, we're actually going to bring you five different segments in this podcast. We want to thank our loyal sponsor Avtex for their continued support of season five, including this special episode. What does it take to shift the standard from meeting the bare minimum of customer needs to over-delivering at every touchpoint? It's about being able to plan exceptional experiences and set those plans in motion. And that's exactly what our friends at Avtex do? Visit them at www.avtex.com.

Dan Gingiss: It's shocking how often people use 38 words to describe something, when two would do the trick. We are looking at you lawyers and accountants, words matter. And there is no excuse for trying to hide what you mean. We explore words and messaging in this next iteration of, say what!

Dan Gingiss: In 2018, when the European Union's general data protection regulation, better known as GDPR went into effect, email inboxes were flooded with privacy policy updates. Now they're inundated with urgent announcements about coronavirus measures from every company that has our email address on file. Most of these, including those from the major US airlines, say almost exactly the same thing. But some have taken the opportunity to stand out in a time of crisis. And these are the ones we can learn from and be inspired by.

Joey Coleman: In the first few weeks as the pandemic started to spread around the world, many airlines sent out email messages saying, guess what, we're going to clean the planes even more than we've cleaned them in the past, and explained the materials they were using and how they were going to be making sure that it was safe to fly.

Joey Coleman: My favorite airline, Delta, which as loyal listeners of the show know, I fly all the time, sent an email that said, "Not only are we going to do additional cleaning on the plane, but here's a video describing it." And in the video, the head of customer experience at Delta described their usual cleaning process as well as their augmented cleaning process. And they actually showed people using a special, almost like fogging machine, that they had used that would disinfect the planes, and then wiping down the seats, and how they were doing this on every turn. And I got to be honest, as somebody who was already committed to delta and loyalty Delta, when I saw this video, I thought, wow, they really do care

about me as a person and are going above and beyond the cleaning they normally do. And it left me feeling excited to fly again.

Dan Gingiss: And I want to share a contrasting story about this Joey is that after all the airlines had shared those emails about the cleaning process, I was waiting to take a flight that was late. And anybody who has been in business school and has done the Harvard business case on Southwest Airlines, knows that it takes an airline, at a minimum, 30 minutes to clean a plane under good circumstances. They can't do it faster than that. And so this plane is late, it arrives late, the passengers exit the plane, and immediately they start the boarding process [crosstalk 00:06:23] environment. Yes, what happened to your enhanced cleaning process? Like, only if we're not late, right. And so I did feel like, hey, if you're going to tell people that you are spending the extra time, please take the extra time to do it.

Dan Gingiss: So another thing that I really liked, I saw two different emails from two different organizations having to do with food, one was Domino's Pizza, and one was our friends at Imperfect Produce that we have talked about on a previous episode. Both of them sent emails talking about contact-less delivery, and that's this idea that you don't even have to interact with a delivery person, if you're practicing social distancing, which we all should be doing.

Dan Gingiss: And so the way that works is the delivery people are gloved up, so they're not actually touching your product. They don't even touch your doorbell. They simply leave the item at your door and then you receive a text message that it's there waiting for you. You don't have to sign anything, you don't have to exchange any pleasantries. And so this concept of contact-less delivery, I thought was really interesting just because it adheres to the situation at hand, which is, we got to stay away from each other even if we're continuing to buy things and have things delivered.

Joey Coleman: I agree, Dan. And what impressed me, to be honest, is how quickly, at least with Domino's, because I got that email, how quickly they built that opportunity or that option into the App. I mean, this was before cities we're talking about stay in shelter orders, it's before the lockdown had really started, it's like they were anticipating the need for this. And I think wherever a brand can provide a little bit of insight into, hey, we imagine our customers are thinking about this, and so are we, that stands them in good standing in terms of their reputation.

Joey Coleman: I also got an interesting email from Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and now some other companies have done it as well, but I got it from Enterprise first, that said, they were lowering the age minimum for renting a car. It used to be that you had to be 25 to rent a car, Enterprise came along and said, "We're going to lower the rent a car age to 18." And they explained in the email that the reason they were doing this is because so many colleges and universities around the country were closing and kids needed to get home with their stuff, and flights were becoming harder to get. And I just thought this was a great example of a customer centric message in this time where a lot of the emails were more about, hey, here's how you can use these tools that we've already had, whereas Enterprise was saying,

hey, we're making some changes to acknowledge the realities of this pandemic situation.

Dan Gingiss: And what I love about that is that those college students are going to be loyal to Enterprise for years to come just as I was in college.

Joey Coleman: 100%, yes.

Dan Gingiss: Yes. I mean, when I was in college, Enterprise was one of the only companies that would rent to college students, and that's kept me loyal all these years because it was the first company that I ever rented a car from. So, these are-

Joey Coleman: So forgive me Dan. What I loved about it too is I don't have college aged children and I'm well past college age myself. But when I got this email, I'm not kidding you, I shared it with a couple of my friends who I knew had kids that were in college and had started to lament, oh my gosh, if their school closes, how are we going to get them home? I was able to forward this on and share it with some people.

Dan Gingiss: Yes, it's awesome. Which is exactly as marketers what we want to happen.

Joey Coleman: Right, exactly. Word of mouth actually happened because it was a remarkable change in policy that we wanted to spread the word on.

Dan Gingiss: Exactly. So another message that resonated with me was from Charles Schwab. Now I've been a Charles Schwab customer since I graduated from college many years ago. And-

Joey Coleman: [inaudible 00:10:17] Folks when he rented that car.

Dan Gingiss: Exactly. And what I loved about it was that they didn't talk to me about cleaning their offices, they didn't talk to me about visiting the CDC website like everybody else did. They talked to me about what Schwab could do to help me now. And I want to read the introductory paragraph because the other thing that they did so well, was they showed empathy to the situation that all investors are in with what's going on in the stock market.

Dan Gingiss: It says, "To our valued clients. At Schwab, we have a deep and abiding belief in seeing the world through clients eyes. That simple, powerful idea helps us stay focused on what's most important, living up to The trust you place in us every day. With so much uncertainty in the financial markets and concerns about COVID-19, investing for the future may seem more complicated than ever. Please know that every one of us at Schwab is committed to helping you meet your long term investing goals. I also want to remind you of the resources available to you."

Dan Gingiss: And then they list expert perspectives, which is their analysis and commentary, service options, and one to one guidance, so they're actually offering the ability to meet with somebody to review your portfolio and determine next steps in such a turbulent market. And this letter was signed by the President and CEO,

Walt Bettinger. I thought this was really cool because it was actionable. It wasn't the same old that everybody was telling us, it was something that I could actually do. And it made me feel much better than I already was, which I had been positive on Schwab obviously for a long time, but it made me more confident in my choice.

Dan Gingiss: The other letter that I received that really stuck out to me was from a recent conference that I spoke at Catersource. And Catersource is the largest catering industry association in the country. And they also sent out a letter that I thought was so empathetic and offered real help, that it really, to me, stood out as a great example that other brands could emulate. And here's how their letter started. "Dear Colleague, this will not be the type of traditional letter that you have been seeing transmitted from businesses across the globe. This is a letter to, for, and about you. We see you. We share your pain for the losses and massive disruption you have incurred over the past week, and we'll continue to incur as social distancing and closing mandates continue. We understand the despair and anger you must be feeling, the distressing business decisions you have to make that were not in your strategy for 2020. This is also a letter about how Catersource can help you."

Dan Gingiss: Again, like the Schwab letter, it combined genuine empathy with real solutions and real help at a difficult time.

Joey Coleman: I love it. So we have three key takeaways from this conversation. Number one, don't just check the box in communicating with your customers, okay. Don't send the same email that everybody else is sending. Think about what you can do differently, how your tone can be different, how your focus can be different, how you can actually change the conversation.

Joey Coleman: Number two, project calm and confidence. Never in the history of corporate communications, has there been a greater need for letting your customers know that you are paying attention, that you are thinking strategically, and you are doing everything in your power to be there for them.

Joey Coleman: And number three, identify opportunities to provide real value in context with your brand. Sending someone to the CDC website, while a fantastic and useful resource, if that's not associated with your brand activities, you don't need to include that in your messages. Instead, give clear action steps, things that you are an expert in, things that you would recommend your customers be doing at this challenging time. By doing that, they will remember you when the pandemic subsides.

Joey Coleman: Just because you have required elements of your business, doesn't mean they need to be boring. It's time to get creative, have some fun, and make people sit up and take notice. Get your customers talking when you make the required remarkable.

Joey Coleman: Every business needs policies and procedures in order to function. That being said, policies and procedures are not meant for times of pandemic. What we're seeing now is that the most forward thinking, customer-centric businesses are

already adjusting and revising their existing policies and procedures to show that they're conscious of the dramatic impact COVID-19 is having on all of their customers.

Joey Coleman: For example, we talked earlier in the last segment about Delta Airlines. Now, I fly Delta a lot. In fact, last year, I logged over 160,000 miles on that individual airline. What happened when the COVID-19 crisis started to hit is that Delta came out, and many airlines did, saying, "We will give you a one year credit for any flight that you need to cancel. If you need to change the flight, there will be no change fees. And we're going to waive any of the type of associated fees we've previously had on changes in ticket price, change fees, cancellation fees, etc, and you'll just have this running credit."

Joey Coleman: Now, as somebody who flies Delta a lot, that was fantastic because, as you might imagine, at the time this all started to hit, I had many, many Delta flights booked in the future. Frankly, to the tune of 10s of thousands of dollars, which under a traditional policy, I would have lost. Thanks to Delta being more aware, I now have a credit that will allow me, when we all start flying again, to be able to buy those tickets with dollars I've already spent.

Joey Coleman: This made me love and appreciate Delta even more. It actually endeared me to the brand because of the way they had changed their policy to acknowledge the impact it was having on me personally as a flyer, even though we also know it was having an impact on them as people aren't buying tickets and aren't flying, that means that they're actually struggling with money. But the good news is because they're giving me the credit, they don't have to refund the money, so they get to keep some of that cash and defer when they need to deliver on the service to me until later when it becomes easier to fly.

Dan Gingiss: Yes. And American did something very similar and I appreciated it as well because I had a bunch of flights booked too. And obviously the airline industry is in a lot of trouble right now and it's likely going to be the beneficiary of a government bailout. But ultimately, we are going to all start flying again, it's going to happen at some point. And this is the moment where airlines and other companies can either retain their customer loyalty or they can aggravate their customers and send them to the competition. And I think both Delta and American have done a really nice job of retaining that loyalty.

Dan Gingiss: One thing that stuck out to me, Joey, I'm just wondering if you had thought of this as well, is that a lot of these fees that are being reversed and canceled, they didn't exist 10 years ago. Remember, it [crosstalk 00:17:52] took the airline industry almost collapsing to start creating all these ridiculous nuisance fees, and I wonder whether the long term aspect of this may be, hopefully fingers crossed, that they start rethinking these ridiculous fees. My favorite one is now the one where it costs you money to redeem your miles.

Dan Gingiss: So you've earned all these miles and now you want to use them to buy a ticket, and that'll be \$75 each way to use your miles. I mean, whatever accountant came up with that idea, I'm sure it made billions of dollars for the airlines, but it is so customer un-centric, it is so anti-loyalty literally, because the whole idea of

earning miles is that you've been loyal, and now all of a sudden we're going to basically punish you to use those miles. I'm hoping that it causes some of the airlines to rethink some of these and maybe never bring them back.

Joey Coleman: I think you bring up a great point, Dan, and it's really the case that this entire COVID-19 crisis, while incredibly stressful, while incredibly challenging and with huge costs both monetary, the cost of lives, I mean that the impacts of this are going to be felt for many, many years to come, right. Even once we're on the other side of the pandemic, there will have been things that have happened that will be difficult for anybody to overcome.

Joey Coleman: What I do hope is that organizations, and hopefully the folks listening to our show, are looking and saying, in this downtime, in this period where business isn't as usual, let's actually look at everything. Let's look at everything we're doing and come at it from a lens of saying, I understand we were doing this in the past, but do we need to do it going forward? Is it the right choice? Is that the customer centric choice? Is it the way that we want to operate as a business? I think there's a real opportunity here.

Dan Gingiss: I absolutely agree. And as we both have said recently, there is no more important time than right this second to be focusing on customer experience, because even if you don't have customers right now because you've had to temporarily shut down your business, when things go back to normal, the question is going to be, are the customers going to come back or are they going to go somewhere else? And what you do right now is going to have such a big impact on that.

Dan Gingiss: Joey, we both have different utility companies, because we live in different states, and I believe we both have monopolies you Xcel Energy and me ComEd in terms of electricity, and I always love looking at utilities, especially monopolies, and how they act because customer experience, you could make an argument, they don't need to focus on that, because we don't have a choice in where we [crosstalk 00:20:39] get our electricity.

Joey Coleman: Yes. And we want electricity so therefore, you have who you have.

Dan Gingiss: Yes, but both of our utility companies, I think, did something very similar, while it didn't necessarily benefit you or me specifically, I think we both felt really good about it. Which was, that they announced that they would not cancel anybody's electricity for lack of payment. And that basically they guaranteed that all customers were going to have their electricity remain on during this crisis. And for people that were having trouble paying, they would work out a payment plan and basically allow you to punt it down the road and not worry about losing electricity on top of all the other worries that you have right now.

Joey Coleman: Hugely important and hugely valuable. And most utility companies have a rule that they can't cut the power during the winter, especially in colder environments like you live in Chicago, and like I have here in Colorado. But the fact that the utility companies, at least it appears, I'm not sure about this, but it appears like they acted before there was legislation saying they couldn't cut. To

me, to your point, left me feeling better about my energy company. I was like, wow.

Joey Coleman: And God forbid I do end up in a situation where I couldn't pay for my electric bill, I'm really excited to know that I'm taken care of. I thought that was a great example of when you're messaging to your customers, even if the message doesn't specifically affect them, like the Enterprise email about lowering the rental car age that we talked about in the last segment, it still has a lifting effect because it allows your customers to know that you're thinking about them, even if the things you're doing don't actually impact them personally.

Joey Coleman: Speaking of things that I think are unexpected and delightful communications, I had a week long stay planned at the MGM Hotel in Las Vegas that was actually supposed to happen this past week, and the hotel had to close down because of COVID-19. What I thought was really interesting is I got an email from them at about 2:00 AM, the night before we were technically supposed to be checking in. Now we had already decided we weren't going on our trip. But the email said, "Because we're closing the hotel down for the next month, we are refunding everyone's deposits who has a reservation at our hotel."

Joey Coleman: Now the MGM has 6,000 rooms, right, this is an enormous hotel. But the email went on to say, you don't have to do anything. You don't have to call in and tell us you're canceling, you don't have to call in and tell us you're affected, give us some time, and they kind of implied in the next 24 hours, and we will reverse back and refund to all of your cards the cancellation. I thought this was a great example of a company saying, hey, we're going to do something, but good news is, we're taking care of it, you don't have to ask, you don't have to worry about it, it's coming back your way.

Dan Gingiss: Yes, I love that. And while not as proactive, I had a great experience. I had a hotel booked for three nights at the Mohegan Sun Pocono in Pennsylvania. And this was a three night prepaid non-refundable rate. And I called up and said, hey, I had to cancel my trip. I actually said, I'm going to move it because I will be back, is it okay if I move it? And they said, "We're just going to give you a refund. It's fine, no questions asked."

Dan Gingiss: And I'll admit, I was a little surprised because it would have been so easy for them to hide behind their policy and say, I'm sorry, but you bought a non-refundable rate too bad for you. But they were very, very amenable and they, I think, have ensured that the next time I go there, and I go there a lot because I have a consulting client there, that I'm going to stay there. And so again, short term loss, because they lost some money from me, long term gain because they gained my loyalty.

Joey Coleman: So, what do we need to do in these crazy times? Number one, look at your policies and procedures now. Don't wait. Get into them right now and come up with COVID-19 conscious versions. Versions of your policies and procedures that acknowledge the realities of the world today, and put your customers first.

Joey Coleman: Number two, be empathetic. Brands can really endear themselves based on how they behave in times of crisis. This is definitely a time of crisis, and the more empathy you can show towards the position your customers are in, the more likely your customers will be to stick with you through this crisis, and be back as loyal customers once things start to return to normal.

Joey Coleman: Number three, put people over profits. I understand as a business owner, that is easier said than done. But it is more important now than in any other time in your business's history. We need to focus on our customers and our employees and doing the right thing for them, even if it means our profit margins are going to go down.

Joey Coleman: Now, employees listening, there's going to need to be some assistance from the employees as well. But the employers have the opportunity to lead the charge. And last but not least, trust your gut. Remember that every business on the planet is in this same situation right now. It's not just you, it's not just your industry, it's not just the businesses in your town, every business on the planet is dealing with these challenges. There's more time for empathy and grace for all of us if we just recognize that we're all in this together, trust our guts, and do the right thing.

Joey Coleman: Sometimes, a remarkable experience deserves deeper investigation. We dive into the nitty gritty of customer interactions, and dissect how and why they happen. Join us while we're dissecting the experience.

Dan Gingiss: We're now going to turn our attention to employees. Just as taking care of your customers in a time of stress and crisis is critical, it's also important to focus on your employees, because similar to the best of times, happy employees equal happy customers. And unfortunately, the inverse is also true. So it's very important to make sure that your employees remain healthy, safe, and confident.

Dan Gingiss: Now, there are a lot of places in the country, including my home state of Illinois, that already have shelters in place requirements, so people are working from home. There are other places in the country where people are still going into work, either because they are essential employees in essential businesses, or because their companies unfortunately have not yet made a decision to ask people to stay home.

Dan Gingiss: This is such a critical time to show employees that you care about them and that you understand that they are the engine behind your business. And oftentimes, they're the front lines of your business that are talking to customers. Imagine asking an employee to talk to a customer and try to comfort them and make them feel safe when they don't feel comforted or safe themselves. So the first thing is, please do not require anyone to come into work who doesn't absolutely have to. The good news is, we live in an era where remote working has become popular anyway, Joey and I have worked from our homes for a while. Many people have worked from home for a long time and know how to do it. And we have the technological resources to do it.

- Joey Coleman: Think about the definition of the word essential as well. I've been in some conversations in the last week where I heard employers talking about certain employees as being essential, and when I press them on it, they actually just decided that they wanted that employee to keep working, the functions that they needed that employee to do was not essential that they be performed at the office. They could have been performed by home. So I think there's a real opportunity here because you're employees are smart people too. If you've tagged them as essential, and they don't feel that it's essential, they may not feel comfortable speaking up because they want to keep their job. And I think there's an opportunity for all managers and employers to really think about what is the true definition of essential in a pandemic crisis.
- Dan Gingiss: Yes. Totally makes sense. I mean, unfortunately, not every employee is essential, even though they may think they are, or in the best of times, maybe they are. But right now essential employees is generally going to be a smaller list. Now, if employees must work in person in the office, it's absolutely critical that you practice social distancing religiously. And that they have the proper protection, such as gloves, masks, sanitizer, etc, so that coming into work is literally not risking their lives, right.
- Dan Gingiss: I mean, we all joke about how we spend more time at work than sometimes we spend at home or with our families, but work is important it is not worth risking our lives for. And so it is really important that if you are going to require people to come in, that they feel safe and that they feel protected.
- Dan Gingiss: Another thing that I think is really important that sometimes we lose sight of even in the best of times, is that employees have families, and families are stressed during this time as well, especially those of us who have kids that are suddenly home from school, and bored, and we're trying to keep them entertained while also keeping our jobs and working, and that causes even more stress. So just as we often talk about stepping into the shoes of your customer, it's so important to step into the shoes of your employees and really understand what they're going through right now.
- Joey Coleman: Absolutely. And I think we need to be thinking as employers, how are we going to handle an employee becoming sick? What are you doing to think ahead now for the employees who actually are essential? Is there an opportunity to cross-train? Is there an opportunity to do some scenario modeling where if that person who's the linchpin in your business, either is personally sick, or has a spouse, or a significant other, or a child, or a parent that is sick, what are you going to do to hopefully be able to continue keep functioning using other people on your team? Most experts will tell you that it is better to have these conversations and think through these things before you're in the thick of it, instead of waiting to try to troubleshoot these type of problems once you're waist deep in the issue.
- Dan Gingiss: Exactly. So, let's look at some examples of companies that we think are doing the right thing by their employees, and hopefully, you can be inspired in your business to consider similar measures. So the first that I wanted to bring up was Facebook, which immediately came out and announced that it was giving \$1,000

to every employee in order to help them. And obviously they have a lot of employees. And if you think about it, \$1,000 doesn't sound like a ton of money, except this is also what the US government is considering sending to everybody, right? So, if the US government sending \$1,000, and now my employer is matching it, again, it's a gesture of goodwill that I think gains loyalty from employees over time.

Joey Coleman: Well, and I think \$1,000 actually, for the majority of Americans is a huge amount of money because most research shows that the typical family, when faced with an unexpected \$400 expense, would not be able to weather that challenge. And so most families are facing a lot more than a \$400 change in expense right now, not only in terms of costs, but in terms of where their income lies.

Joey Coleman: It's interesting, a lot of the sports teams that are not able to have their events anymore, given the crowd rules etcetera, have created some interesting solutions as well, both in Major League Baseball, the NBA, the NHL, a number of owners have stepped forward, notably Mark Cuban, to say, we're going to pay the salaries of all of the people who normally work in our basketball arena. So there's an opportunity here for businesses of all sizes to step forward.

Joey Coleman: I know a couple of CEOs who have decided that they're not taking any pay for the next three months to be able to pay their employees for the next three months, so that they don't have to lay people off or fire them. So there's a lot of opportunities to get creative.

Dan Gingiss: And I love that example because so often, when bad things happen to good employees, the first thing that employees look to is the top executives, right. So when there's layoffs, for example, and then you see that your top executive is making \$50 million a year and gets another \$100 million in stock options. And you're like, well boy, if he had given up two or three of those millions of dollars, maybe we could have saved a lot of jobs. And so I think this is one of those things where if you're able to do it, you really can gain so much loyalty from your employees versus the opposite, which again, can be anger and distrust of the company.

Dan Gingiss: I know Disney and universal have done similar things for their employees because as we all know, those parks are closed indefinitely and there's a ton of people that work to keep those open, and whether they're cast members, or people operating the food stations, or the ride stations, tons of employees and they're really working hard to keep those people as well.

Dan Gingiss: Another example that I really liked was Starbucks, which decided to extend its mental health benefits for store employees. And I think why this is important is Starbucks is one of the places that is staying open and therefore is requiring baristas to come in and make coffees even though people can't dine in and they can only take out, they're still bringing in their employees. And obviously, this causes stress. And Starbucks acknowledged that and is now offering mental health benefits for free to their employees, which I think was an excellent move.

Joey Coleman: Folks, this is a huge one, I don't care what business you're in, if you are not taking time to consider the mental health of your employees right now, there is a big problem. So many people are uncertain. So many people are afraid. In fact, it's rising to the level that there's so much fear and uncertainty, I think it's something that most people aren't even talking about. I mean, to be completely blunt and transparent, before Dan and I started recording today, we just checked in on how each other are doing and what's going on, because this is a stressful time for everyone.

Joey Coleman: This is an opportunity for you to look to your friends, look to your co-workers, look to your boss, as well as the people that report to you and check in on everybody's mental and emotional state and how they're doing. Business shouldn't just be about, are we operating? And are we operating at efficiencies? And are people getting paid and are our employees getting paid, are our customers placing orders, etc? We should spend some time thinking about the mental and emotional health of the people we interact with too. And my hope is, while this is certainly a terribly challenging and difficult time, that more businesses will look to the opportunity in this time to say, how can we press reset, a reset that we've known that we've needed to do for a long time, and actually think a little bit more about what our employees are going through?

Dan Gingiss: So here are some takeaways from this segment. As always, happy employees equal happy customers. It is never more important than right now to focus on our employees and keeping them happy, healthy, and safe, so that they can focus on our customers and keeping them happy, healthy, and safe. Also, your frontline employees are representing your brand right now, as they always are. But in a time of crisis, if they're stressed out, if they're feeling beaten down, if they're feeling under-appreciated or unappreciated, how is it that you think they're going to project to your customers?

Dan Gingiss: So especially with frontline employees, right now, customer service agents, retail employees that need to continue working, people that are engaging with customers, these are the ones that we've got to focus on and keep in a good state and a positive state so that they then transmit that to customers. And finally, just as you're going to need your customers after this crisis passes, you're also going to need your employees. This is the time to engender pride in and loyalty to your organization.

Joey Coleman: We love telling stories and sharing key insights you can implement or avoid, based on our experiences. Can you believe that this just happened? The COVID-19 crisis is impacting everyone you interact with. And what we've already discussed how it's impacting your customers and impacting your employees, we wanted to talk about a third category of people that your business interacts with that are being hit hard by this virus, your suppliers.

Joey Coleman: Everybody in their business life and in their personal life has folks that look out for you, people that you patronize. Whether that's your chiropractor, the hairdresser you go to, or a business setting, the person who cleans your business office, who maybe helps support your IT infrastructure, whatever it may be, people that come to your office, or to your home, or you go to their office or to

their home to take advantage of their services. And in this time where business is grinding to a halt, and more and more people are being encouraged to not only stay home and work, but to stay home and not travel outside of their homes, your suppliers are increasingly in jeopardy.

Joey Coleman: And so one of the things we want to address is the fact that in many businesses, the suppliers you interact with are actually small businesses or freelancers. People who don't necessarily have the cash reserves that some of the larger brands we referred to earlier in the show do. And so the question becomes, what are you doing and what can you do to look after the people of which you are a customer?

Joey Coleman: So, for example, in a business setting, if you have somebody that comes to clean your office but your office isn't going to be operating anymore from your office, what can you do to support them during this time when their revenues are going to be down? I know a lot of entrepreneurs I know have agreed to prepay for some of the cleaning that's going to have to happen in the future, even though it's not happening right now.

Joey Coleman: What are you doing to look at creative ways to reallocate resources? For example, I have an assistant who helps me scheduling with flights, and coordinating hotels, and logistics for my travel. Needless to say, I don't anticipate traveling for the next month at least and potentially two or three or more. I've decided to have her work on other things that are important to my business, that are not necessarily related to my travel, but yet allows me to keep her on the payroll.

Dan Gingiss: Yes, I've done something similar with my virtual assistant who was hired to really help me reach out to prospects and make them aware of my speaking capabilities, and the fact that I'm available for keynotes, and that sort of thing. And and right now, selling that is not a great idea because events are being canceled and people are not necessarily thinking in that direction. So I've been cross training him on some of the marketing that I've been doing for my business, my newsletter and some of the stuff that I do with taking audio and video and transcribing it into texts to make blog posts, and some of my social sharing and scheduled posts and all that sort of thing, and I'm really trying to cross train him so that he can continue to help, he can continue to be employed, and then I can continue moving my business along.

Dan Gingiss: And these are hard decisions to make, because let's face it, Joey, just like so many others out there, you and I don't know what's going to happen to our business in the next few months or even years, or how long it is going to affect us. And so the initial instinct is to just hoard your money and don't spend a dime. And I'm actually trying on a couple of different places to spend money right now, to invest in my business's future, and to build some foundational stuff, because I do believe, as my grandmother always used to say, "This too shall pass." And whenever it does pass, I want to be in a good position to pick up where I left off and maybe even be in a stronger spot than I was when this first started.

Joey Coleman: Absolutely, Dan. And I think your grandmother had wise advice and it's something that pretty much everybody's agreeing, that there will come a time that this is not as big of a pandemic situation as it is right now, right. We've got ways to go before we get there, but it will get better. What are we doing now to make sure that the businesses that serve us, and the suppliers, and the vendors that we have relationships with continue to be in business? And this doesn't just hit the business side of it, it hits the personal side. So, for example, my wife and I, and my two boys, obviously we get haircuts, right. So one of the things we did is we went to-

Dan Gingiss: Hey, that's not too obvious for some of us, Joey.

Joey Coleman: Fair enough. This is the difference between Dan and I folks. Dan takes care of all of his own hair trimming, I have a professional work on mine. Although some people who've seen me on stage or seen pictures of me might agree whether it's that professional or not. But the moral of the story here is, hair salons are closed down. So we reached out to some of the folks that provide us with services, whether that's massage, or chiropractic care, or hairdressers and offered to pre-buy haircuts in the future, pre-buy adjustments and massages in the future.

Joey Coleman: And the idea behind this was, yes, there's a little bit of a hit from us from a point of view of expending money, but you can put that on a credit card and ride it for a month or two, and if that's the thing that helps your favorite hairdresser, or your favorite massage therapist, or your favorite chiropractor, whatever Freelancer or small business you do business with, navigate through this crisis, not only have you ensured that you'll be well taken afterwards, because they'll still be there, but here's what I can promise you, they're not going to forget that you've stood by them during this time. They're not going to forget the generosity that you extended to them. Now I'm not saying that's why you should do it, but it certainly is a nice ancillary benefit if you're in doubt about whether or not you should.

Dan Gingiss: For sure. And I think the smart companies, by the way, are showing that appreciation right now. So, there is a sushi restaurant in my hometown that obviously is suffering quite a bit. And a lot of residents have been recommending this sushi restaurant, obviously now just pickup and delivery. And what's happening is when you order they are offering a discount for pickup, which is funny because that's the only way you can order right now is pickup. And secondly, they are including a gift certificate with your order for a future order. So they're basically already now saying ... So as a customer, I feel good because I'm supporting a local restaurant that is clearly struggling. I can't go sit in the restaurant, but I can still order out from it. And they're showing that thankfulness back to me saying, hey, we really value you, thanks for supporting us during this difficult time. And that's what the letter, there was a little handwritten note with the gift certificate, that's what it said.

Dan Gingiss: And so, you feel good about that, right, because you feel good that you're supporting a local business, and you feel good that they feel good, and that they're willing to thank you for it.

Joey Coleman: Folks, during this pandemic, there are going to be a lot of businesses that will struggle and close, especially small and local businesses. You can do your part to help by following this four step process. Number one, determine who your key suppliers are, both personally and professionally.

Joey Coleman: Number two, reach out to them and discuss the status of the relationship. Any outstanding shipments, or supplies, or projects that maybe need to be put on pause, the payment terms. Have a conversation. Don't wait for them to call you. This is not a conversation anybody is excited to have, but lean into it sooner rather than later.

Joey Coleman: Number three, get creative. Offer to pre-pay via gift cards, or pre-booked appointments, or pre-packaged, or even pay for services that aren't rendered. If you've got somebody that's been loyal to you for many, many years, and your business or your personal financial standing is in a place where you can afford to pay them for a month or two, even if they don't deliver on the service, the investment you are making into that relationship long term, will far outweigh the dollar outlay today.

Joey Coleman: And last but not least, thank the workers that are doing their best in these new circumstances. For example, the person who carries out the groceries to the car when you've ordered online, the person who when you call to cancel a service or to get a refund is answering the phone and doing their best to process. A kind word right now not only helps everyone get through the day, but it's an investment in those businesses being around tomorrow.

Joey Coleman: There are so many great customer experience articles to read, but who has the time? We summarize them and offer clear takeaways you can implement starting tomorrow. Enjoy this segment of CX press where we read the articles so you don't need to.

Dan Gingiss: So we wanted to end this episode on a positive note. And rather than a traditional CX press segment where we just go through a single article, we wanted to share with you that we've seen lots of articles out there of positive things happening amidst this outbreak and pandemic.

Joey Coleman: Yes, folks, it's not all doom gloom in the news. Don't just get caught up in the stories that are about the terrible things that are happening. Look for the more positive stories too.

Dan Gingiss: And as it turns out, companies of all sizes often have resources that can help others in the community during a time of crisis. It might be money, or supplies, or facilities, or even just expertise. And we wanted to share some companies that we've seen that are doing just that. So Loom, a video recording and sharing service, has made their Loom Pro Edition free for teachers and students at K through 12 schools, universities, and educational institutions. As we all know, many students now are being forced to learn remotely. And loom is a service that can be used for that, and so they're just putting their service out there for educational institutions.

Joey Coleman: Yes. And LinkedIn has decided to take 16 of its learning courses and make them free. Now these are courses that you used to have to pay for, but now they're available to anyone and they provide tips on how to stay productive, how to build relationships when you're not face to face, how to use virtual meeting tools, and how to balance family and work dynamics in a healthy way, which increasingly, as more people find themselves working from home with their children and their families, these are valuable tips and suggestions to help people navigate this new time.

Dan Gingiss: We talked in the last segment about how local restaurants are really struggling. So Uber Eats and DoorDash have both waived commission fees for independent restaurant partners to promote people supporting their local restaurants.

Joey Coleman: A good buddy of mine, Philip McKernan, an amazing coach and inspiring individual decided to make his books available for free. He decided to make his online courses available for free. And he launched a new virtual training program where each week he's doing motivational check-in sessions that help people explore how do they navigate this new COVID-19 world. I think what's great about this is there's literally no business on the planet that can't get creative about how they're providing value, not only to their customers, but just to the public in large and their general broader community.

Dan Gingiss: I definitely agree. And one way to look at it is to focus on keeping things as normal as possible during a time when it's anything but. And we've seen a lot of public companies stopping their stock buybacks, for example, and the reason for that is to make sure that they remain solvent and able to help their customers during an outbreak. I think we've also seen lots of companies, we talked about utilities in the first segment, but we've also seen all the cable companies, and telecommunications companies, and Google have made pledges to keep the internet going and alive for all Americans, even if people can't afford to pay.

Dan Gingiss: Again, on a local level, for a smaller company, which a lot of our listeners run, think about how you can help even just your local community, it might just be the little town or suburb that you live in. What can you do to give back to your community because people are going to remember that when this passes?

Joey Coleman: Or the person in your neighborhood. Folks, this literally is a time to think as, in some ways, as small as possible. Think about the people who live on your street who are maybe immunocompromised or elderly, that you could leave a little note with your cell phone number that says, if you need somebody to go to the grocery store for you or to the pharmacists to pick things up for you, call my number and I can go out and do that. Now, again, we still want to encourage people to practice social distancing, to only go out if you absolutely need to, to maintain a significant physical distance at least three feet, closer to six if you can, away from anybody that you interact with, but there's an opportunity to provide value to people beyond the groups who normally provide value to.

Dan Gingiss: Joey, the suburb I live in, somebody set up a Facebook group that was specifically for doing just that, for helping others and I've been asked to join it now by about 18 of my friends. And it's a great way [crosstalk 00:52:42] Social

media guy, Dan, I mean, come on. Well, it's a great way to spread the word about being able to help the elderly or people who are immunocompromised during this time. So I love that.

Joey Coleman: I was just talking to my little brother earlier today, he lives in Springfield, Illinois, and at the time we're recording this it's not long after St. Patrick's Day and they had a message go out in their neighborhood that said, if you want to participate, put some shamrocks on the windows, that way, when families are out walking around, because we want to encourage people to continue to exercise and continue to get outside, just stay away from other people when you do it, right. But they said, "Set it up so that your kids on a walk through the neighborhood at night can count the number of shamrocks." And I thought, what a creative way to allow neighbors to connect with each other in a way that keeps folks healthy and abides by the idea of physical distancing, but still allows people to have some type of interaction with their community.

Dan Gingiss: I love it. Now if you want more inspiration, we recommend an article by Just Capital that is entitled Capitalism Meets Coronavirus, How Companies are Responding. And of course we'll include the link in our show notes at www.experiencethisshow.com. But we've also created a shortened Bit.ly link that you can use if that's what you prefer. And it is Bit.ly, which is B-I-T.-L-Y /ET for Experience This, responses. And the E, the T, and the R in responses are all capitalized. So it's Bit.ly/ETResponses, and that'll get you to that Just Capital article.

Dan Gingiss: Now, we wanted to provide you with a couple of bonus articles as well to spread the Good News [inaudible 00:54:28], because hey, we got nothing but time here. And hopefully, you've got some time to listen. So, an article that I happened upon that I really liked is from an organization that I had actually never heard of, which is called the Good News Network. And I can tell you, I'm going to be following their stuff for now because I'm really tired of all the bad news. But this is an article called 10 Positive Updates on the COVID-19 Outbreaks from Around The World. And it was written by McKinley Cobly of the Good News Network, and this will also be shared our show notes, and there is also a Bit.ly link which is, Bit.ly/ETGoodNews, and again, ET, the G in good, and the N in news are capitalized.

Dan Gingiss: And some of the examples that they shared in this article are that US researchers have delivered the first COVID-19 vaccine to volunteers, human volunteers in an experimental test program. Also amidst national shortages of hand sanitizers, there are several alcohol distilleries around the country that have begun using their facilities to make their own sanitation products and sell them. And some of them are selling a lot of them. And finally, air pollution plummets in cities with high rates of quarantine. So, we're excited to present to you a little bit later this season, a special environmental episode of Experience This, but I thought this was some good news too, that we were seeing positive environmental effects by people staying home.

Joey Coleman: Absolutely. And to conclude out our CX press episode of Good News that you can subscribe to or find, I've been a big fan of Dr. Peter Diamandis and his work

for many years now. Peter is the chairman and CEO of the X Prize Foundation, which leads the world in designing and launching these large incentive prizes to drive radical breakthroughs. So you might have heard of the X Prize. He also is an original founder of Singularity University, which is all about teaching people about exponential technologies.

Joey Coleman: And over the last two years, he's built a machine learning algorithm that scrapes the world's news and science journals and social feeds every day to understand how exponential technologies are impacting specific topics and industries. And he calls it, Future Loop. He sent out an email just two days ago about a new offering that they have. And I'm quoting from the email, "Future Loop Pandemic Special Edition, is a daily comprehensive update on the impact of exponential technologies like AI, robotics, drones, cellular medicine, CRISPR, networks and sensors, all about the COVID-19 pandemic. If you participate Future Loop will update you every day on the latest breakthroughs in detection, prevention, and cure of COVID-19. Now, this product is still in beta, but it's powerful, high quality info and it's free. Your mindset is your most important tool during the pandemic. Making sure you're consuming the right information is critical to maintaining that mindset. Future loop offers data driven optimism."

Joey Coleman: I just loved that. Data driven optimism. There's a tool out there that you can subscribe to for free, that will deliver positive news that acknowledges the craziness that is the COVID-19 pandemic, but provides a glimmer of hope. So you can find this at our show notes at experiencethisshow.com, you can also, as Dan mentioned, if you want to check out the Bit.ly link, it's Bit.ly/ETF, that's Experience This and the F is the beginning of the word Future Loop, where future and loop are both capitalized. But again, if you didn't have a chance to write that down or you don't want to go, just go to experiencethisshow.com you'll be able to find the show notes for this episode and you'll be all set to get some data driven optimism in your inbox while you're working from home in the coming days and weeks.

Dan Gingiss: So the takeaways of this multi-article CX press segment, number one, companies have the unique ability to provide resources to help the community. It may not be money, it could just be expertise. It doesn't necessarily have to cost you anything, but you do have resources and think about how you can give back. Number two, find some way, even in a small way, to give back to your customers or to your community and show them how much you appreciate them in this difficult time and they will appreciate you back.

Dan Gingiss: And finally, number three, take some time to think about positive things and to read about positive things. It can be very easy in a time of crisis to get down, to get depressed, to get angry, and it's nice to see that there are a lot of positive things happening in the world right now. Unfortunately, with the media situation that we find ourselves in, in the United States, it's hard to find those things, and so we hope by giving you some of these resources, you can stay in tune with some of the positives going on in the world now.

Dan Gingiss: Thanks so much for listening to this special episode of the Experience This show. We will return to our regular schedule next Tuesday and have episodes ready for

you through the first week of June. Please note that the rest of the episodes in season five have been pre-recorded before the COVID-19 pandemic. If you liked this episode, please do us a favor and tell your friends and colleagues. Our entire back catalog of more than 90 episodes is available on iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Play, Amazon Alexa, or your favorite podcast App.

Joey Coleman: And a special thanks to our wonderful friends Avtex. Avtex has been a fantastic sponsor of the show this season. We so appreciate their support and their continued involvement in helping bring Experience This to your ears every week. What we love about Avtex is that their approach brings together transformation and orchestration, which means they help you to define the areas of CX that need to be improved, and then create a roadmap for improving them. Avtex knowledge and experience in orchestration allows them to help you leverage the people, processes, and technology you need to implement your plan. You can learn more about the great folks at Avtex by visiting their website at www.avtex.com. That's A-V-T-E-X.com.

Dan Gingiss: And finally, we are here for you our loyal listeners during this difficult time. If you have a question about how to respond to COVID-19 with a customer experience lens, don't hesitate to reach out to us directly. Joey's email is JoeyC@JoeyColeman.com. And my email is Dan@DanGingiss.com. Thanks again for listening and we'll see you next week on The Experience This show. Wow, thanks for joining us for another episode of Experience This. We know there are tons of podcasts to listen to, magazines and books to read, reality TV to watch, we don't take for granted that you've decided to spend some quality time listening to the two of us.

Joey Coleman: We hope you enjoyed our discussions and if you do, we'd love to hear about it. Come on over to ExperienceThisShow.com and let us know what segments you enjoyed, what new segments you'd like to hear. This show is all about experience, and we want you to be part of the Experience This Show.

Dan Gingiss: Thanks again for your time and we'll see you next week for more, Experience ...

Joey Coleman: ... This.