

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF **membermouse™**

EP 151: How To Create The Best Possible Experience For Your Customers with Sarah Hatter

"Think about how they can instill love in their actions towards customers. That is radical thinking. In the tech world and in the business world and in the consumer world, to think about loving our customers and not just like, "We love you here's a coupon," but actually having motivation of love towards them, the really good companies are not afraid of that."

INTRO:

You're listening to Sarah Hatter, my special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Sarah is the founder and CEO of CoSupport, a business that has helped over 200 companies create excellent customer support experiences since 2011.

Sarah is also the organizer of the ElevateCX conference AND the best-selling author of The Customer Support Handbook.

Yep... that means she literally wrote the book on customer support.

Sarah describes herself as being "spiritually passionate" about good customer support and has an immense amount of wisdom to share with you.

In today's episode, Sarah and I sit down for a candid and engaging conversation about all things related to customer experience. Plus, we get deep into the joys and pains of entrepreneurship.

If you're wondering how you can provide your customers with the best possible experience or want to learn how to apologize in case you slip up... you won't want to miss this episode.

It was such a joy speaking with Sarah and I sincerely hope you enjoy our conversation.

As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is Episode 151 of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Wait, what's my first line? Welcome. I haven't done this in a couple of weeks. I usually say, "Welcome to the shows." Yes, we're recording that, but this will all get cut.

Sarah: No, leave it in. This is great, people are going to see behind the curtain. What it's like sometimes it's just you got to piece it together-

Eric: You have no idea about some of the things that have happened, but it always turns out to be very well polished.

Sarah: If you have too much polish, I think it seems insincere. And I think authenticity when it comes to ... Becoming someone that people can trust and lean on for advice and wisdom, you've got to have a little bit of edginess to you. So, leave it in.

Eric: Yeah. Let's just roll into this very casually.

Sarah: Let's do it.

Eric: I was actually just out in California for a week.

Sarah: Where were you?

Eric: I was in a Venice Beach.

Sarah: Nice. I used to live on Highway One, right there on Lincoln Highway.

Eric: And so, you're not there anymore?

Sarah: I'm not. I'm up in Northern California. I grew up in Northern California. My whole family's here. I was away for about 15 years. It was kind of like a slow progression back because I lived in Chicago and I always said, "I'd never move back to California." And then I said, "Okay, well, I won't move to San Francisco." So, I moved to LA and then I was like, "Well, I will move back to El Dorado County where I'm from." So, now I'm in Sacramento in the State Capitol. It's amazing. It's wine country. It's great. My whole family lives within about half a mile of me.

Eric: That's nice. My brother lives in South Pasadena. So, I was able to visit him while I was out there. And I have a brother in Connecticut, a sister in Florida, my parents are in Florida. And definitely during this time I often felt like, oh, it'd be nice if people were closer. So, you're in a good situation.

Sarah: Yeah. It's been good timing for me. Let's put it that way. Unexpectedly good timing.

Eric: I really appreciate what you said about the authenticity and just kind of go on with it. Because I mean, that's been a big part of my entrepreneurial journey is just, I always say ignorance was one of the main things that helped me to kind of get to where I am, because if I knew too much about what it would be about, or if I thought too much about it, you could easily get overwhelmed.

Sarah: Yes. And I find myself in that place too sometimes where that's my most unhealthy state is just getting out of it, right? Just like going to get a real job, going to get a degree in library science or something completely unrelated to being an entrepreneur. So, you're right. I mean,

there is an element to it that you can never know until you're in it. You can never really know what it's like, what the life is going to be like being a business owner or a founder or an employer for gosh sakes, you know?

Eric: Right.

Sarah: So, yeah. I definitely feel you on that one.

Eric: But it's such a weird animal, right? This word entrepreneurship gets thrown around so much. But I feel like it's more of a lifestyle, right? And you can call yourself an entrepreneur at some point, but it ultimately like all labels. It minimizes the complexity of what it actually is.

Sarah: Right. And I also think that there's something about people's character and people's personality typing that leads them into this type of career. I've always been seen as very radical and rebellious even when I was a kid. And I grew up in a very conservative family, very conservative town. I was kind of the outlier a lot because I loved to read, I loved the arts. I would listen to show tunes on cassette tape. Always thinking of the wider, bigger world out there. I was very into the arts, very into writing. And those things weren't necessarily, I think top of mind for a lot of people at a very working class, neighborhood working class environment. And I do find that people who are terrible employees sometimes make really great business owners.

Eric: Yeah, for sure.

Sarah: I was a terrible employee. I'm constantly questioning the why's and the how's and the ethos and the ... All of that stuff. But I think it also lends itself for me to be really serious. Maybe is a good word, but like the ethos that I put out for my company, decisions that I make, the ways that I treat my employees and how I manage and the business that I pursue. So, intentional, that's the word I wanted to use, intentional.

Eric: Let's talk about that transition. So, you were an employee at one point. So, when you say you were a terrible employee, what were some of the qualities of a terrible employee that you exhibited?

Sarah: Well, when I left the last job I had before starting my own company, I referred to myself kind of as like a peacock in a cage. And I feel like I am ... In the Myers–Briggs analogy, I'm an ENFJ. I'm very extroverted. I'm very questioning. I'm very experimental in my thought process. And especially in small companies and flat companies in the software industry was that are being led by rich white males. They really just want people to kind of fall in line and do the work that they need to get done.

And I'm so much more of a questioner, an experimenter. I also just like when I was in my 20s, I didn't really have great emotional maturity to think, like, I shouldn't talk back to an employer. I shouldn't question the why, or I shouldn't say, "That's not a good idea." Right? Those are things

that maybe some people learn that you just kind of like shut up and keep up. And I didn't do that very well. So, yeah. I mean, I'm not saying that I was like a slacker at all. I think if anything, I was just better off being more idealistic, being more of a pacemaker that's sitting at a desk somewhere.

Eric: Yeah. I didn't know that's a great image, a peacock in a cage because, well, I mean, peacocks really aren't flying birds. But it's this idea of like, you have so much to offer based on the environment that you're in. It just did not align at all with what you actually had to offer.

Sarah: Yeah. There's no point to that in captivity. There's no point to it at all. It needs to be sort of free roaming and have its natural access sort of like balanced out. So, when I was growing up, I wasn't the type of person who was like, "I'm going to own a company one day and have employees." Not to mention, multiple companies and multiple brands never crossed my mind. It happened by circumstance and burnout, as it usually does in the tech world, especially. Very rarely do you see women kind of pivot that way, but a lot of other people do, they kind of get to a point where you realize like, "This isn't how I want to spend my time. I don't want to just slave away making somebody else's dreams come true. I don't want to just build a beautiful house for somebody else to live in." So, yeah, it just kind of happened. It spiraled more quickly than I anticipated it would. And 10 years later here we are.

Eric: Yep. And coming back to labels again, we talk about, okay, you're a business owner and you have employees, but it kind of like just happens, right? That you go out to set something and ultimately yes, you hire people, you have employees, but how do you visualize it? How do you look at the people who are part of and assisting on your journey?

Sarah: I think they're all the dream makers, you know what I mean? Like what I would have to have happened, I can't do that myself solely, individually. Lots of people can, freelancers do a lot. Sometimes people who work on design contracts or whatever as their own standing freelance self. That's great. But for the kind of work that I do, it has to be collaborative. Also, I work in this environment where we are creating customer experience, processes, and systems and personas for other companies. And it's not a good idea to just have a singular voice involved in that. You really have to have these layered perspectives come to the table to create something that's inclusive for everybody, creates something that's helpful for everyone and effective for everyone. So, for me, it's a privilege to be an employer. It's a huge privilege to make payroll every single month whatever it is.

That's always been my primary motivation and keeping my company, the company part of things alive. And also, I love seeing people thrive, doing good work, work that excites them, work that they're passionate about, work that comes easy to them naturally, that they realize is actually just their giftedness kind of shining through. So, that's been a huge privilege to me. It's very selfish to say something like that or self-indulgent to say something like that, but in the midst of how difficult it is sometimes to own and operate a business right now, a bootstrapped business, there's so much on the swing side of it, that's really fulfilling as well.

Eric: Yeah, for sure. And I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "It takes a village."

Sarah: Yeah. Of course.

Eric: One of the things, especially at this time that I lament from time to time is that the distributed nature of our world and how having community becomes so much more challenging, just everybody living in all these different places. But I do feel like the company's run in a certain way, definitely rebel against the word company, but they become these villages because we're all ... You have the bread maker and the mayor and all these people who contribute their talents. And ideally the bread maker is just as happy as the person running the thing and making sure that you're holding the container for everybody to operate and offer their gifts. And to me, I am 100% on the same wavelength they use that it's a privilege to be sitting in the position and also it doesn't come without its own challenges.

And I know for me specifically, it's come up a lot that I am not the right person for this job. In my journey, I've been asked to switch roles a lot. You start kind of in the trenches and then as things grow, you can't continue to do that low-level work yourself anymore. You have to find people who can come in and take those roles. And then you naturally have to bubble up to play other roles that need playing. So, in my journey, anyway, I've had to bounce around a lot to fill the space, whatever needed to be filled, which is how I ended up where I am now. And again, it's going to change. I already see the things that I have to do differently in the future. And I wonder if you've had similar experience in your journey?

Sarah: Oh, absolutely. When I started my consulting firm in January of 2011, I specifically had been working in customer support, customer experience for a very well-known software company. And it started to be a point where for about a year's time, about eight months to a year, our customers or fans or followers would be writing support emails to me, and then saying, "This was a great support email. I would love it if you helped my company do support." Or, "Could you come in and teach us how to do this kind of support." That sort of thing. And so, I started doing consulting on the side and then I said, well, can I curse on this podcast? We can cut that out. If I can't curse.

Eric: Yeah. You can totally just express yourself in whatever way you want and we'll take care of anything we need to.

Sarah: So, I was being shut down a lot by my employers about side work and stuff like that. And I kind of just had this realization like, "Fuck it. I'm going to do it anyway." Because I think people are asking for help and they need help in an area that, to me, I'm so passionate about, almost spiritually passionate about. The way that we communicate to customers, paying or free, whatever that is a whole other podcast that we can talk about. But what I started to do was consult first by myself, that I hired my first employee. About four months later that I started getting a lot of requests to speak at tech conferences. I was on podcasts, I was on people's YouTube shows. I wrote a book and then we decided, "Let's start this conference." Because I don't want to be the only one talking about this. I will burn myself out.

This was in the first year of my career. I spoke at over 50 tech conferences and all this stuff. And just 2011 alone, it was ridiculous. So, I had this thing going into 2012. When we started our conference, I said, "I want to put myself out of business. I want to teach everyone how to do this as well as I do to have the ethos around it, that I have to have a philosophy around customer experience." Like I do to create better language and better processes to create more sustainable companies through customer experience. That was my goal. I wanted to put myself out of business. And we started the conference where I would find people doing my job at these random SaaS companies and pull them on stage and teach them how to speak and say, "You have a story about something that you're doing. That's great. Let's tell it."

That spiraled into three conferences a year, 30 to date, 20 speakers a piece, two to 300 people at a time. And I really, really legitimately over last nine years, have done what I intended to do, which is put myself out of business. I'm no longer the sole voice speaking about this stuff. In fact, I see people all the time on Twitter or tech news or whatever, big companies talking about stuff that I was talking about in 2011, that's in our book for 2014. In some ways I think a lot of people would find ego attachment to that. And I don't, because I don't think that this is singularly my passion and my story, right? What I did was really paved the way and give people language about it, give people language around what it means to have this sort of customer experience and it's great.

But now what I'm seeing again, is that we started doing these events January of 2020 rolls around and our great success, bringing people together and community and events is now without having to pivot again. So, I'm no longer an event producer for our community. Now I'm sort of this community person and figuring out what that needs and figuring out what the next step is to not just put 20 speakers on a stage at a time, but now figure out a way to be a center for career growth and personal growth for 1,800 plus people that are in our community. I mean, I feel you, I think that one of the best things you could ever do is really number one, be okay, letting go of your ego around ideas and creation and getting credit for things.

Eric: Right.

Sarah: Because the important thing is getting the information and the passion out there and letting it, that sort of disseminate to other people. And two, it's really important to get very good at seeing other people succeed with the idea that you started and fly off with that, right? You have to learn how to not just be good at accepting that, but being excited about it. And so, that in turn, I think will inform how you adjust to having new roles and pivoting, as they say in tech world. And changing course and ... Was that, I like to say course correctly?

Eric: Right.

Sarah: All of that stuff comes down to not being attached to the ego side of things, I think. Which is also part of my big philosophy around customer experience.

Eric: The way that I look at it nowadays is kind of like we're gardeners. When you set out to plant something, you have a desire for the fruit that comes in the end, but there's all this stuff that has to happen. And a number of skills that you have to employ to do that. You need to know the type of soil that's appropriate. You need to have the seed, you need to water it. And it's like, nature naturally pushes you to go through the cycles of its own growth process. So, you continue to water it more than it should be watered and pass the time it should be. Then you kill the thing. So, if you're attached to any one of the phases of the gardening process and disconnect from the natural flow, then you end up destroying the thing you're trying to create.

So, to me, that's been one of the biggest lessons. Like the whole thing that was my challenge was also the biggest lesson of the journey of starting a company. Because I did have to let go of the ego stuff. I did have to allow myself to flow with what was being asked. And the fact of the matter is awesome. Getting to the places like you said, "Where, oh, now I'm not the sole fire behind the company." Now, new people with new ideas. And it's like a child growing up, it's a baby, you're taking care of it and you're a sole provider. But then as it gets older and educated, it has its own personality, its own desires for where it wants to go. And you just become that kind of parent that has to let it travel as far as it can, while not allowing it to walk in front of traffic, right? So, there's this kind of looseness of allowing it to do, but also holding it to a consistent vision.

Sarah: You want a good analogy about this from California. I grew up in wine country and that idea around gardening, around pruning of your vines is considered regulation, like regulating. Making sure that there's balance to your crop or let's say your plants or your bush or whatever you're planting or you're gardening or company. There has to be consistent pruning at the beginning, the peeling back, right? That's very tough and difficult and painful to do sometimes. But then you can get into that stage of regulation, which is like, how do we keep the momentum going? How do we keep the fire going? And that's still a really important part of leadership. Not just that we raise up other people to kind of like take over for us and see our vision through, but that we are equipping them properly to continue that on, right?

Eric: Right.

Sarah: It can't just be me and it can't just be them, it has to be more and more and more so. Yeah. I'm with you.

Eric: Right. So, you don't peace out basically.

Sarah: No, I wish I could sometimes. Dude, I remember the first time I got a big check, probably 2011 maybe 2012, it was a big, huge five figure check. And I was like, "Oh, I could just go to Tahiti right now. Just pack it all in, this is great. I'm done, no more need to foster or whatever." But at the same time, I mean, I know that sometimes people do that most of the time when we see it happen in our industry, it's just due to burn out. It's due to being unfulfilled, pushing caution out there and not having it returned.

If your passion is not being returned to you, either in fulfillment from mentorship, fulfillment from leadership or actual just company progression. If you're not getting that back in return for what you're putting out, then you're not going to survive it, right? And so, that's when you see, I think people really peace out, I think when you're looking at companies that have grown the sustainable infrastructure of culture, it's because there's really high reward despite all the pruning that goes on.

Eric: Yeah. I definitely did my own peace out like four or five years in. Yeah. Because I was really burned out and I went to Mexico for six weeks, but it ultimately ended up being a very important turning point because I got this message because originally, I was just planning to go to a different place, but basically, I would have everything be the same. I would have my laptop, I would still be doing whatever. But then I got this voice coming to my head or something that says, "You're not going to take your laptop to Mexico." And then of course, like that brace fear with me at first, I was like, "I'm not going to have my laptop?" But then as I looked at it. I was like, "Why am I so afraid not to bring my laptop?" And then I realized, of course, how much of my identity was tied up in who I was when I had my laptop.

And so, I was like, "Okay, well that's silly." So, I decided not to take it. And of course, as part of that to prepare for that trip, I had to make sure everybody was empowered to run things when I was not there, which was another thing I realized I hadn't done. I always needed to be checked in with in certain things. So, anyway, it worked out so well and I was relaxed and I was like, "Wow, the company didn't blow up and I'm fine. And everything's good. Yeah. This is the way it's going to be basically going forward." And that was the big shift that happened for me.

Sarah: Yeah. And I think that for you now that you have that maturity in your leadership and that maturity of self, you have tools to prevent that from happening at the same scale for the same reasons, right?

Eric: Oh, yeah.

Sarah: It might happen for other reasons and it might have happened at a different scale, but at least now you've kind of equipped yourself a little bit better, you know?

Eric: Well, yeah, it's just really like having self-holistic self-care, be a part of life in general. Like don't push my body and things too far than they should. It's not necessary. And a lot of that was happening early on because I was just flailing about trying to find the pathways to success because I didn't know. And just like putting my energy in all different things, like basically a shotgun approach, right? So, I was engaging in all these different things to try and find the way. Now, it's a lot more focused and you've realized like actually less is more, you can accomplish more with more focused and precise ways and uses of energy.

Sarah: Do you find that to whole transformation and all of that, that you went through for yourself holistically, has it changed your perception of what success is going to mean to you right now?

Eric: Oh, yeah, for sure. When I first started the company, I mean, I had that, I was caught up in the whole, the secret thing and I had a dream board.

Sarah: Oh, the secret, wow. Okay. I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing at the memories.

Eric: It's okay. I laugh at me. It's fine. But on my dream board was like a Rolls Royce and like ...

Sarah: Oh.

Eric: A beach, getaway place. And basically, material things. Which is totally not what I'm interested in now. It's more lifestyle and less is more and the kind of metaphor of sailing, of going through life, like a ship on the ocean and the less you carry the further your goal kind of thing. So, yeah, it's totally different. So, I wanted to ask you more about your passion around this conversation with the customer. So, what do you see as the biggest mistake that companies are usually making in this department?

Sarah: The biggest mistake is not creating a persona for their customer support people to identify with. They just think about deflection and they think about clearing an inbox and they think about swift replies. Instead of thinking about creating a human element to that, right? When I talk about it sort of high level, I always say there's a difference between relational and transactional support. We all know what transactional support is. I don't have to explain that to you, but we also all know when we've had a really relational human experience with someone who almost caught us off guard with the way that they spoke to us or handled a problem or replied to an email. So, I think one of the problems that a lot of larger legacy brands are always going to have is volume. And they're always going to use volume to excuse why they don't improve process, to excuse why they don't hire better or train better or put better processes in place.

And when I say processes, I don't mean tactical infrastructure process. I mean language training and better scripting of their automated emails and things like that. I think that we owe it to each other on this earth and I'm going to get way we want it. That's okay. That's who I am as a person. We're all on this earth, we're all interacting in so many various ways together. Whether it's on the internet or in person, maybe not anymore on the phone, all over Zoom constantly all the time. And for some reason, when we get to a point we are writing a customer support email, or we're having an interaction with someone who's on the other end of customer support. We lose all humanity, all expectation of humanity. And we're just banging out on a keyboard, especially now we're seeing such huge increases in escalations and tickets from people who are just using the opportunity to get their rage out at someone we're all angry and we're frustrated.

And sometimes the person in front of you who ... There's a blank text box for you to just let it out. That's going to be the person who gets it all. But there's a human being behind that, right? On the other flip side of that, companies are employing human beings to do this work for them.

And if they're giving them an operational system of, "Get it out of the inbox, as fast as you can, don't let them find our contact information, deflect, deflect, deflect." You're not thinking of the human being who's seeking help. The other thing too is 90% of the staff that goes through customer support channels that we write to them about, or they reply to us with is like not major human-interest stuff, right? It's shipping times, it's refunds, it's how does this feature work? It's why don't you have this feature?

This is not stuff that we should look at. Let's just get it out of the inbox. We have an opportunity to actually improve every interaction that a human being might have that day through thoughtfulness, right? And I always think too is like any opportunity you have to instill some goodness and joy and humanity and thoughtfulness and empathy, regardless if it's a refund request or if it's a ... You're going to save my life when you reply to this kind of thing. I don't think that we should scale it that way. It should just be any opportunity you have, you should take it upon yourself. Really, really, really great sustainable companies that have beautiful cultures that where people are happy and proud to work there. I think employee that type of thought process around customer experience. When you spin it into KPIs and metrics and process and all of that kind of stuff, when you lose the humanity behind things, I think that's when you just start to ... I don't know.

Eric: Right.

Sarah: Get bad.

Eric: Well, I may not bleep out the F word that you used earlier. But I will probably bleep out the OO word because that word, like I know why we use it. It's because there's a bit of momentum in the past of people believing that anything having to do with more subtle energy and emotions and humanness is bad for us-

Sarah: Oh, yeah. There's a certain intimidation and fear factor around it. I don't know if this part's going to be bleeped out or not if we should go into this too.

Eric: Do it.

Sarah: But I have a really good friend of mine, Josh Ramsey, he's amazing. He used to be the director of global customer experience at Hilton. And he gave an amazing talk at one of our events a few years ago, about how he trains his employees, how he manages his employees, his idea of treating the whole self in his management. So, he's not just interested in their ... What they're bringing to the table metrics wise. He's really interested in their personal and their career growth as well. And he trains them to think about how they can instill love in their actions towards customers that is radical thinking in the tech world and in the business world and in the consumer world to think about loving our customers and not just like, "We love you here's a coupon," but actually having motivation of love towards them that also kind of sparks empathy in you for whatever's happening, that sparks interest in the human being who's actually requesting something of you.

It's kind of a trickle-down theory, right? Those kinds of words really are, I don't want to use the word intimidating. I would want to use the word like fear inducing to people. A lot of people respond to things out of fear and don't call it fear, right? They kind of shoot back about stuff. But again, I think the really good companies are not afraid of that, of showing that type of persona, showing that kind of empathy of showing that kind of human interest, right? Now, I mean their employees and their customers as well.

Eric: Right. Well, and I do want to dive into this because I have this big relationship with words. Because the thing is like a word is really nothing, love as a word is nothing essentially. Because what you can have is like, oh, love is trending right now. Go to our marketing team together, figure out how to get love into our messaging. And you can see it from a mile away that you don't feel it.

Sarah: 100%.

Eric: And so, this image comes to my mind anytime I get into a topic like this from the Tao Te Ching, where he talks about water and how water is something you can't grab, but you can create a container for it. And I think the things you're expressing is like ... Because some companies will hear this and be like, "Okay, yes, let's implement this." And then they'll be, "Okay here are the guidelines for how you treat." But it's the same exact problem that you had before.

Sarah: Yes.

Eric: And now people are just forced to be robots about how they're expressing love. And it's like, "No," the only way you can get the flower of love to fully be truly expressed is if that person is coming from a loving place, which has all to do with the community they're involved in, what is their work environment like. Stuff like that. You can't dictate how they should communicate.

Sarah: No, and you can't just have a script, right? I think that I used to rely heavily on that when I was teaching and training and speaking at conferences that were very heavily developers who are typically more process-oriented thinkers, I would always tell them like, "Look just fake it till you make it." Right? Start trying to sprinkle this language into how you speak to people. And so, on it will become more natural to you. I still believe that that's possible. However, the other element beyond, why are you changing your language when you speak to customers is ... What's the point of it there, right? So, one of the things for me is I'm a big stickler for apologies, huge when companies or corporations or for whatever reason have to apologize in any way to customers, if I've had an issue with the company and they need to apologize to me, I'm the worst person to be involved with that because I'm ... So, think about it.

And that has so much to do with my background and my growing up, my generational trauma and all this stuff that I have to unpack emotionally myself, this is how it's coming out in my

giftedness around customer experience. Is that when it comes to an apology, you cannot say to people, "We apologize for your inconvenience."

Eric: Right.

Sarah: That will set me off, like you have no idea, right? I train people all the time. I've come up with lots of companies who have paid me a lot of money to come and train their teams. And I've said, "Okay, well, you need to say, I'm sorry. You need to say, I'm really sorry about this." You need to tell a customer who's complaining about it. Something you're aware of. You need to tell them, "You know what, you're right. And I'm sorry." And I've had companies that are like, "No, we're not going to do that."

I have one company, very, very, very well-known tech company that I'm actually still a customer of, telling me that he refuses to allow his customer support agents to apologize because it shows that they're taking blame. And most of the time it's the customer's fault. And they don't want to take blame for that. And I'm like, "So, what, take the blame, take it off their shoulders. If they screwed something up and they need help. If it is their fault, do something to kind of lighten the load for them." Even if it's language, the intent has to be, "I'm on your team, I'm here to help you," right? So, I think the, I'm sorry, and the, you're right. And I do want to fix this for you. I'm on your team. That kind of language is really important for us to start accessing and giving permission to our support agents, to access. But also, we have to tell them why they're doing that and why we make this change. Why we believe in this kind of change.

Eric: Yeah. And I think fundamentally for my opinion, anyway, the why is because when you get into communicating that way, it's again, you can't just say so, you have to apologize. The reason people resist apologizing is because they're living in a world of who's right, and who's wrong.

Sarah: Totally.

Eric: And having that be the important factor. But really when you come into more being a human being who cares, who's right or wrong-

Sarah: Who cares?

Eric: About something, everybody will feel good. If everybody feels good at the end of the day, regardless of if it means that I crashed the car or you crashed the car, who cares?

Sarah: Yes. And especially when we're talking about the type of relationship that a company, let's use the word company is just like a catch all for someone selling a product at a customer or the person buying the product. The relationship that is formed when that customer purchases a product that doesn't just end. Remember that old Mitch Hedberg joke about, "He got the receipt for the donut."

Eric: Oh, yeah. I love that.

Sarah: And he's like, "Why didn't you?" It's so exciting.

Eric: "We did not need to bring paper into this transaction..."

Sarah: ...end of transaction, right? That's how I think of transactional relationships. But even in the donut analogy, it's not true. Because if it's a good donut, he's going to go back and get another donut. He's going to tell his friends, "I want this donut." He's going to bring people there and say, "Look at this donut." Right? So, even in those small interactions that we have, there's opportunities for us to think relationally. And historically bad companies, utility companies or internet service providers, or even airlines I've done a lot of work with airlines.

Eric: Oh, my God.

Sarah: They have this excuse that, "We're just inundated all the time with people who need help. We're just inundated all the time. We just need to get them out the door, close it, close it, close it deflect." And I'm thinking to myself, "This is a systematic problem in your process." People are continually having problems with you because you're not fixing the process. The why, you're not fixing the whole internal structure of the experience that a customer's having.

And yeah, I mean, I think that it really takes what I love seeing beyond just complaining about airlines and banks and whatever, I love seeing companies that are being built now from the bottom up with these founders who have this idea, that's being instilled in their company manifestos from the beginning, right? They're building customer centric cultures, they're building customer centric companies, products with empathy. That's my big thing to see that starting to happen more and more and more. Is they're thinking forward about possible issues a customer might have or problems people might face, or what would happen if we did this kind of feature and they're solving it before it happens to prevent it from happening. That to me is the kind of stellar mindset we need more of, right?

Eric: Which reminds me of another Mitch Hedberg joke, which is when he says, I forgot how he said it, but something about like, "When you want a baked potato, you need to know like two hours in advance because you need to put in the oven..."

Sarah: Exactly. And that's thought for this. I mean, that's just thinking forward. Empathy I know is another big, huge buzzword just like entrepreneur is or whatever that companies love to latch onto. But what does it mean? It really means thinking about compassionately and thoughtfully about the interaction that someone's going to have with your products and your company and thinking forward and thinking, "What are all the ways that we can pour ourselves into solution hearing for these customers when they need us, and so they don't need us." Right?

Eric: But that's the biggest challenge I think about this whole thing situation is because when you say, "Thinking compassionately." I mean, it's kind of like-

Sarah: It's another word. It's like love, right?

Eric: It's like an oxymoron. It's like, they're in opposition to each other. If you're compassionate, then in your communication, you don't need to think about it. But if you're thinking about it, then you're not compassionate in a way. And so, it becomes like this very challenging thing, because you do have to have the logical aspects of things. You do have to think about things. You can't just be like whatever, you can just throw things to the wind and go dance around naked in the desert.

Sarah: Haha! I'd love to hear about the experience about that particular analogy. But yes, I think that there's too much fear around cancel culture right now for companies. There's too much fear around PR, control all this kind of stuff. And I always have these conversations. I can't tell you how many times I've had the conversation about apologizing or having empathy or showing compassion or giving people permission to speak a certain way to customers. And people usually in PR or marketing, they're a little bit afraid of it. And I was like, "Well, what's the worst that can happen. You take responsibility for something, you give them a refund." You follow up in two weeks to just reach out again and say, "I'm really sorry that you had that experience. Is there anything else I can do for you?" I remember that one person was like, "Follow up with someone I've given a refund to." Why would I do that? Because it's an extension of goodwill. It'll take you three minutes.

Eric: Yeah. And you do to help people make the transition. You do remind them that like, "Look, these things are actually, will end also." It can also lead to your goals because if somebody has a good experience with their company, whether it's because they canceled or whether they had a success with your product, they are still going to share that with people.

Sarah: Yes. 100%. They still are. They still are going to talk about that. And the sad part, Eric, the saddest part about the job that I do is how the realization that comes to companies when they have success with the kind of language training that we bring in. When they realized like, "Yeah, well people are really happy." It's like, "No, shit people are happy." You throw out all these awful scripts about, "Sorry for the inconvenience, and thank you for your feedback." You threw that out, and you were a human being and it startled them because on the rest of the world, they're getting, "Sorry for the inconvenience. And thank you for your feedback." And you stood out to them because it felt like a normal human, compassionate being was actually speaking back to them about their \$39 refund. It's so dumb to me that we are startled with great experiences-

Eric: I know.

Sarah: As customers. It bothers me, I'm telling, I'm sweating talking to you about this... I get so worked up about it!

Eric: Sweat it out. It's like there's this planet that exists with all these automated replies and you just download, you get one of these deliveries from this planet. You're like, "I know it's from this planet. I'm not going to read it." Like when the COVID situation happened, I kept getting all these emails-

Sarah: Oh, my God in these unprecedented times.

Eric: I know, from the airlines. Like, "We're all in this together." I'm like, "We're not in this together." You're sending me this email because you're freaking out. You want me to buy a ticket on your plane?"

Sarah: That's all it is. Can I tell you an interesting story about an airline I worked with? I was hired by an airline that was one of the worst airline in the world. And of course, the first thing they do is damage control. And it was the worst customer service I should say in the world of all the airlines in the world. They hired me they gave me this ridiculous budget. It was so ... I mean, it didn't even cover my flights to get there, right? But I was like, "No, I'm investing in this myself because this matters to me." As someone who's on a plane, a hundred thousand miles a year, this matters to me.

And all I could do is invest little bits of time. The one thing that I could do is invest in their language. Language is free and it's easy to change. And if you're working with people who are driven by a script and driven by canned replies and these macros or whatever, I'm going to make those the best sounding macros, I'm going to make their FAQ the best FAQ you've ever read. I'm going to make them sound so great just by changing language. It's all we did, just an email. I didn't get to touch the phones. Believe me. I would have loved to.

And they saw like a 70% decrease in negative customer reviews to their email responses in less than three months, those are real hard numbers. And it comes to small changes that again, like language is free, words are free, compassion is free, empathy is free. You can build all this stuff into your company culture. You can start doing this today. If you have to do it before, it means something to you still do it.

Eric: Right.

Sarah: And then learn for it to mean something to you, right? Make it mean something to you. But still start with, "Let's make some changes here." And the number one tip I can give anyone is never again, say, "Thank you for feedback." Never again, apologize for the inconvenience. Think of those as cardinal sins against your customers, never use those again.

Eric: Okay. So, speaking of things like that, so imagine you're Moses.

Sarah: Okay.

Eric: Okay. So, you're good?

Sarah: Yeah. I mean, I'm a good talker.

Eric: Good. So, you're Moses and you come out of the top of the mountain, you've got two stone, chiseled things. You just mentioned the first one, what are some other things on those tablets?

Sarah: Oh gosh, stop using the word deflection when you think about processes for customer engagement. There's lots of tools out there that do an awesome job, but I think we need to put a positive spin on what their intention is versus keep people out of the inbox. I think of it as gate keeping and I don't really like that. Eliminating customer support emails is hard at first, but once you figure out that there's a better way to build a searchable knowledge base to use something like, Help Scout speaking, that helps people find things before they know they need to find it. Sending people great onboarding emails, and being really thoughtful about if they're not opening these or using these or clicking these links, why maybe I should rewrite them that's really important. Which is probably commandment number three is that you cannot start a company without a hugely dedicated knowledge base.

You can't launch a product, you can't start taking money until you have that solid. I know so many people, who've launched companies, a lot of micro founders, bootstrappers whatever. And they're overwhelmed when they launch a company, they launch their products because they're getting 40, 50, 60 emails a day and they're sending the same reply out. And I looked at them and I was like, "why didn't you have this stuff class all over your website?" Because it took too much time. We really try and get this out the door. And no one really sat down and wrote it. We didn't have someone who's that was their job. Well, those are your excuses. And this is the consequence of that excuse. So, that's an easy way to fix that problem before it happens. Yeah. The other thing too, which is really sticky that's really hard because I understand what it's like to build a company and to want to save money and to not want to take investment and to do it very lean.

But you can't just like throw anybody who's standing around at your support inbox without giving them at least some guidance about how to speak to customers, what to say and what to do. That is something that happens way, way, way too often. And then what ends up happening is you get so used to not paying someone to do customer support. Then when it comes up, you have to pay somebody to customer support. You don't want to pay them because you feel like this is a free job or it's a cheap role because why I've been doing it myself as a founder. And then we had my cousin's son do it on his summer vacation.

And so, then you're like, "Well, I'm just going to offshore it. I'm just going to pay someone \$4 a day to take care of the most important aspects of building a sustainable company." Right? You got to think about this stuff. If you're going to contract someone, you need to think in like the \$25 range per hour, if you're going to hire someone full time, you cannot be paying them 30 to 35,000 a year. It really has to be much higher. You have to think about it as like a career prospect for them. That's a very controversial opinion, but I do this for a living so.

Eric: Well, it's not controversial from my perspective-

Sarah: Yeah.

Eric: I do that. Yeah. So, is there anything else? I mean, obviously there's something else. Consider our audience here, okay? So, these are things that people without like paying you to fly to them, that they can implement.

Sarah: I think the other thing too is like, you really have to define your why. You have to define what is my manifesto? What is the purpose behind offering customer support to anyone, right? You can just really quickly, Jerry Maguire, this kind of shit right now in a Google Doc and say, "Why do I want to offer great customer experience? Why do I want to offer great support? Because I want people to have a good impression of my company. I want people to love my product. I want to vow right now that I'm going to build a product that doesn't require support because it's so well thought out. And it's so intuitive for everyone to use. I want to create a knowledge base that doesn't deflect customers from contacting me." They don't have to contact me because it's educating them. The educated customer is the best customer to have, right? The educated customer is the loyal customer.

All of those things that are there that I know people have in their hearts, when they're building products beyond wanting to drive a Lamborghini and have a beach house, there's other reasons why. And I think it's okay to be a little bit spiritual about this and say "I have intentions to build a company that is well thought of that gives people good experiences that leaves a great impression on people." That maybe I write a support email that is nothing for me to do. It's a three-minute kind of interaction that I have and I close it out, but it changes the trajectory of a person's day, it changes their mood, it lifts them up. Something like that I think is completely appropriate for people to start doing. Then they set the tone for what the rest of the company is going to be doing. How the rest of the company is going to be speaking to the customers. How they're going to be thinking about customers in the long-term. In a year when they've hired 20 more people to work on customer experience, what is the standard that you've set for them?

That stuff is super important. And I know a lot of people too, are really relying now on drip campaigns, even onboarding drip campaigns. There's no reason why you shouldn't be revisiting those all the time to make sure that your language is on point, to make sure that it's fresh, to make sure that it's empathetic, to make sure that people are actually clicking through, right?

Eric: Right.

Sarah: If they're not clicking through, when you've written all this stuff and people still write you an email about, "How do I do X?" And you say, "Well, it's right here." They're not getting for a reason. Start thinking more empathetically about why they're not getting there. So, I mean, clearly there's ... I could go.

Eric: A lot.

Sarah: I could go on, right?

Eric: Well, I think that we've covered a lot of ground here and I love how this whole experience has been a reflection of exactly we're talking about. Like the outline script for this episode is blowing in the wind somewhere I have no idea. We've touched on obviously some of the things are in there, but not in the way of like, "Oh, let's get through this list."

Sarah: Yeah, I appreciate. Again, it all comes down to authenticity. Authenticity has to be a big part of. How you present yourself and your company to everyone who experiences it, people know, like you said, "They can see it a mile away. They can see that sort of like fakeness trope language a mile away." So, be the person who stands out, that's what I always say.

Eric: So, since we haven't talked about your companies that you're involved in, let's just show people some places where they can learn more about you.

Sarah: Sure. So, my consulting company is cosupport.com we consult everything where it comes to customer experience. We also handle implementation for small companies, startup and growth phase companies. My community that we built for customer experience, professionals and leaders, it's called ElevateCX. It's elevatecx.co, where you can find our website. Join our brand-new membership community that's just launching. That's the whole reason why I'm using MemberMouse and I'm on your podcast, right? And then if you want to read the book came out in 2014, it's a little outdated, but a really great baseline. And it includes a lot of scripts and replacement language that you can start. It's called the Customer Support Handbook, it's on Amazon, it sold 30,000 copies since 2014. And really proud of that.

So, yeah. I'm SH on Twitter, just the two letters, that's it? I don't know. You can Google me and you can see a lot to my talks about this lots of past writings and all that kind of stuff. And again, email me, reach out to me I'm always happy to help with people, especially founders. And like I said, micropreneurs, bootstrap founders, that's kind of my big passion point.

Eric: That's awesome. Well, I am really excited that you're doing this work and you started a while ago. But I think now it's definitely becoming more top of mind for people that this is required and not just a suggestion and so really happy that there's someone like you who's doing this work. And I appreciate you choosing us to help be a part of that because that feels really good to support you.

Sarah: Yeah. Well, I think that I really like working with companies or using companies or being customers of companies where I see my own philosophies reflected and that's all I've gotten from you guys.

Eric: That's good.

Sarah: So, that makes me really happy to see that there's more of that out in the wild.

Eric: Yeah. Maybe on April Fool's Day, we'll send you an email that says, "We're sorry for the inconvenience."

Sarah: Yeah. No, no. You'll get a really nice reply back probably I promise.

Eric: Yeah, exactly. And I think there's no better way to wrap up this podcast than to, I only have one line that I'm supposed to remember in any given podcast, which I forgot in this podcast. And it was to welcome you to the show. And so, I'm going to do that now right before I thank you for being on the show. So, welcome to the show, Sarah.

Sarah: Thank you. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Eric: Yeah, it's great. I'm looking forward to it. And thank you so much for being on the show and it was great talking to you. And yeah, I really appreciate your energy and I'm sweating too, by the way. So, we're just both like, we should ...

Sarah: Like a sweat lodge experience. Like we're in a teepee somewhere having this big spiritual conversation about customer experience. But hey, that means it's real, that means we feel it.

Eric: It's real. I'm going to bust out my drum and start chanting. But yeah, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Sarah: Thank you. I love this conversation. It was awesome.

Eric: All right. Bye, Sarah.

Sarah: Bye.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with Sarah. I hope you are now walking away with some information and inspiration that will help you in your own business.

I'd like to extend my sincere gratitude to Sarah for coming on the show and sharing so freely from her experience.

I really appreciated her bright spirit and deeply human approach to business.

To get links to all the resources we mentioned in this episode, head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/151.

There you'll also find the complete show notes and a downloadable transcript of our conversation.

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Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time!