

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

**EPISODE FIFTY-SIX
CX RANTS, SOAPBOXES,
AND WAKEUP CALLS**

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GUEST: NATE BROWN**

NOVEMBER 3, 2021

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Shawn: Welcome to the fifth season of *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to make life better for all of us. I'm your host, Shawn Nason, CEO and founder of MOFI. In these episodes, we'll be exploring the power, influence, and importance of Experience Ecosystems™. To do that, we're bringing together the most unique and influential experience experts in the world for honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, leading with heart, and getting real about heartsets and mindsets. In case you're wondering, an Experience Ecosystem is the web of people, touchpoints, and interactions that combine to create all of the positive and negative experiences we have in the world. When an organization wants to improve customer experience, they're wasting their time if they're not willing to engage and humanize their entire Experience Ecosystem. It's time to blow up some silos and ignite an experience revolution by putting people first.

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Shawn: On this episode, we have Nate Brown who is the Chief Experience Officer at Officium Labs, Inc., an organization that helps leverage CX to drive customer loyalty, engagement, and revenue. He's also the co-founder of CX Accelerator, a virtual community that connects like-minded CX professionals and helps them learn, share knowledge, and kick-ass together in their CX careers. Starting his career as a customer support specialist at an e-learning company before moving up the ranks to become a CX executive. He's been recognized as a top CX thought leader by the International Customer Management Institute. Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Nate.

Nate: Hello, how is it going, Shawn, "Man on Fire?" I too enjoy fire. So I believe we already have something in common.

Shawn: Yeah. Your profile picture has a little bit of CX fire to it. I love it. And I also love anybody that will put in their bio to kick-ass together because we talked about blowing shit up together.

Nate: Oh, we did.

Shawn: Let's just have a little bit break-the-ice conversation first before we really dive deep into this, Nate. So why is experience design worth our time and energy? And why have people like you and I devoted our careers to it?

Nate: Yeah, it seems like there's been an evolution in our awakening in this area. I mean, going back into decades ago, the businesses just operated very much in a vacuum for themselves, and hopefully, customers come and hopefully, they like these

products and services, and we morphed out of that into more of, “Oh, wow, you know, we need to attract customers. We need to think about what we're doing socially in these communities. We need to do CSR type of activities and other things,” and now evolving towards the age of the customer and the experience economy as Joe Pine said it so well where life is built up of experiences. I mean, people want to interface with an organization that values them, that is creating a holistic experience for them, and most importantly, that they can relate to that company like a person because they've created this holistic experience that's consistent with a brand voice that they can interface with and get to know and trust and believe and ultimately know, “Hey, if I go to this organization, I'm going to have this experience. This is worth my time and money.”

Shawn: Obviously you have some passion around this, and who would have thought, Nate, you know, when Joe Pine wrote the book on the experience economy. And we've been really honored to have him on the podcast here as well.

Nate: Awesome.

Shawn: That he was actually a thought leader and a godfather to this because, although it was relevant then, I see it more relevant now, and I think you do too, you know, that brands are driving this in such a powerful way. So I really do want to jump into this whole concept, you know, at MOFI that we call the Experience Ecosystem. So what need were you hoping to solve when you created the CX Accelerator and how is it going for you?

Nate: It's going great. It's a very altruistic effort to give back to the CX community, to encourage, to equip these CX professionals that are out there looking to design incredible experiences. And that's difficult work. There's high burnout associated with it. So we need to be able to come into a safe place and encourage one another, spark ideas off one another to go back to the fire theme here, the combustion theme. Sometimes we need to strike iron on iron, to sharpen those swords, and ultimately make ourselves better to go fight these battles that we fight both inside the organization and outside. We want to be equipped as experienced design warriors to do great work, and you can't do that alone. I mean, it really requires a great network of people around you to encourage you and infuse you with that creative energy. And that's what CX Accelerator is meant to be. Officium is doing that great work as well, so I'm so pleased to be part of both of those great organizations, and it's just been a really fun couple of years.

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Shawn: Yeah. So, I love people that get on their soapboxes and do a little bit of preaching, and I love your CX rant that you're on Officium's Instagram, and really I hope that you do more of that. So you said professionals need to stop making excuses and that we're all leaders. What does it take to lead an organization to deliver value from experience design and in this Experience Ecosystem?

Nate: Yeah, I mean, in that rant, what I was really hitting at there is a lot of times we develop a victim mentality pretty quickly in the work of customer experience. We develop this perception that we're set apart, that we're special because we're the ones taking care of the customer and nobody else gets it. You know, we're the ones that really understand, and if only more people would listen to us. And I was kind of pushing back on that a little bit, you know. There's some reality there but, I mean, ultimately, at the end of the day, we're not doing customer experience inside of the organization. It's not our job to create the ecosystem in a vacuum of a CX team. What we're trying to do is wake up everybody else inside of the organization and get them to care and get them to want to serve the customers in the way that only they can inside of their role and inside of their team. It's only when we awaken and bring people together and unify them in the work of CX that we can be effective in our roles.

Shawn: Yeah. This year, I had the privilege of co-authoring a book called *Kiss Your Dragons*, and it is almost like awakening the dragon, right? I tell people all the time and I said it on this podcast before, I'm really lucky because my very first corporate experience was working for The Walt Disney Company, and then I was able to become a Walt Disney Imagineer, and I had no idea, honestly, Nate, that every organization did not work like that. And so, the rant that you're on, I love, but it was really hard for me to understand what do you mean? Like, I thought we all serve the customers and my role at the Walt Disney Company all the time was backstage. I was never on stage dealing with the guests. So, I'm really interested in this whole model that you've created and that you work with at Officium Labs. You have a distributed network of professionals that come together to solve problems, and that's very different in most companies, so how does that arrangement make you more effective at serving customers and serving people and serving humans?

Nate: Yeah. Ultimately, the mission at Officium is to create incredible customer experiences, and we take a very holistic approach in that knowing that most organizations are like, "Oh, technology. It's technology. When you can get it right here, then everything else happens." Or, "No, it's this magic consulting best practice playbook that we've developed. Only we know the solution toward great customer

experience and you have to follow these 12 steps.” And it's like, no, none of you are going to get this right as long as you're so focused on these individual pieces. So Jonathan Shroyer, our CEO, he created the ServiceStack, and ultimately, it's bringing these pieces together in a way where they can sing where we can create some harmony, and each one of them is enhanced because of the other. When your technology is capable of delivering frictionless experiences and knowledge is curated well and it's flowing through and you have a 360-degree view of the customer, all of a sudden you can develop processes. You can have good insights and information.

You can have a good voice of customer engine that makes you intelligent and know what changes you would need to make to enhance the lives of your customers. But until these things happen, you don't have the ability to come in with a magic blend of consulting spices and just say, “Yeah, this is what you need to do. This is going to fix it.” You don't know that because you've not developed the intelligence yet around the voice of customer engine. Every single organization is going to need to take a custom and personalized approach to how to engage their customers in their brand voice. So anybody that thinks they have the magic formula, be wary of them. What you want is somebody that has the ability to set the foundation, to create the engine, the voice of customer insights that are going to get you the intelligence and then unify the organization around a change management methodology where you have the ability to enhance your customer's lives, to use a Jeanne Bliss-ism there, and ultimately make a difference in your CX.

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Shawn: I don't think that by any means there's a one-size-fits-all and we are totally about using customization configurability with organizations. And when we talk about the Experience Ecosystem, that's where the VOC comes in. I remember when I left Disney, I went into healthcare. One of the very first things that I did in our organization is I actually had to go walk in some of our member's shoes and see what it was like to enroll and what it was like to interact with this, and holy shit, like it just opened my eyes to how broken that system is. And that's what I love about what you guys are doing, and what I love about your passion is you're not hanging your shingle on, “Use our methodology. Use our way. Use our playbook,” as you said, like so many of our bigger competitors or whatever you want to call them do. Thanks for sharing that. Totally. So, let's dive into CX a little bit more. If you could wave a magic wand and make every company deliver better experience design, what would you change about the way they're interacting with the people they serve today?

Nate: I have done that and the effects are forthcoming. If only I had that magic wand. I believe that people would... In terms of the actual interactions, the people are perpetuating with one another, I love what Simon Sinek is putting out there, and I've just consumed *Leaders Eat Last* recently through Audible. And I'm just so hooked on this idea of this circle of safety and this circle of trust that organizations can create around their people and even extend that circle outward to include their customers, and this idea of organizations that are so convicted and compelling around what they do, their unique mission and their ability to serve the community and serve the world that they're just united on that. I mean, using tribal leadership as an example too. I mean, a level-one tribe is very cannibalistic. You have no circle of safety that is there. Everybody is looking out for themselves, and when you're looking out against your coworkers and making sure you don't have a knife in your back, you can't think about your customers. If you're worried about your leaders ripping the carpet out from under your feet, you can't think about your customers. You can't serve well inside of that organization.

So when we create a circle of safety around our people, and win with the strength of our shields rather than the sharpness of our swords, then a magic thing pervades those interactions that you're describing, Shawn. I mean, suddenly, we care in a different way about the people around us because we know that as a team together if we can lift up our team members, we can all serve our customers better together. We can serve the organization better. We can be more creative. We can be more energized. We can enjoy our work experience together better and we can extend that out, that feeling, that excitement, we can extend that out to our customers. So every organization I see that's excelling on the layer of customer experience, if you peel that back what's inside, it's a great team that cares about one another, great leaders that have created that circle of trust and that circle of safety around their people, and it's just pulsating. It's radiating outward into the world and it's drawing people to them like a moth to the flame.

Shawn: Well, you're on a great soapbox, the one that I love to stand on too. In our book, *Kiss Your Dragons*, one of our coauthors, Michael Harper, he jokes that, "Shawn, you preach the same three-point sermon all the time for leaders," and it's true. And what I talk about is, you know, you have to build radical relationships as leaders, and that's really to get to know your people. You have to be transparent and you have to love people as leaders. And probably my greatest mentor in my life who has been a CEO of a \$40 billion company plus, he said, and I've heard him say to his executive team several times, he said, "Our job as executives to the rest of the organization is not to make decisions." He said, "Our job is to remove obstacles and remove barriers and

provide a place for people to feel safe to work.” And I do think if you do that right, what you're saying is, “Take care of that first and it's going to take care of the customer.” And I've preached that for a long time. So thanks for being on that soapbox with me.

Nate: Yeah. I mean, I feel like this is an area where, you know, our Officium co-founders are very good here. I mean, I feel like they have, in many ways, created that circle of trust around us. I mean, I'll give the example of... We had some flooding in Nashville that affected one of our coworkers. And I mean, this is not a Nashville-based company per se. You know, we're decentralized and our co-founders both live in California, but without even asking, I mean, they were just so incredibly generous to just give to this affected family, to put them back in a safe place to where this coworker could focus in again on their work. It's just so enhancing that environment of like, “Wow, you know, they didn't need to do that. That wasn't expected,” but the fact that they took the time and the energy and invested into this relationship, it just goes to show that... I mean, this is more than a job, you know. This is a group of people that I'm locked in with where we're protecting one another and it's so galvanizing, the force of that.

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Shawn: Let's dive still some more into the CX and employee space around an effortless experience, Nate, and we say it's a holy grail for great experience design. Is it actually possible to meet all the experience needs across an entire Experience Ecosystem and guide the customer to the point or to the best resolution possible?

Nate: Yeah. I mean, I have to hope that in 98% of the situations that are out there being faced by customers that it is, and I certainly have drank from the fountain of the effortless experience many times and I love that line you just said on guiding customers to the best resolution path. I've used that so many times with organizations that keep adding channels and thinking they need to be all things to all people, and I'm out here shouting, “No, no, go through appendix A of the effortless experience and figure out what channels your customers actually need and the ones that you have the ability to do a quality consistent job on instead of being out here just basically doing glorified triage on every social media platform. It just confuses everyone.” So, I'm a huge fan of put yourself where the customer is likely to experience a problem. You know where those friction points are because you've been doing voice of customer, and if not, then that's where you start, figuring out where those friction points exist, and then, “Okay, does this need to be a phone call?” If yes, let's not throw people into our self-service environment. Let's not make them go through our live chat hoops. If we know that we need to talk them through this scenario, then let's do that. Let's lead with that. But if

we know, “Oh, you know, this is something where they can look that up, they can get on their way so quickly and easily if we can put out the right knowledge to them,” then make that knowledge curation process so good and right there on their mobile device to where they're back on their path right away. It's just thinking through what the friction point is and how to best address it.

Shawn: A hundred percent agree. And I love the fact that, you know, you're saying that you can't be all things to all people, and I think that's where people really, really, really struggle with it. So let's dive now. And I know we talked about it a little bit earlier on employee experience, you know, training is critical to delivering consistent and successful experiences. What are the mindsets that you have to blow up in order to get people on board with where experience design is heading? Or put it in your terms, what mindsets do you need to kick-ass against to get this onboard to where experience design is going?

Nate: Well, it's interesting that you mentioned training. I'm an L&D professional by background and it's amazing how much overlap there is in terms of building and developing that mentality and what type of training program you have inside of an organization. The vast majority of companies still have a CYA training program. Let's just make sure that our sexual harassment training is complete and then we have a report that we can run on that, which is... I'm certainly saying that's important. Definitely do that. But your heart of your training program should be how can we equip people to be better in their jobs, to treat one another better, and to care about the customers in the ways that we as an organization value and that we're looking to foster? I mean, the way that we think about our customers and the behaviors that we perpetuate towards our customers, that's what we want people to understand to unify them around those principles and to be on a very regular and very effective way, reinforcing that, reminding them of that. So, that's going to be training, you know. That'll play a role, but more than that, it's just your everyday real-life interactions. They're going to be looking at the way your leaders are thinking and behaving towards customers. They're going to take that cue far more than something that they see in an LMS. So, I mean, training should be an everyday occurrence that's happening all the time.

But to answer your question around, like, what do we do to wake people up in this regard to make them want this? I love John Kotter and his methodology around leading change, and step one in that is to develop a sense of urgency. People aren't just going to change for change's sake. They're not going to change because you showed up in a novelty suit and told them that they need to... I've tried this technique and told them, “You need to serve customers better.” That's not enough. Like, you

have to demonstrate why the current course of reality is not sufficient to achieve the results, the objectives that this business is looking to achieve. And until we do something different, until we change this reality and serve our customers differently, and enhance our CX strategy together, we're not going to make it. Either we're not going to survive as a business. We're not going to acquire that market share. We're not going to hit those numbers, whatever it is that you need to say or do to demonstrate the sense of urgency around CX, and you don't need to make it up. The numbers are there. We know that when we do CX well, the ROI is overarching. This is how we acquire new customers. This is how we earn the right to grow the business in a sustainable way. Look at how much customer success has risen into the equation. Let's maximize customer value so that we can develop the company and we can grow the bottom line of the organization instead of going out and just doing traditional cold calling, traditional marketing. Customer success is the response of the world to the age of the customer to change the way we do sales and marketing. So, I mean, you got to wake people up and develop that sense of urgency starting with the executive team and then working your way down. Okay, mid-level manager, you're being held accountable to this objective. Here's how we... If we do this for our customers, if we reduce these friction points, here is how you get to be successful.

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Shawn: Even from an employee standpoint. I used to say this, we got to meet people where they're at and we just got to quit checking the boxes. So, we talk a lot about that experience is emotional, and so we're in the business of managing emotions and telling stories through peak moments that stick with people. And because we're interacting with humans, there are emotional lows that come with those highs. How do you navigate the full range of emotions in the work that you do and that you do with organizations both personally and professionally?

Nate: Shawn, I think you probably know a lot more about this area than I do. This is an area that I've been trying to develop my own understanding in because I believe that psychology is the underpinning of CX. If we consider CX to be the thoughts and perceptions, the feelings that people have towards a brand, then what we're doing is psychology because we're trying to enhance those feelings and perceptions. I'm really keen to study more in this area, but from what I've discovered so far, it's all coming from expectations that we set. If we disappoint our customers because we set an expectation with them earlier in the journey, they're going to be pissed off. They're going to be disappointed. They're going to be disillusioned. They're not going to trust us, but if we set a clear expectation in the journey and we deliver on that, we don't have to blow them away. What we're doing is we're galvanizing that trust. We're

demonstrating that we are capable of backing up our brand promise with a reliable delivery of an experience that they can trust, that will be consistent, that is there for them. And that right there is what generates more than just an emotion. It generates a loyal relationship where they're going to keep coming back to you, and when somebody is out there in their network of friends or family that's needing that product or service, you will be the one that comes to mind, not because of the fireworks, not because you're going to blow somebody away, but because they know that they can rely on you. You're not going to damage their reputation or relationship with them because this is a company that you trust that's going to deliver on the experience that you promise. That, more than anything else, is going to lead to those positive feelings.

Shawn: So, that's the positive side to this, the psychology of CX, but then 2018 NewVoiceMedia report said that poor customer service costs companies \$75 billion a year. So why are companies still losing so much revenue towards this and not grasping what we're talking about and what we've talked about the last 20+ minutes?

Nate: Yeah, that stat is used very eloquently by our CEO, Jonathan Shroyer, on our Officium blog. It's a great quote and it's a wake-up call. It's a wake-up call to all of us, and I would hypothesize, and I believe that Temkin and some others have validated, that number, if anything, has gotten worse not better in these past three years. So why? I mean, your question is why? Bob Thompson has some great literature on this on CustomerThink in terms of why are we ultimately failing as CX professionals to generate ROI and to make a difference? A lot of it is stemming from us trying to do too much as CX professionals. We're coming in and everything becomes CX and we become overwhelmed, and we have this quarterly shareholder model inside of organizations where people expect results within a couple of months, you know. They're going to experiment, they're going to try out CX, and if it doesn't work in that Q1, 2022, well, that failed, I guess, we're going to have to try something else, and they move on to digital transformation or whatever the other buzzword is. That's not what this is. CX is a revolution that needs to take hold of people's mentality for the long term, and it's something where we need to grow this work over time in a sustainable fashion. So I think that's a big part of it, but I mean, really, I think where that stat is coming from more than anything else is disloyalty that is generated from poor experiences, in many cases, in the area of customer service.

Customer service is often, sadly, where the straw that breaks the camel's back. I mean, something bad already happened in the "ideal" experience that's forcing them to now go to customer service. "Something is wrong, you know. Come and fix me." And the inability, in many cases, for a customer service team to do that, whether they don't have the tools, they don't have the resources, it's just too broken, you know, whatever

that is, ultimately, people are going to become very frustrated and they're going to walk away. They're going to become disloyal. They're going to become a detractor, and that detractor not only impacts them and their relationship with you, of course, they're going to go tell 10 people about that negative experience, and they're going to impact your relationship with those other 10 people. So a detractor is a dangerous thing, and we generate a lot of them because we set expectations and we don't deliver on them.

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Shawn: I heard it said that, if no one owns CX that no one does CX. So, I've heard this said in a couple of organizations. I'm sure you have when you've worked with them, Nate, that, you know, well, everybody is supposed to do customer service. Everybody is supposed to do customer experience. And I think there are a lot of senior leaders out there that have that mentality, but if no one really owns it within the organization and gives that North Star in that strategy, then you're really not doing CX.

Nate: A thousand percent. I used a metaphor. When I was a young CX professional, I accidentally, in my ignorance, subscribed to the Moses model of doing CX work, which was me coming down the mountain of Mount Sinai with my golden tablets of voice of customer data and slamming them down at the Israelites and saying, "All of you suck. We failed our customers in all these ways. You all have to do better or else we're going to be out of business in a year." And guess how many people that motivated? Nobody.

Whereas, you know, watching TBS, which is playing *Lord of the Rings* televised version on loop, I'm sitting there watching Gandalf and his ability to bring the hobbits, the dwarves, the elves who never worked together, by the way, and galvanize them on this fellowship of the ring, this quest to destroy the ring in the fires of Mount Doom, and suddenly you have this united group together. It's not about any one of them. There is no hero in that story per se. You think it's Gandalf and then it's not because he falls in a crevasse for like a movie and a half. You think it's Frodo but then he gets eaten by a spider, and then it's Samwise Gamgee, the gardener, who picks up the ring, and in my opinion, if there was a hero, it's him. But the whole point there is there's not an individual who is responsible for this quest. It is together, the work of the fellowship. That fellowship mentality is what we as CX professionals should be developing inside of the organization that we serve.

Shawn: Awesome. Well, Nate, it has come to that point in this episode where we do this thing called The Combustion Questions, and for you today, we have three randomly selected questions, Nate...

Nate: Excellent.

Shawn: ...that we're going to ask you. So are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

Nate: I've never been readier. Let's go.

Shawn: Awesome. So combustion question number one, Nate. What animal would be way better if it was covered in scales?

Nate: Well, definitely a chicken. I'm actually looking... I have seven Rhode Island Reds in my backyard right now, and I am having to consistently peek out at them because hawks come in and pick them off. They're the most worthless, defenseless animals in the world. So if they had some good scales, some good armadillo armor, I would feel much better.

Shawn: That's awesome. I won't ask why you have seven chickens, but we'll leave it at that. Combustion question number two. Would you rather have a bottomless box of Legos or a bottomless gas tank?

Nate: Oh, gosh. Well, definitely a gas tank. I've got two young kids and I fricking hate Legos these days. All I ever do is step on them. A bottomless pit of Legos sounds like a nightmare to me right now but I'm always having to refill my dang gas tank on the way to pickleball, so yeah, definitely the gas tank.

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Shawn: You know, I think I would have to agree with you as well having a six-year-old son. I step on several Legos a week or a day even.

Nate: Nice.

Shawn: All right. Well, combustion question number three. What do you think about breakfast cereal?

Nate: I recently tweeted that whenever I become sad, I'm at risk of consuming a glorious amount of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, which... I don't know. That's what I do. If I need to pick-me-up, I'm reaching for the Cinnamon Toast Crunch. So now I'm careful not to buy it because I know that tendency that I have. So right now I'm stocked up on Frosted Mini-Wheats, which just fills you up, you know, and then Honey Nut Chex, which is kind of my guilty pleasure right now, but man, I love a good breakfast cereal.

Shawn: You know, you are speaking my love language in all of those cereals there, Nate. Well, awesome, brother. It's so good to have you on here. Before we close up, how can our audience find you? What are all the Instagram channels, and where can they go follow this wicked cool guy?

Nate: Nice. Well, definitely, check out officiumlabs.io. Would love to serve you there. CX Accelerator as well, and I'm on Twitter at the hashtag or rather the handle @CustomerIsFirst. I'm somewhere on Instagram, I think under CX Accelerator, but I used to be a wedding photographer and I think that's still all I have out there, so maybe do Twitter.

Shawn: Awesome. Well, thank you again, brother, and hope that we can connect soon and kick some ass and blow shit up.

Nate: Yeah. Keep it up, Shawn. Stay on fire, my friend, stay hungry.

Shawn: Yeah.

Shawn: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*. Let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

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