

The Chief Customer Officer is NOT a Customer Advocate

by Curtis N. Bingham

**CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER
COUNCIL**



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Curtis N. Bingham
Founder and Executive Director
Chief Customer Officer Council


Curtis Bingham is the recognized authority on chief customer officers and the first to promote this role as a catalyst for competitive advantage. He is the creator of the CCO Roadmap, a groundbreaking work containing 100+ critical strategies essential for customer centricity. As an international speaker, author, and consultant, Curtis is passionate about creating customer strategy to sustainably grow revenue, profit, and loyalty.

Are you a customer complaint officer (CCO)? Or a chief customer advocate? If so, you are doing your company and your customers a disservice.

Many people believe the primary role of the chief customer officer (CCO) is to be a customer advocate, or perhaps even a customer complaint officer (CCO), dedicated to solving customer problems. Nothing could be more damaging to the CCO or the organization than this perception. A customer advocate title implies the executive will always side with customers, regardless of the business impact. Effective handling of customer complaints is a critical process within the organization, but if the CCO owns it exclusively, it invites the wholesale abdication to the CCO of all customer responsibility. There are three reasons why a CCO is not a complaint officer or advocate.

First of all, customers are simply not always right, no matter what popular literature might advocate. If customers had their way every product, service, or interaction would perfectly meet all their needs—for free. In our efforts to pacify customers, we've trained them to complain and get a credit. If they ask for it, we'll give them a coupon. Let's face it: we're not in the business of continually giving away our products or services for free. To do so would be foolish & irresponsible to our shareholders, employees, and ultimately, our customers. Sometimes the most valuable thing the CCO can do for the business (and for the customer) is gracefully say to a customer, "No."

Secondly, the CCO role is so much more than complaints and advocacy. Executives make trade-offs. Underlings blindly champion causes, irrespective of the consequences. An effective chief customer officer's primary duty is to help the organization drive profitable, customer-centric growth by balancing current & future customer needs with business objectives. To do so, the CCO has to have not only an intimate understanding of customers' needs, wants, and desires, but also the strategic priorities of the business. Understanding which, the CCO can make the strategic tradeoffs required to balance long-term

A white silhouette of a lighthouse on a white base, with a blue beam of light shining from the top. The background is a blue gradient with a yellow and orange curved line.

customer value with short-term costs. To achieve these goals, the CCO must be involved in strategy, culture improvement, customer prioritization, retention, acquisition, and even innovation.

Third, the CCO must inject the customer perspective into executive discussions so every strategic decision answers the question, “what is the impact on the customer?” If the impact is positive, leverage it. Customers can’t appreciate what they aren’t aware of. If the impact is negative, find ways to mitigate it. For JetBlue, on-time departure was the key driver of customer satisfaction. Yet to fix airport/traffic/weather delays was prohibitive or impossible. They found that having the pilot come out of the cockpit and address the passengers caused satisfaction scores to nearly completely rebound to those of on-time departures.

To be an effective CCO, you must remain strategic. Complaints are everyone’s job. Set up closed-loop issue resolution processes and help the experts retain ownership of correcting and preventing further complaints. Balance customer needs with business needs as a peer of the executive team.*

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About CURTIS N. BINGHAM

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About THE CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER COUNCIL

The CCO Council is a powerful and intimate gathering of the world's leading customer executives from widely diverse industries. The Council helps executives achieve objectives faster and more easily by leveraging best practices. It helps validate and refine strategies and initiatives to avoid experimenting at customer expense. Membership is by invitation only, and purposefully cross-pollinated with the most forward-thinking companies, large and small, so as to help customer executives deliver solid, customer-centric business results. For more information, email info@ccocouncil.org or call 978-226-8675.



Powerful Influence on Customer Centricity – Authority is the currency of the C-Suite. Greater Authority means greater ability to influence the organization to take a desired action. So how do you increase your authority and better use the authority that's been granted to you? How can you build stronger relationships and demonstrate and communicate results? In this **Bingham Advisory**, you'll not only learn about the three types of chief customer officer authority: Positional, Borrowed and Earned, you'll also learn five ways to borrow and four ways to earn greater authority, with specific examples of each.

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