

ADVERTISEMENT

WORCESTER  
**Business Journal**  
IN PRINT. ONLINE. IN PERSON.

CLICK HERE TO  
SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

<http://www.wbjournal.com>

## What It Takes: Curtis Bingham, Executive Director, Chief Customer Officer Council, Littleton

8/12/2012



MATT PILON

Consultant, speaker and author Curtis Bingham has parlayed his experience into the formation of a fledgling organization for Chief Customer Officers.

Some businesspeople have probably never heard of a chief customer officer. It is, after all, a relatively new position in the C-suite. But the numbers of CCOs is growing, according to Curtis Bingham, a Littleton-based management consultant who is building a professional association for customer-facing executives from around the country.

The Littleton-based Chief Customer Officer Council has picked up a number of high-profile members since its founding several years ago, including Oracle, Metlife and the American Cancer Society. Bingham sat down with MetroWest495 Biz to discuss the council, the challenge of collaborating with executives from near and far, and how many companies aren't focusing on their customers to the extent they should.

A CCO is the one who is the ultimate authority on customers within their organization and they're driving customer strategy at the highest levels of the company. The CEO is often times focused on shareholder value. The head of marketing is focused on reach, ad spending and awareness. Sales is all about bringing in the deals. Nowhere on that list is someone uniquely accountable for the

customer.

Yeah it does. Owners who know customers so well are hugely successful. They realize it's about the relationship more than it is about making a buck. Many people will focus on making a buck as primary objective but they'll get one sale and the customer will never do biz with them again if they're in a competitive market. We can do all of these wonderful things for a customer. But if you have a bad day and you yell at a customer or do something disrespectful, you could ruin something that hundreds of other people in the company have worked so hard to create.

Ten years ago, I was writing a paper and I interviewed every CCO I could find – about 15 to 20 existed back then. I was looking to do another report five years ago and I found the role had just exploded. Many companies had the role but nobody knew anybody else in the role. So they were out reinventing the wheel every time they turned around.

I've tried to do a lot of webinars. The members don't want it. They want face to face. They want telephone conversations. It makes sense given their missions. What ends up happening is we have working groups that pick topics they're interested in and they will share their findings at our annual conference.

It's typically larger companies who end up with a CCO. As a company grows, they tend to abstract themselves from customers and lose sight of some of what customers really need. There are three reasons to hire a chief customer officer. The first is a company has a problem impacting customer that just won't go away. The second reason is market share – our customers are leaving or they're reading negative flak about us. Many times they'll hire a CCO and say: Stop the churn. The third reason companies do this is to create a competitive advantage.

I saw a lot of CCOs being fired. I wanted to figure out why that was the case. The latest number was 29 months and in the numbers I am about to publish, its 31 months. A lot of times it was that the company wanted to focus on retention and the CCO wanted to focus on acquisition. There was a strategy mismatch. It's still the most fragile member of the C-suite. What happened during the recession to an awful lot of new CCOs, was when companies started cutting, they said 'you're not bring in new revenue, you're not critical to running the business like a CIO is.' There was a lot of churn.

Time. I think that these executives are so incredibly busy they don't have time to take a break and reflect and think about what their strategy should be. Time is also the biggest challenge for me, personally. I'm a very small company, but I look like something much bigger. And there are so many things that I would love to do and there's just not nearly enough time in the day to do everything I want to do for the business and to grow the membership. n

This article was edited for length and content by Matt Pilon.

© 2012 WBJournal.com