

From the outside in: Anne Lise Kjaer

Following a well received presentation at the 2011 Leadership Conference, Anne Lisa Kjaer, founder of leading international trends forecasting company Kjaer Global, tells **Live!** what it takes to build successful customer relationships in the 21st century.

We are witnessing seismic shifts in our society. Crises in financial systems have shaken the foundations of people's trust in institutions. At the same time (perhaps unsurprisingly) many of us are questioning our own values. We are asking a very fundamental question: How do I get more out of my life?

Change on this scale brings both challenges and interesting opportunities for organisations working to build and maintain successful customer relationships. My favourite Chinese proverb sums this up perfectly: When the wind of change rises, some people build walls, while others build windmills.

To harness the opportunities of change we need to understand the forces shaping our society. At Kjaer Global we engage what I call 'whole brain thinking'. We observe both rational and emotional society influences in order to decipher trends and get a clear picture of how they impact people's needs and behaviours. This approach reveals the key drivers for the 21st century.



Perhaps the most influential trend is dialogue-driven innovation, which is sparking conversations everywhere as people get together, especially online, in communities based on common values. It is essential that organisations join the dialogue in real time to maintain and build relationships and it can provide a useful health check on how well they are performing.

Of course ethics are fundamental and you only have to look in the news of late to find some prime examples. In future we will demand total transparency, with clear and honest communication of values becoming a given. Already online comparison sites, peer reviews and collaboration groups are pointing the way to a customer-focused and people-centric future where businesses earn trust on a daily basis.

The need for balance and equality rank high on the current global agenda, especially with more women entering leadership roles, driving both innovation and growth.

In fact, this 'female factor' has become an essential driver for growth. Respected global consultancies including McKinsey and Goldman Sachs have suggested that increased female leadership has the power to increase GDP.

An empathic approach is also crucial, as organisations harness the power and passion of local communities in order to have real relevance in people's lives. By participating in creating a better world and by embracing volunteering, fundraising and good causes, companies reaffirm their own identity as a force for good and create a lasting cultural legacy.

All these trends underpin an overarching 21st century driver I call 'authentic wellbeing' and happiness. Far from being an ideal, this is not only a universal goal, but a serious business proposition currently being addressed by the UK government.

In the future, governments may even consider a Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDW) index, alongside GDP, to measure a nation's true wealth.

With that in mind I'd encourage you to look at your organisation as a 'happiness enabler', considering how you and your team can deliver positive experiences that enrich and empower the lives of your colleagues and customers.

Making people happy sounds a big ask, but it really isn't that hard. Research show that conviviality, courtesy and simple gestures such as eye contact and a genuine smile are enough to up the everyday happiness factor for everyone. And as happiness is contagious, that's got to be a win-win for everyone!