
“Forever Better”: Miele Canada and the Pursuit of Customer Service Excellence

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Miele. Its brand promise is “Forever Better.” It’s a household name. And, as it turns out, it’s a new university.

As Miele evangelists know, the company stands for two important things: Quality and customers. So, it is fitting that its customer service reflects this, too. The brand, its products, and its thoughtful engagement with customers and employees remain difficult to match in an increasingly competitive marketplace (both instore and online). As I sat down with **Miele Canada’s VP of Customer Service Operations, Eric Esguerra**, it became clear that the company’s strides in innovation come from the long-standing mission articulated by its founders: “Success is only possible in the long term if one is totally and utterly convinced of the quality of one’s products.” This, too, applies to the quality of its customer service. Joined in conversation by **CSPN’s VP of Business and Customer Service Strategy, Jessica Cryer**, and **Dolly Konzelmann, CSPN’s President and CEO**, it was also revealed how Miele and its partnership with CSPN created a unique and unmatched program which both optimized customer service operations, and transformed the Miele Canada employee experience forever.

Eric Esguerra is no stranger to customer service. Honing his skills as a CSR for Sprint Canada, this was his first foray into business and customer service life, and was the kickoff to a career that included every customer service role imaginable. Even after all this time, and after being a team lead, supervisor, and manager, his beginnings as a CSR remain vital to his daily work life. “I still keep a Polaroid of myself as a CSR because it helps me onboard and integrate individuals who come into our business,” he says. “Sometimes they may just see you as an untouchable VP, so it breaks down the walls for CSRs to know that I was cut from the same cloth as them. [Those experiences] allowed me to become successful, and are an asset behind what brings me to where I am today.”

And today, Esguerra is busy as Miele Canada’s VP of Customer Service Operations. For the uninitiated, Miele (a German brand) is viewed as the largest family-owned appliance company in the world, with close to 24,000 employees across the globe, and spanning 47 different countries. You may have glimpsed its high-quality products via partnerships with MasterChef Canada, and Air Canada, too. The ‘family-owned’ aspect of Miele is pivotal: “We have a family board that transcends direction across all continents and all the countries,” Esguerra points out. “The consumer experience is something that we talk about every single day, at every single meeting.”

When I ask him about customer service at Miele Canada, particularly its perception of it, Esguerra beams. “Customer service is paramount to our organization here in Canada,” he says. “We are ‘customer first’, as they are the nucleus of our services, operations, policies, and processes. At every touchpoint in the consumer’s journey with Miele, we have a direct influence and the ability to modify our efforts to benefit the consumer. Not many companies have the agility to pivot as we do. The training that each of the sales people get, to the software that they have, to the delivery of the products, to the installation of those products, we control it all, and we have the capabilities to effect change if and when needed. We know that the consumer experience is crucial in all of our departments.”

But that agility doesn’t come naturally: It takes work, research, and training. This becomes even more pressing in a complex customer service department like Miele Canada’s, where it sees inbound and outbound calls and messages on anything from technical support to general inquiries and concerns, from a complex customer network made up of individuals, organizations, and retailers. To meet the varied needs of its customers requires a flexible and knowledgeable employee base that has been nurtured and educated. That base, for Miele Canada, is made up of around 150 agents meeting consumers at every single touchpoint.

Even when I ask Esguerra about the consistent pain points he experiences working in such a complex network, he *still* beams. “For one, the level of customer expectation is increasing. It doesn’t matter how much you have in your bank account or what your affiliations are: *You belong to the customers*. Outside forces such as technology have made customer patience levels thinner because of the sense of immediacy it provides in the palm of a mobile customer’s hand. So, being able to meet a customer in the moment, when in reality we would have to schedule a technician well beyond the moment, is difficult, even though we would love to be able to offer that. We want to ensure that since we’re a premium brand, we provide premium service. And that’s the big question: What does premium service look like now? Consumers want it to be better and faster, but that comes at a cost. So where do we find that fine balance? This is a challenge we think about often.”

And working on that challenge, and a host of others, is part and parcel to Esguerra's leadership role at Miele Canada. What has made it easier for him to navigate such challenges is two-fold: First, he keeps an eagle eye on key performance indicators like CSat and NPS, and findings from consumer surveys from all touchpoints (powered by a service called Voice of the Customer). Secondly, he keeps his agents top of mind by providing them with the training and experiences they need to meet their own successes.

This second point is crucial: Esguerra knew that in order for Miele Canada to evolve in this age, it needed to a) change its mindset on how to manage customer service; and b) absorb new technologies and practices to meet the increasingly high expectations of the modern consumer. "We did a complete overhaul of our onboarding in our training. I took a step back and wanted to become part of my delivery team, my service team, my contact center, and my technical support team. I wanted to look and feel exactly like them, because I want my company's challenges at every level to become clear to me. I came to realize that training, knowledge, skill, and ability are two-way streets between employer and the employee."

Thus, Miele University was born.

Miele University, a result of Miele's partnership with CSPN, is a testament to this realization, and the pursuit of excellence in customer service. The internal model is built on the premise of post-secondary education, a path for employees to earn a degree in three phases. Jessica Cryer, **CSPN's VP of Business and Customer Service Strategy**, speaks to the University's success: "The continued investment in a more strategic approach to training has been monumental in Miele's success in professional development. Many companies have a tendency to look at training and professional development as more ad hoc. But the reality is, if you want to move the needle on customer service and customer experience, taking that kind of step-by-step approach to building up skill sets at the right time is so important. Miele University succeeded by building exercise programs to empower managers, supervisors, and leaders to sustain ongoing performance improvements around service excellence. It's taken a time to build that within Miele University, and the courses we designed around that have contributed to the success of it."

Esguerra has found the partnership hugely influential, but he's no stranger to the CSPN network, having become acquainted with it over a decade ago. "In addition to their training modules, CSPN's invaluable conferences, with their relevant topics and professional speakers and true industry leaders, provided an education I couldn't find anywhere else. The network really allows you to gravitate to companies like yours that help stimulate growth within yourself, as well as stimulate the culture and future of your organization," he notes. "We partner with networks like CSPN to ensure that we provide all of our agents with the correct tools to ensure the best quality possible," he adds.

CSPN continues to flourish, offering fundamental training, consulting, and events (including its [Women in Leadership Conference](#) in the fall) which bolster customer service operations for leadership across the country. And, the momentum will not die down for Miele Canada anytime soon: In addition to moving and shaking with its product offerings and partnerships with MasterChef Canada and Air Canada, it recently opened its first [Experience Centre at Yorkdale Mall](#) (Toronto), an environment where consumers can meet and greet the product line in a hands-on way.

What becomes clear about Miele during this conversation is the company's investment in innovation, and its willingness to be agile in what has been described as [the new era of the customer](#). This is no doubt driven by its core mission. "At the end of the day, we are a family company, and our promise is "Forever Better," which signifies our desire to do better for the consumer. As our products evolve, so too do the expectations of our customers. I'm sure it's like that in all businesses, but I think being ahead of the curve in ensuring that our consumer experiences are always kept top of mind, and priority one, makes Miele different."

About Miele

[Miele](#) is a German manufacturer of high-quality domestic appliances and machines for commercial applications. The company was founded more than 112 years ago in 1899 by Carl Miele and Reinhard Zinkann and has always been a family-owned, family-run company. Miele aims to manufacture the highest-quality domestic appliances and commercial equipment in the world and to be seen by markets worldwide as providing an absolutely top-class household product.

About CSPN

[CSPN](#) is a leading provider of employee-centric and CX training programs, consulting services, and networking opportunities, designed to empower organizations and harness the competitive advantage of delivering an exceptional customer experience.

About Fonolo

[Fonolo](#), the industry leader in cloud-based call-back solutions, has revolutionized the way contact centers interact with customers through web, mobile, and voice. The company's patented call-back technology empowers customers with an innovative alternative to waiting on hold. Fonolo's award-winning solutions are trusted by a growing list of call centers who aim to enhance the customer experience. Visit fonolo.com to learn how your call center can reduce abandonment rates, smooth out call volume spikes, and lower costs.