

## What Guests Are Really Experiencing

*Editors Note: During our August focus on Guest Experiences, we are honored to have some of the best voices in the world of Customer Experience provide guest posts for the Vision Room. As you read the content below, simply think "Guest" in terms of the "customer" the author is talking about - and you will benefit from the knowledge and expertise of these great minds.*

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You may have heard the expression, "Take a walk in your customer's shoes." The idea is that you put yourself in the customer's position and see the situation through their eyes. This is good advice for those who have customer-facing responsibilities.

You may have heard other versions of this expression. One of the more humorous versions is, "Walk a mile in your customer's shoes, and once you're a mile away, you can say anything you want about the customer and they can't hear you."

I said it was humorous. I didn't say it was right.

Recently, I was speaking at a convention in Philadelphia, where I heard another version of the phrase. This one's a good one. "Before you walk in the customer's shoes, take off your own shoes."

What this means is that even though we try to see the experience through the customer's eyes, we sometimes don't – or can't – because we know too much from being on the inside of the company. It's hard to separate ourselves from what we *think* the customer perceives versus what the [customer actually experiences](#).

Years ago I came up with a short poem: *Think like the buyer, not like the supplier*. That's it. It's just one line. I would have used the word customer instead of buyer, but I couldn't come up with a good rhyme. The point of the poem is similar to the idea of walking in the customer's shoes. We need to get inside the heads and hearts of our customers and step away from our company roles before we can truly understand what the customer is thinking about us.

However you say it, there's only one way to do it. You can't talk about it in a conference room with your colleagues. You must become the customer. Depending on your type of business, there are different ways to do so. Call your company from the outside and experience what it's really like to go through the phone tree or be put on hold. Make a call to the sales department or go visit a store as a customer. Experience all you can from the [customer's perspective](#).

We want our customers to have a great experience. The only person who can really judge your success is the customer. The customer is the judge and jury on that one.

Do your perceptions of the customer's experience align with the customer's reality? Take a walk in your customer's shoes – after taking yours off – and find out.

> [Read more from Shep.](#)

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