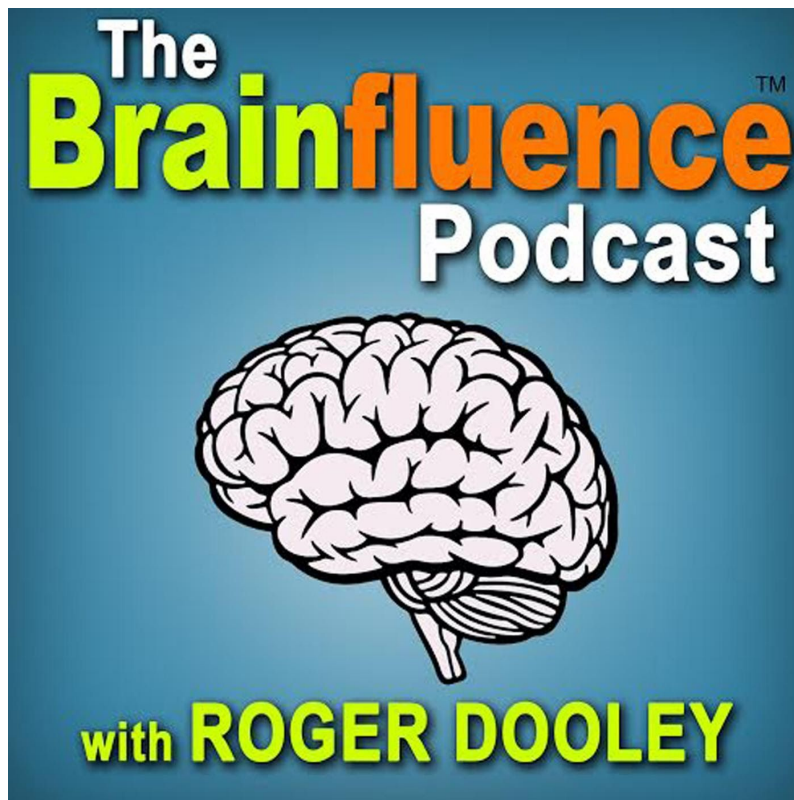


**Customer Experience Pioneer Jeanne Bliss on #CX
and Legacy**

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jeanne-bliss-cx/>



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host



Roger Dooley

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley
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Customer Experience Pioneer Jeanne Bliss on #CX and Legacy

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Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley has weekly conversations with thought leaders and world class experts. Every episode shows you how to improve your business with advice based on science or data.

Roger's new book, *Friction*, is published by McGraw Hill and is now available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and bookstores everywhere. Dr Robert Cialdini described the book as, "Blinding insight," and Nobel winner Dr. Richard Claimer said, "Reading Friction will arm any manager with a mental can of WD40."

To learn more, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction), or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley:

Welcome to Brainfluence. I'm Roger Dooley. I'm really excited to be speaking with today's guest. Jeanne Bliss has been a pioneer in customer experience as an explicit topic. She was one of the first champions of the concept of a chief customer officer, and her book with the same title came out in 2006. Jeanne co founded The Customer Experience Association, and has herself served five times as chief customer officer. She's the author of books like *I Love You More Than My Dog* and *Would You Do That to Your Mother?* It's no surprise that she's often called the godmother of customer experience. Welcome to the show, Jeanne.

Jeanne Bliss:

Hey, Roger. Thanks so much for having me. It's a pleasure to speak with you today.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. I'm sure, Jeanne, some of our customers know Land's End as a brand associated with Sears. Not maybe the best association these days.

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Jeanne Bliss:
Right.

Roger Dooley:

At least as of 2013, they became an independent company again, more or less. But before the Sears acquisition in 2002, Land's End had really established itself as a pretty innovative company in the apparel space. And that's where you spent the early part of your career and became a customer advocate. You were just about fresh out of college then. Weren't you? And explain how that started and how your role evolved there.

Jeanne Bliss:

Sure. The caveat on Land's End is unfortunately important to place. I joined them a couple years out of college. Answered an ad in the Chicago Tribune to go train 2000 phone operators on customer service and the product. And what was happening was we were growing 80% a year. The telephonic 800 number business was exploding. I think we were one of the very first, if not the first, to have that kind of a phone number. And I was sitting with the operators listening to calls every day, and started peppering Gary Comer, our founder with lots of things that we needed to do. We were \$100 million in sales when I joined them. And about 10 years later, we had reached a billion dollars. So I want to give people that information to know that we were doing a lot of things right to earn that kind of explosive and love driven growth.

Jeanne Bliss:

And a lot of what that was, was this conscience that we had that was very, very clear about what we would and would not do. In our principles was what's right for the customer is what's right for all of us. We would never, for example, offer one price for one kind of customer and another price for another. If we made a mistake in the catalog and inadvertently charged \$50 even, less than something was supposed to be charged, we would honor it. If the cost of Shetland wool that we sourced dropped, we would drop the price of those sweaters. We didn't have talk time for our operators. These were young men women from the farmlands surrounding Dodgeville, Wisconsin, who we encouraged to come on and be themselves.

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Jeanne Bliss:

And so it was all of these things that earned this great love between this company and its people and its customers. And so I started peppering Gary with lots of things we needed to do to make it better and better. And he yanked me off the phones a couple years later and said, "Okay, smarty pants. You are now going to report to the executive committee." So at the age of 26, I reported to the executive committee. Gary called me the conscience of the company. It was essentially the first leader of customer experience. We were growing rapidly. We had lots of different people coming in from other places that were disciplined in their area, but not attuned to the way we did or did not do work at Land's End. So it really was the gift of my career.

Roger Dooley:

Was Land's End still a private company then?

Jeanne Bliss:

Yes, yes. All of this was very much so. Two things, which your viewers I'm sure, listeners, know about, which is we were private company and a very founder led company. But we also had other amazing people at the helm, who were very, very consistent with this approach to growth. The people who were leading product, as well as the guy who came in after Gary had been at DDD, Neiman, and Young and ... camps. We were very heavy copy, informational, honoring the customer with the knowledge so they could make the right choice. Yeah, it was a very different kind of an organization.

Roger Dooley:

I think you've hit on a couple key points there that enabled Land's End to provide this great customer experience then, even though people weren't really talking that much about customer experience.

Jeanne Bliss:

We were still calling it service, yep.

Roger Dooley:

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Right. They were founder led, which is kind of important because that often, the founder may bring important principles with himself or herself that once you've got sort of professional management in, that may or may not be true. And then also, the company was still private, where you didn't have this expectation that, okay, what we're really here to do is serve the shareholders.

Jeanne Bliss:
Right.

Roger Dooley:

And the customers are part of that process of serving the shareholders, so a couple of key points. But after there, you went to Mazda, which is really kind of a huge leap going from apparel to cars, where you've got one product that's a high repeat purchase rate, kind of an ephemeral product that gets often discarded after a short period of time, to cars that last forever, and people purchase relatively infrequently in their lives, at least most people. So how did that transition work for you? I mean, why did Mazda think that you had the skills to help them with loyalty when it was so different? And what did you see in that transition going from one product to another, very different one?

Jeanne Bliss:

Sure. Well, and I needed to flex. I had been at Land's End, I had grown up there for 10 years. And Mazda was doing, trying to do some really interesting things. They were very much into, again, people will know these terms, Kaizen and wrapping an emotional response, not only to the product, but they wanted to take it to the experience as well. And so I was brought in with two other people at the time. Caterpillar was also considered a very big customer driven brand at the time, as was Xerox. And we were brought in as a triumvirate of people to help change the organization.

Jeanne Bliss:

One of the things that Land's End taught me was the importance of data and understanding customers. Back in the late '80s, we knew customer lifetime value. There's companies still struggling to do it. We were doing

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this electronically inserting things into our outbound boxes, depending on what you bought and how recently or frequently you bought it. So I tapped into all of that, and at Mazda was able to create the first relational database integrate 24 flat files into their first 360 degree view of the lifetime journey of a car owner and identifying the triggers that either eroded or created value, and hence creating their lifetime value model.

Jeanne Bliss:

And so it was powerful stuff, and then also brought in the dealer behavior into that. So for me, it was a really great flex. And as we go through the rest of these, you'll see I deliberately changed and moved to these industries so I could keep creating my kickback.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. It's funny that you would mention Mazda and Kaizen because in my book Friction, I mentioned them and that process, but not in the context of the customers, but in manufacturing, which is where most of that seemed to apply. And they're just trying to copy this incremental improvement approach. I'm curious whether that philosophy ended up making it into customer experience at that time.

Jeanne Bliss:

It did for a while, and then the yen dollar exchange rate had a bad marriage, and they were one of those companies that said, "Oh, we've got to go chase after the money." So it was interesting. It was enough time to really do some things that did end up sticking. But it was also interesting politically as we ... A lot of what I talk about in not only my first Chief Customer Officer book that came out in 2006, but the one that also, that I redid almost 90% new in 2015 is understanding the power core of the company and navigating the underbelly and where the sea changes, and knowing as a change agent when you need to stay and when you need to pick up your marbles and go. And I needed to pick up my marbles.

Roger Dooley:

Right. I actually used the Mazda and the other Japanese firms had a concept, which I'm sure you encountered there, called Muda, which is waste, wasted effort, wasted motion. In the manufacturing context, that

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meant ensuring that the assembly worker didn't have to rotate their body 180 degrees to grab a part of the part could be put right where they needed to get it and avoid that wasted motion, which is basically almost an equivalent of the word friction, at least in terms of wasted effort, which is the way I use it. So it's funny that you did spend that time there. But as you alluded to just now, Jeanne, after that you went to Coldwell Banker, a real estate company, then Allstate Insurance, and then Microsoft, which I guess is more of a B to B company. And those are very different industries. Was there some consistency in your approach to all of those? Was there sort of a single philosophy, or tactic, or strategy that you could say you brought to each of those?

Jeanne Bliss:

Well, in each one, it was bringing the discipline of starting with the growth of the customer base and understanding it. I went to, and I'll briefly just do this, Coldwell Banker because it was B to B, and I also wanted to flex my muscles in running a part of the operation. And so I very much did, and our job was delivering value to the franchisees who paid their franchise fee.

Roger Dooley:

Okay. So just pausing here for a second, a lot of people know Coldwell Banker is a real estate company, where they can list their house or buy a house through them. But you were specifically involved in the relationship between the headquarters operation and then all of the local offices.

Jeanne Bliss:

And the broker.

Roger Dooley:

Okay. Got it.

Jeanne Bliss:

That's right. And we converted local offices to Coldwell Banker companies. And then our job was to assist them in becoming successful. And so I was able to pass on to those people who were working at the front line with the customer the kind of Land's End approach to doing the work. Allstate, I knew I needed to make a leap to really big. And Allstate, again, weirdly,

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was a spinoff of Sears. I have this weird Sears thread going through my career for some strange reason. They're over \$32 billion at the time I joined them. And I reported to the president of the personal lines company. And Allstate was fascinating because it was B to B to C, and has been a really important through line for me as a consultant to speak with companies who many have that. So you have to not only build the customer journey, but the agent journey, and make sure you're honoring and adding value to that agent, who may or may not, if they're not captive, just your brand has a choice.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. That's really an interesting thing. A few years ago, I did some work with a large financial services company that it was challenging to sort of wrap your head around that where they had multiple customers. And you couldn't simply focus on one customer relationship without also accounting for the other customer relationship. But thankfully, most industries don't have that. But that was kind of interesting in terms of messaging, in terms of processes and everything else.

Jeanne Bliss:

Yeah. It's quite fascinating. You've got lots of businesses, for example, I'm working with a manufacturing company right now, who needs to build relationships with designers as well as retailers. And a lot of it is making sure you're not boiling the ocean and that you're learning the approach with perhaps one part of the experience, and then cascading it through. But yeah, it was a great experience. We actually started with one of the, again, this notion I have that I talk to people about. It's called the power core, which is you need to recognize the first language of either the founders or the C suite and what they're holding dear in terms of metrics and what success means.

Jeanne Bliss:

And to be a change agent, you must know power core. In my book, I list multiple ones. You have finances. You could have sales. You could have product development. You could have marketing. And you need to know the power core and dance with the power core and prove value to the power core first to then be able to expand into areas that may or may not

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be as dear to their heart, understandable, or clear in terms of the return on investment for that. And at Allstate, one of the very big power cores was the sales organization. And so I danced with the power core, importantly. And one of the first things we did was change the compensation for the agents to not be just bringing in a new sale, but the lifetime value. See the thread running through of the book of business that they were building. And that changes behavior.

Roger Dooley:

Well, sure. I think that it's really easy to reward sales people for bringing in new customers. And that's what so many organization focus on.

Jeanne Bliss:

Still.

Roger Dooley:

Because it's fine. You don't want to focus on people you've already got. Right? I mean, you've got those customers. You need to get new ones to grow. But it kind of ignores the fact that your growth is really going to come from your base of existing customers, who are loyal to your firm and keep using your firm, or buying from your firm. And it's really expensive to get new ones compared to just really keeping the ones you've got and doing a good job for them.

Jeanne Bliss:

It truly is. And it is a fundamental shift. One of the things I coach leaders on is I explain the work of customer experience's competencies. And it's the first competency is always honoring and managing the customer as the asset. Yeah, you can talk about how many widgets you sold. But at the end of the day, you need to celebrate and recognize, yes, how many new customers you brought in to sell widgets to. But how many of those widget buying people did you keep and grow as well? So that you're not giving yourself a false positive of just always saying, "Oh, we brought in 100." Well, guess what, you lost 50. And the 50 you lost in that same period were worth three X the 100 you brought in. And nobody's doing that math, that simple, simple math. It's insane.

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Roger Dooley:

Yeah. So Microsoft must've been a change of pace again.

Jeanne Bliss:

Microsoft was, yeah, a really great learning experience, huge company at an interesting time. They had just gone through a lot of the Department of Justice stuff. So I joined Microsoft at a very tumultuous time, and so needed to again as a change agent, figure out where I could make an impact. And what I found was that there were ... The way Microsoft is structured, I think there's some similarities, a lot of similarities to this, is they were organized by countries. And you had country leaders. And so I found country leaders who very much got it, saw the ROI in it, or we did enough early work to produce value. And then we would use those countries, if you will, as learning labs.

Jeanne Bliss:

And then there were other things that we did too that were just so obvious. But we identified the power core, so Microsoft is a technology company. A part of their power core is the product, and so one of the early days things we did, you may have experienced this in your life, is there's a box that pops up. And I don't think they're using it anymore, that says, "We've experienced a problem. Do you want to tell Microsoft about it?" You remember that box?

Roger Dooley:

Yeah.

Jeanne Bliss:

Okay. Inside the company that was actually called a Dr. Watson box. And that box sent a direct beeline of information to developers. And so what it started to do was the pinging of that box, and the collecting and the trending of that information made it very real to the people developing the product of the impact they were having on people's lives daily as they were trying to encounter and use the product they had built. Dance with the power core.

Roger Dooley:

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And off of that, they, at least in that era, developers were pretty quick to blame customers for any problems experienced.

Jeanne Bliss:

Well, yeah. If we build it, we will come.

Roger Dooley:

Well, they're doing it wrong. They're not doing it the way they're supposed to. If you haven't showed them the right way, or if the right way isn't intuitive, or the only way, then you're probably doing it wrong.

Jeanne Bliss:

Yes.

Roger Dooley:

Anyway, you've evolved since then. I guess it's going on 18 years since you started your own firm, Customer Bliss.

Jeanne Bliss:

Yes.

Roger Dooley:

Nine years ago, you co founded the Customer Experience Professionals Association. And I'm curious about that. I've been involved with the start ups of a few associations. And it's really a thankless task.

Jeanne Bliss:

It is.

Roger Dooley:

Sometimes at least, it's lots of work. You've got to beg for money. You've got to try and get super busy people to volunteer to do stuff. And was that a challenging thing to do? Or did you find that everybody was really ready for that and eager to help out?

Jeanne Bliss:

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Well, it was a labor of love. Bruce Temkim and I co founded it. And he and I were totally in lockstep about the importance of creating a community of people who wanted this to become and be a skillset that could not only advance their career, but they had a community of people to help them in doing that work and making it their life's work. I had done it from a boot strapped way. That's why I started writing books about it. And what's interesting is more and more people wanted to do it. It's an interesting right brain, left brain kind of a job. So it was fascinating, yes, it was a lot of work. He and I lost our own business at times because we had to put so much time into it. And we were bottle washing. We were writing copy. We were doing the whole thing, but it's sustained. And neither of us are involved in the day to day, but I think it's helped a lot of people, so it's been a glorious thing to have been a part of.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. I certainly encounter a lot of folks now who have the certified designation. Right?

Jeanne Bliss:

Yep.

Roger Dooley:

And so that's really great to know you've had an impact on the industry and presumably a lot of people's individual lives too, which is I think very rewarding.

Jeanne Bliss:

Yeah. It's been a love fest. The people who gravitate to this work are very giving and generous people. I get a lot of wonderful emails, et cetera, on a pretty regular basis. Again, when you give, you get, and so it's been a really great journey.

Roger Dooley:

Now looking at the state of customer experience today, research firms like Forrester do surveys. And sometimes their news seems kind of depressing about ... It seems to indicate we're not making that much progress in the level of customer experience. I'm curious whether you agree with that. Or

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are we really getting better? Or are too many firms just still failing at it? Or is it that customer expectations keep rising? What's your take on all that?

Jeanne Bliss:

Well, here's what's happening. It really requires, if you want to think about it in its simplest terms, a complete commitment at the leadership level. That means the C suite's going to band together and recognize and understand that their role and function is going to change, that they have to start with what I call one version of the truth of where they are today. They have to be united in how they recognize and speak about the business. They have to be willing to kind of put their money where their mouth is in how they make decisions. I call them the non negotiables of what they will and will not do to grow. And they have to really be very explicit about their purpose in customers' lives, why they exist as a business, and then operationalize that commitment. And so I'll stop there. That to me is a big part. That's the work not being done in over 90% of these people who are saying, "Oh, we're doing CS."

Roger Dooley:

Right. Yeah. I really agree with that. And I've encountered so many situations like that, where I first said, "Well, gee, they just need some smart people inside the organization who understand user experience or customer experience." And then you realize that those people are there. They just don't have the ability to get it done because of top management.

Jeanne Bliss:

That's right.

Roger Dooley:

And this kind of brings us to your new emphasis, Jeanne, which I was looking over your website and saw this three blocks long and a legacy. So why don't you explain what that's all about?

Jeanne Bliss:

Sure. It's interesting. I can spend time with you all day long talking about the mechanics of customer experience. And I know it and I've lived it, and I can lead it. And I do it with a lot of people. But again, what I wanted to find

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a simple way was to kind of create a little bit of a lightning rod moment with people and say, "Are you really clear about how you want to be remembered?" I had a dad who had a Buster Brown shoe store when I was growing up. He was, I call him Geppetto. He was Italian man. And he kind of shoed everybody. He shoed a generation of children and their children's children. And it was not about the shoe. It was about how we honored people's lives, the dignity that he afforded them, how he became a part of the story of people's lives.

Jeanne Bliss:

And when he retired, a line of people three blocks long stood to say goodbye to him. So this is not about the goodbye, it's about being really clear about how you want to be remembered. As people, how do you want to be defined? In terms of the attributes of the customers that you serve, how do you want them to describe why their life is better because you're in it? Okay. Fine. You need to know it. Then you need to build that into your operating model. A lot of people don't do the know it work.

Jeanne Bliss:

They certainly don't deliberately do it the build it work. And then the final thing is living it as a leader. When things are presented to you, and somebody in a very well intended way says, "Gosh, we can add \$50 million to our spreadsheet if we start charging customers a \$3 overcharge fee every time they accidentally do A," and you say, "Oh, cool. Check. Let's do that," now you're willing to kind of liquefy this commitment based on whoever presents in the room and with well intended, good sounding ideas. You walk away over time from this purpose. You don't have those intentional guardrails of leadership. And that's really what I'm trying to help people with.

Roger Dooley:

Well, how does this work in a large public company, where the CEO isn't so much trying necessarily to be remembered for something emotional? He wants to be remembered as the CEO that didn't get fired after 12 months because the board wasn't happy with profits. How do you reconcile that? I think what we started talking earlier about founders and how they can bring a consistent philosophy to a company, but for a CEO who is more or less a

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professional manager, it seems like that's more of a challenge. So how do you deal with that situation? How do you change the philosophy of a company that really has been there in the past primarily as a tool to serve shareholders?

Jeanne Bliss:

Sure. Well, and we know that there's a sea change there shifting. And again, I think there's an important conversation to have here that this will throw a halo on the CEO's personal legacy. But this is around sustainability and sustainable growth for the business. What we know is the companies that are growing in a sustainable way, earning share and market share as well as business growth year after year are doing a deliberate set of things. For example, in my latest book called *Would You Do That to Your Mother?* I talk about companies who are choosing and making hard decisions, brave decisions. Virgin Hotels, for example, will not charge you for wifi. They consider it a right, not a revenue stream. They're very clear about how much they would charge. They're not going to charge you for a \$7 bottle of water. Instead, they'll charge you however much it's going to cost you to buy it at the corner market.

Jeanne Bliss:

But what that deliberateness has done has won the market share all kinds of accolades and insane fast growth in a sector they hadn't been in before. And so this very much is a growth strategy. It's a paradoxical one. And it's not one that every CEO has the bravery to step into. But yet what I'm trying to say here is that this is about leadership bravery and it is a growth strategy. It is not a Kumbaya, we want to be warm and fuzzy. It's: What will we do to earn this kind of growth, to elevate us in the marketplace?

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. I mean, I think that's brilliant. But is that something that can survive? Is Virgin going to eventually really become a force in the hotel industry when their competition has really figured out how to sort of extract the maximum amount of money? And of course, the airlines come to mind as an example of that too, where they've been able to consistently reduce the average customer experience, and then charge extra to improve it. How does this competitive balance end up shaking out? Do you have any

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examples of companies that have been doing that in the long haul and have actually really outpaced their competition?

Jeanne Bliss:

Well, I mean, I've spent a lot of time for example, and it's a really good question because again, this is why this bravery word has to come. Colleen Barrett, who was the CEO of Southwest for a long time, they have to defend the reason for not charging change fees and \$5 for pillow on a regular basis. And they couldn't do that if they weren't really clear about the kind of company they were going to be. Now a lot of people will say they've been shifting on some things. But that foundation is what has given them really the bravery or the ability to do that.

Jeanne Bliss:

And REI, they close, they shutter their doors on Black Friday because their purpose is getting people out in the world in community and the great outdoors. And even on their website, you can eventually get in, but you have to kind of push away their black, their little message around, "Are you sure you want to shop today?" And it's actually driven growth to them. It's driven admiration. And this is another thing that I think we're living in a different time, where, yes, not everybody is making a decision about price only. People are choosing, in a world of vanilla, and pricing where it's the same for almost everything, people are choosing to work with companies whose values are congruent with their own.

Jeanne Bliss:

And there are lots that aren't. But for me, I really am focusing on the paradoxical growth companies. It's more fun. It's more interesting. And I think that it builds a completely different kind of company. And it goes all the way back to the Land's End work and the conscience work that we were doing.

Roger Dooley:

I have to agree. And I hope that you can inspire a few C level executives to be a little bit braver because-

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It is bravery. Right?

Roger Dooley:

Yeah. Bravery or maybe suicide in some cases. But I guess nothing ventured, nothing gained. And we could use a little bit more of that at the corporate level. Any other predictions for the future of customer experience while we're chatting, Jeanne?

Jeanne Bliss:

I think there's going to be a shake out of CEOs and leaders walking away from it if, to your point earlier, they don't see a growth spurt that comes from it. Paradoxically, that growth spurt may not come because they're not personally involved in it. And it's something that's being assigned to the middle of the organization, and the commitment is, okay, come back and report on it. That is not a shift. I think we have an inflection point. There's a moment where there's a lot of attention on this. Again, I don't want to be, I'm not trying to be ...

Jeanne Bliss:

I'm a realist. I've been through a lot of these. We've all lived through TQM and quality and all of this, CRM and all of this. And the companies that, at the end of day, this is rigor around business behavior. And it's embedding that rigor into how you lead and how you do the work of the business. What I'm seeing is a lot of this is around the mechanics and not leadership. And the mechanics will dry up if and when the zealots who are pushing for it leave the business if it's not embedded into leadership behavior. Does that make sense?

Roger Dooley:

It makes a huge amount of sense. And I always wonder, what you for instance at Amazon, you've got Jeff Bezos, who is totally customer focused. And his philosophy has driven that organization to amazing heights, where they're even continuing to gain market share despite everybody's efforts to try and recover a little bit of the eCommerce market. But you always wonder what would happen when he departs. Will some professional manager come in and start saying, "Well, hey, we can squeeze a few more points here and there and so on"? But hopefully not.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

Customer Experience Pioneer Jeanne Bliss on #CX and Legacy

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/jeanne-bliss-cx/>

Let me remind our audience that today we are speaking with Jeanne Bliss, founder of Customer Bliss and author of multiple bestselling books including Chief Customer Officer 2.0. Jeanne, how can people find you?

Jeanne Bliss:

On my website, it is easy to find customer and then the word Bliss, my last name. That's my real last name, not made up, dot com.

Roger Dooley:

Well, you could not have made up a better one. It sounded good.

Jeanne Bliss:

I lucked out with the guy I married totally.

Roger Dooley:

You were born with ... You married the right branding then.

Jeanne Bliss:

I did marry the good brand. That's right.

Roger Dooley:

Right. Great. Okay. Well, we will link there and to any other resources we spoke about on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. And we'll have a text version of our conversation there too. Jeanne, thanks so much for being on the show.

Jeanne Bliss:

Thank you. It was such a pleasure and really good questions. Thank you.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's online writing and resources, the best starting point is RogerDooley.com.

And remember, Roger's new book, *Friction*, is now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and book sellers everywhere. Bestselling author Dan

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Pink calls it, "An important read," and Wharton Professor Dr. Joana Berger said, "You'll understand Friction's power and how to harness it."

For more information or for links to Amazon and other sellers, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction).