

ICXI-POST newsbriefing

Vol 1 – Issue11 . Apr 2022

Introduction From The President The Role of Women in Customer Experience

The recent International Women's Day brought into focus the many roles and multiple achievements of women generally in the social, political and socioeconomic spheres and begged the question about their role in the specific world of customer experience management. Studies in the USA and UK estimate that around 65% of roles in the delivery of customer experience are held by women and in the wider world estimates put the female level as high as 85% particularly in the case of front line roles. It is shown that women bring higher levels of empathy, connectedness and relevance drawn from personal experience in those roles but when it comes to supervision, management and leadership the ratios appear to become less favourable to women.

The point of relevance is perhaps particularly relevant when it comes to the topic of leadership in customer experience management. If, as an Interpublic study states, women are involved in 85% of all consumer purchase decisions and that engagement is not only in terms of quantity but more importantly in the kind of purchasing in which customer experience has greater significance then it would appear sensible that it should follow that they have a greater role in the design of the delivery of the customer experience. The facts do not support that hypothesis as the ratio of women to men changes in favour of men in the more influential management and leadership positions.



Is this just another example of the glass ceiling and the dominance of males in C class and higher management roles or is it, that in many organisations, customer experience delivery is seen as a "soft, nice to have" skill that doesn't get the attention of the male dominated organisational money managers so making it hard for any manager to flourish and even harder for the female voice to be heard? Could women really be better at managing and leading customer experience management and are many organisations missing a commercial opportunity by not investing, developing and unlocking the potential commercial opportunities available from women in more senior roles?

So What are The Skills Required to be a Successful Customer Experience Leader?

Are the skills required to be successful in the role withing the sphere of competence of women or are they simply beyond their capability?

Christine Rimer, VP of Customer Experience & Advocacy at SurveyMonkey, amply illustrates that the skills required are available to all regardless of gender, race, colour or creed. The three core skills are listed as

- 1. Cross Functional Connector
- 2. Business Systems
- 3. Analyst

These are explained as

Skill #1: Cross-Functional Connector

It's hard to think of parts of the customer journey for which a single function or department is 100% responsible. For example, a customer's satisfaction, effort score, or transactional Net Promoter Score for a customer support interaction goes well beyond the experience the agent provides. It's a reflection of their total experience, including Product's experience, Engineering's stability, Finance's policies, etc.

As a result, improving the customers' experience is a cross-functional effort. Per our CX Peer survey, 70% of CX leaders and 85% of those who report to the C-Suite say they are responsible for driving a culture of customer-centricity. And 63% of CX leaders are responsible for the action program to improve product and processes. For a CX program to have impact and actually make the experience better, CX leaders need to influence a company's culture to be customer centric and drive action to improve the experience. To be successful, they need to be master conductors of a cross-functional orchestra.

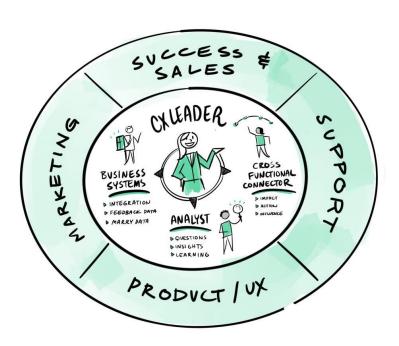
I was recently asked the first skill that popped into my head as most important for a CX leader. I answered "influence." Per our CX Peer survey, CX teams are lean with 33% of organizations funding a CX team of one with the expectation that this leader will influence, inspire and mobilize their leadership and cross-functional peers to ask, analyze, and take action on customer feedback to improve the customer experience. In addition, CX leaders are often the cross-functional program managers responsible for executing the most complex and important initiatives. Failure to influence and inspire action is not just a personal failure to execute, it's a failure to act on the feedback that your customers took time to provide you.

Skill #2: Analyst

When asked to demystify or simplify "customer experience", I remind folks that customers are people. The definition of experience is the "impression you leave from an event or occurrence." So customer experience is understanding the impression your organization leaves on people. You need to ask people for feedback, interpret what matters most and then do something about it.

Per our CX Peer survey, 65% of CX leaders are responsible for establishing or expanding their customer feedback program. This means they need to determine what questions they ask and where they ask those questions in their customer's journey, including the increasingly important digital experience. The CX leader must analyze the customer feedback they receive and look for themes and insights in order to make recommendations. To effectively drive timely action, the recommendations for action need to take into consideration an organization's business strategy. Understanding past decisions and strategies puts that feedback in context. In addition, it's important to understand your current strategy and priorities because there may be opportunities to act more quickly to improve the parts of the experience where resources are already allocated to make improvements.

It's always rewarding when the data clearly points to an opportunity such as a sticking point in the digital journey or the impact of a recent product change. More often than not, you need to analyze that feedback with additional data sources to create an effective CX action plan.



Skill #3: Business systems

I spent my first decade in Silicon Valley in IT running various business system programs including building or migration data warehousing, business intelligence, CRM and billing systems. Not surprisingly, a number of my CX leader colleagues also spent time mapping processes and connecting data to run their businesses. Running a holistic CX program means that you connect the feedback to additional data sources to make sense of action you should take. Per our CX Peer survey, 29% of CX leaders said their top challenge was "connecting CX data with operational data."

For example, if a product in your portfolio is averaging a +37 rNPS with top detractor reasons around pricing, support and functionality, you need to merge that feedback with operational data such as product usage, financial data, and customer data like duration of time as a customer. By segmenting data on these filters, it could signal an opportunity to improve customer onboarding based on feedback from customers in their first year or to focus on those customers that are not actively engaged with your product.

Finally, every trend report from every analyst in the CX space will emphasize the importance of measuring the ROI or financial impact of your CX program. Per our CX Peer survey, 32% of CX leaders say they have no clear metric defined or measured. In order to measure the impact, you need to be able to join your CX data with financial data to build your business case. For example, by combining NPS data with renewal rates, you can calculate the financial upside from a ten point improvement in NPS by understanding the renewal rates of your detractors and promoters.

With 89% of companies competing primarily on the basis of customer experience, up from just 36% a decade ago per Forbes, we know customer experience is a company imperative to remain competitive in today's environment. As a result, we are seeing more CEOs invite Chief Customer Officer (CCO) or Chief Experience Officer (CXO) to join the C-Suite. A CCO/CXO needs to be a savvy cross-function connector, a masterful analyst who can surface the most important insights as well as an experienced business system integrator who can connect siloed data. Impossible? The CX leaders I know, respect, and trust don't think so.

https://www.getfeedback.com/resources/cx/3-skills-required-to-be-an-effective-cx-leader-from-our-vp-of-cx/

One of the clearest thinking articles on this customer experience leadership as a multi functional skill and a powerful indication that this subject is not just the remit of men. To see how this thinking can be applied and measured see ICXI.COM of TICSI.COM for the Digital International Customer Experience Standard (ICXIS) and the International Customer Service Standard (TICSS) both based on the platform of the multi functional P's Model"

One of the issues identified in their study was that customer experience management means different things and has different aims to different organisations largely dependent upon where the organisation chooses to place the responsibility for managing what they perceive their customer's experience to be.

They researched 180 CX professionals from businesses small and large, B2B and B2C, and across a wide range of industries.

They based their roles on one or more of

43% said: "I lead the team responsible for holistic customer experience."

27% focused on customer support experience,

25% on customer success, and

18% on customer advocacy and storytelling.

The majority of our respondents identified their business as focused on

51% B2B and B2C

30% focused on B2B only

19% focused on B2C only.

24% worked at small companies with 1–49 employees.

30% worked at companies with 50-499 employees,

19% came from large companies with 5,000+ employees.

Takeaway 1

CX professionals don't fit in a one-size-fits-all mould

There is no standard "CX leader." While they're unified in their goal of providing great customer experiences, CX professionals can sit in different departments and have different job titles.

24% of surveyed CX professionals report to the C-Suite

21% sit on functional teams such as Marketing

9% Customer Support

9% Strategy and Business Operations

7% Customer Success (

7% Product

4% Sales

2% IT

Our data also revealed that where they sit within the organization has an impact on CX professionals' responsibilities.

Chief Customer Officers (CCO) and other CX leaders reporting to the C-Suite are typically responsible for cultivating a culture of customer-centricity, with 84% selecting this responsibility. Those reporting to the C-Suite are also responsible for action programs to improve product or process (73%) and measuring the impact of CX (66%).

When CX falls under marketing, the top priority shifts to establishing or expanding customer feedback programs (79%). For Customer Support professionals, measuring the impact of customer experience (retention, growth) is the top responsibility (85%). Meanwhile, CX teams that report into Product are far more likely to list establishing an action program for improving product or processes as their top duty (85%).

Takeaway 2 - CX professionals say metrics are their top challenge Asked to identify what challenges they face, CX professionals across all departments selected the following top three:

No clear me	etrics defined (or measured	32%
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Connecting CX data with operational data 29	g with operational data 29%
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Continuously proving value 24%

Interestingly the top two challenges, defining metrics and connecting CX data to operational data, are both critical to successfully proving value, the third biggest challenge reported by CX professionals.

Chart of top CX challenges filtered by department reported to

Takeaway 3 - CX teams are extremely lean

In the world of CX, small, scrappy, get-stuff-done teams are more prevalent than fully staffed teams. And while an understaffed team might get by, to truly elevate your CX initiatives, you've got to invest resources in them.

Takeaway 4 - CX program maturity correlates with resources invested

So how does the size of your team impact the maturity of your CX program? According to our data, team size does correlate with CX maturity—which we've broken out into 6 stages, from the least mature

Stage 1: Ignore	7%
Stage 2: Explore	15%
Stage 3: Mobilize	16%
Stage 4 : Get Feedback	42%
Stage 5: Align	19%
Stage 6: Embed	1%

For teams of just one, we see CX maturity skew heavily toward the early stages. On the other hand, CX teams of 10+ lean towards the mature end of the scale.

Takeaway 5 - CX professionals have to prove their value again and again To get the budget, headcount, and resources they need to succeed in their efforts, CX leaders need to win over executive leadership and continuously reinforce impact.

Perhaps that's why 37% of CX professionals are unable to agree with the statement: "My company understands the role of CX and the value I bring."

https://www.getfeedback.com/resources/cx/the-state-of-cx-teams-5-learnings-fromour-peer-survey/

This data presents a sorry but not unusual picture of the way that the leaders of many organisations manage the quality of their customer experience delivery and is perhaps symptomatic of why not only women but men also struggle to get heard, valued and promoted.

One of the truths is that *experience BY customers is also a multifunctional activity.*Customers deal with multiple organisations and have their own, perhaps less scientific and more emotional, means of performance measurement but whatever their judgement based on their experience influences their commercial loyalty.



Organisational leaders, mostly male, with woolly unfocussed thinking may be making a serious and potentially financially damaging assumption if they believe that customer experience management responsibility can rest with this or that department and may benefit from Christine Rimer's observations.

So Why Women as Leaders - Generally?



In a report by <u>McKinsey & Company</u>, throughout the UK, greater gender diversity on the senior executive team corresponded to the highest performance uplift in their data set. For every 10% increase in gender diversity, earnings before interest and taxes rose by a glaring 3.5%. From this data, we can uncover that women leaders have a key measurable impact on an organisation's bottom line.

When women become leaders, they provide a different set of skills, imaginative perspectives, and, importantly, structural and cultural differences that drive effective solutions. In bringing a creative standpoint, a new sense of awareness will also follow to unplug the finer details that may go unmissed from the naked eye.

What are the main challenges for female leaders?

The working landscape is changing and the business world is no longer just a man's game. However, from the most experienced women leaders who have been making strides long before this debate to the upcoming young talent looking to make a serious impact, there are still challenges in the way.

The first and most obvious challenge is that most of the people in the room are men, but this creates an opportunity for women to stand out and create a long-lasting impression from the off.

10 reasons why we need more women in leadership roles at the workplace

1. Women leaders will paint the future

A woman who is currently not in a leadership role can be a daunting prospect entering such a high-profile role with current stigmas that may be attached. In turn, this could push away the younger generation from striving to break down barriers. In 2019, the proportion of women in senior management roles globally grew to 29%, the highest number ever recorded. While this can be considered positive news, women just entering the workforce will need to be inspired by other women who are currently smashing their role as a leader in the workplace. Once achieved, it can carve a direction for all young aspiring women leaders to increase the global percentage and break new records.

2. Unique transformational ideas will be brought to the front A meta-analysis comparing male and female leaders identified those female leaders were more transformational. They demonstrated more contingent reward behaviour than the two-dimensional actions (active and passive management) presented by male leadership.

3. The enhancement of teamwork

There is no doubt that we've all seen women demonstrate passion, enthusiasm and a capability to take command of a situation when need be. Women are able to make bold and wise decisions as leaders; this helps make the team environment less authoritative and more cooperative, bringing a family-like feel to the team. This boosts teamwork across the organisation and helps implement a new culture within the business.

4. Women demonstrate superior leadership values

Heading back to a national Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends survey, 2,250 adults ranked women better than or equal to men in seven of the eight primary leadership traits assessed throughout the survey.

The key statistics from this survey outline half of the respondents ranked women as more honest than men. In terms of intelligence, 38% said they viewed women as smarter, with only 14% indicating men are smarter. For the other cases, women were ranked for being more compassionate, outgoing and creative

5. Business-wide communication can be enhanced

Communication is said and known to be among a woman's strongest skill. Female leaders will utilise this power to enhance meaningful conversations with employers, coworkers and partners, thus creating an open communication stream that creates a sense of clarity.

6. Achieve a better financial outcome

Within a more diverse workplace, the more likely creative ideas are going to be presented. This helps fuel growth and helps create more sustainability within an organisation. Diversity in the workplace should not just prioritise women, but instead, have a fluid combination of both genders throughout the organisation. In a workplace study, 21% of businesses are more likely to experience above-average profitability if the workforce is gender-diverse.

7. Fresh new outlooks and perspectives

With a diverse workforce will come new experiences and perspectives that ultimately contribute to bringing some much-needed innovation into the business.

Women leaders will bring skills, different perspectives, and innovative ideas to the table, but these three combined will help create new perspectives that lead to better decision-making as a whole for the business.

8. Women leaders can provide better mentorship

Especially for the younger generation, the power of role models cannot be overlooked. Regardless of a person's gender, all people need someone who will guide them to progress in their careers. Specifically, for mentoring and coaching young talent, women leaders are better mentors than men.

According to a study, 29% of women believe that their gender will be an obstacle to advancement. To overcome this obstacle, women in leadership positions can take this opportunity and begin empowering the bright young minds of the next generation.

9. The ability to wear many hats

In a women's life, wearing different hats within their roles is often a common occurrence. You can find them often balancing careers, households and taking up the mantel of parental guidance along with many other experiences. These combined help women leaders to quickly adjust to new situations and focus on finding solutions to real-life work issues.

10. Women in leadership roles can close the gender pay gap

https://www.naturalhr.com/2021/03/23/10-reasons-why-the-world-needs-more-women-in-leadership-roles

6. Achieve a better financial outcome

So What about Women On Customer Experience Leadership Specifically?

One woman's story serves to illustrate the competence of women in the customer experience management world. Venesa Musovic tells of her experience in building **Women in Customer Experience (WiCX)** a best practice community for women in customer experience but with equally valuable insights for men.

What kind of community is Women in CX?

We started out by building a private social media network, content and events programme to bring together women from multiple industries into a single owned space to collaborate, share knowledge and learn from one another. What we didn't anticipate was how fiercely women would support one another on a deeper level, or how that would translate to so much visible action externally.

I'd say we've since transcended 'traditional' community models to provide a platform our members say is 'the best place on the internet', owing to the fact we share a uniquely safe space to meet, connect and truly be ourselves. By being part of a tribe, members are experiencing previously unattained levels of success. Their results in promotions, pay rises, new ventures and CX really do speak for themselves.

How has the role of CEO at Women in CX shaped your approach to business and leadership?

It's been just as transformative for me personally, on many levels. Nothing quite prepared me for the uncertainty of entrepreneurship. Or the gradient of the learning curve I'm continuously traversing. I have become more accustomed to taking risks, comfortable with the prospect of failure, adaptable in the face of challenges, decisive when it matters most, resilient in ways I didn't know I was capable of. Most importantly, I developed unfathomable trust in my people. Leading a community business has allowed me to shake off years of corporate indoctrination and lead with purpose. The long history of women fighting for their rights has taught us that feminism can liberate, democratize, include, and regenerate society as a whole. From your perspective, what are the top three reasons to invite the feminist perspective to the CX table and business in general?

The simple reason why women need a seat at the table is that we think differently about decisions:

Women display long-term peripheral vision, engaging more effectively with multifaceted social issues and how decisions impact people in the long term, beyond the bottom line.

Women lead with greater Emotional Intelligence (EI), engaging in collaboration and consensus-building to elicit support for a course of action.

Women attend to broader stakeholder needs; being far more likely to consider the needs of others and take a far more cooperative approach to decision making in order to arrive at fair and moral decisions that benefit all parties.

This kind of diversity in leadership decision making would undoubtedly lead to a better future for all. But to answer this question fully, we have to confront the truisms for women in CX and unpick what feminism traditionally means.

What do you mean by that?

Whilst women represent almost 70% of the workforce in customer experience, representation drops to 38% in managerial positions and just 12% in the biggest jobs. Add to this the fact that technology is rapidly becoming a significant driving force of our industry (with female representation being only 17% of IT in leadership, 12% in Machine Learning, 10% of Developers and >1% of investors) the number of women leading and shaping the future of CX where it matters most is disproportionately low. But gender is only one aspect of the problem. As an intersectional feminist, I believe that we need to move beyond conversations centred on just equality between the sexes.

How would you explain intersectional feminism?

If feminism is advocating for women's rights and equality between men and women, Intersectional feminism is the understanding of how women's overlapping identities — including race, class, ethnicity, religion, age and sexual orientation — impact the way they experience oppression and discrimination. For example, a white woman is penalised by her gender but has the advantage of her race. A black woman is disadvantaged by her gender and her race. A Latina lesbian experiences discrimination because of her ethnicity, her gender and her sexual orientation.

By removing barriers to entry for women in developing countries and creating safe spaces for minority groups to be equally seen and heard, the diversity of women in WiCX community is a true representation of women working in customer experience. But if you observe social media, panels, authors, conference speakers and 'thought-leaders'; beyond being merely male-dominated, it is also a space dominated by white, straight, middle-aged voices.

The first goal of our community is to promote diversity and inclusion in the customer experience industry, leading the way by example and raising awareness of intersectional inequality. And my personal goal is to use the WiCX platform to help change the face and future of CX.

What's fascinating about the Women in CX community is the ownership and belonging you created for all members. Could you share more about how you

What's fascinating about the Women in CX community is the ownership and belonging created for all members. Our values of inclusion, collaboration, courageousness and authenticity are at the core of everything we do. This means our members feel welcome and included from the moment they arrive, empowered to take their seat at the table and nurtured by the genuine sense of unconditional support. Our culture, approach to codesign and the fact that members take responsibility to help newbies integrate, is all part of the unique experience, sense of ownership and belonging to this community. I have personally never seen, felt or experienced anything quite like it.

Can you share one example of one collaboratively solved challenge within the community?

That's the most interesting thing. I didn't know how to build a community or a platform-based business. The main challenge we collaboratively solved was building the community proposition itself. From developing the brand and building the MVP, to developing the product, service and experience for mass. It was all down to our members collaborating through co-design workshops.

WiCX really is built for women by women in customer experience.

https://cxm.co.uk/women-in-cx-what-does-it-take-to-build-an-empowering-startup-community/



The key messages here being that of engagement to stimulate the development of the best solution to create a powerful community and that if women are creating such communities organisations need to understand their aims and the potential opportunities they may offer.

The Best Commercial Reason

One reason why the rise of women in CX will boost revenues

Women in customer experience

The last decade has undoubtedly seen more women rise to roles in management. According to recent research, this seems to be paying off for businesses. Aside from meeting the basic moral duty of providing equal opportunities for all people, companies with more female executives are proving to be more profitable and innovative.

Customer experience specialists

Customer experience is a key cash-flow driver for business. Industry commentators have predicted that women in management will be especially influential for one particular area of CX growth: psychological engagement with customers.

Emotional engagement

The quest to delight customers has focused many brands' attention onto the relationship between emotions and brand loyalty. In fact, some believe that emotional connections are the most persuasive factors for consumer buying decisions.

Suzy Nixon, Customer Experience Manager, Health Services at ANZ Bupa Experience Team forecasted that"we will continue to see more female executives as the importance of 'emotion' in both the customer and people experience continues to rise. Typically, women are more vocal about emotions and more likely to bring this to the surface."

Sheryl Battles, VP, Global Diversity, Inclusion and Engagement at Pitney Bowes said: "Fifty percent of the global population is female, and women outnumber men in seeking higher education across the world according to SI News. That is why it makes sense that businesses looking to succeed are advancing more women in in the workplace." Pitney Bowes have dedicated themselves to achieving balance and appear to be succeeding judging by their recognition in Bloomberg's Gender-Equality Index. Compared to the 26% average for global companies, 29% of Pitney's executives are women.

"Every experience is viewed through a lens of emotion." - Clicktale

Sheryl Battles, noted: "More women in the workplace have the potential to help brands enhance connections with clients that go beyond a single transaction. Research shows that clients buy-in to a brand, to feel emotionally connected, to feel good about buying from them: 68% of UK consumers in a CXM study said they would be willing to spend more on a product if it was from a brand they love."



Brands use data and personalisation to generate this emotional connection – to tailor communications to the buyer. Understanding how emotions influence the purchase of products, as well as the engagement of teams is part of emotional engagement."

Why Emotions Matter

Empathetic and adaptable approaches are also crucial for effective leadership. Sheryl Battles said: "In the complex, rapidly evolving business landscape the ability to read and manage emotions, exhibit social skills and connect with others will be important. While both men and women must use emotional intelligence to motivate their employees in the future, research has shown that women do tend to have an edge over men in exhibiting these skills."

Even though male and female brains are mostly similar, commentators maintain that the explanation for why women excel at certain tasks compared to men, and vice versa, could be attributed to anatomical differences between male and female brains.

Ragini Verma, an associate professor at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, "found greater neural connectivity from front to back and within one hemisphere in males, suggesting their brains are structured to facilitate connectivity between perception and coordinated action. In contrast, in females, the wiring goes between the left and right hemispheres, suggesting that they facilitate communication between the analytical and intuition."

Point being, gender diversity can be a key strength when it comes to collaborative decision making. When you examine the boardrooms and managerial positions around the globe it's clear that businesses could do with more balance.

Policies	Are the views and potential strengths that women can bring to board level decision making and delivery experience considered seriously?
	Has the organisation really thought about customer experience management as a multi functional factor that needs central leadership and management as it is the source of the organisation's revenue?
Products /Services	
	Is the experience and knowledge of the women in the organisation considered in the design and development of products and services?
Places	
	Is the input of women sought in the design and development of the places where all online and offline service is delivered
Processes	
	Is the customer journey management process designed to include the needs and requirement of all genders
People	
	Is the proportion of women in all roles from staff to senior leadership giving the organisation the optimum opportunity for success.
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Final Word

As an aside the fact that different organisations make customer experience management the responsibility of various different departments is indicative of the fact that they do not "get" the importance of the subject and is as weird as placing accounts in marketing or sales in HR.

The progress made by women in breaking through the glass ceiling has over the past decade been encouraging but the number of women in customer experience leadership roles still has a long way to go. This may be a function of the fact that customer experience leadership itself still has a long way to go. Its importance and value the key influence on the sole source of revenue for all organisations appears to still be foggy mystery to the leaders of many organisations of all sizes.

In general terms there is no doubt that women have different strengths in different competencies and in customer experience terms these strengths may have greater impact than in other areas but there is the lingering doubt that these strengths are often overlooked not because their value is not recognised but because they are held by a woman.

That is something that evidence shows the smart organisations have addressed and the others have the opportunity to access.

However the final word should be that in every role at every level gender is irrelevant and only performance is important so get the people best able to deliver the best experience to customers and the best results to the organisation.

Recommended Reading

https://www.getfeedback.com/resources/cx/3-skills-required-to-be-an-effective-cx-leader-from-our-vp-of-cx/

https://www.naturalhr.com/2021/03/23/10-reasons-why-the-world-needs-more-women-in-leadership-roles/

https://cxm.co.uk/women-in-cx-what-does-it-take-to-build-an-empowering-startup-community/

https://www.customernetwork.com

The ICXI One Question Quiz

Are there any barriers in your organisation preventing women from getting to the top?

NO

YES

If "Yes" - Why?

