

Joe Welu:

We talk a lot about how it's a data arms race in banking and lending and the areas of financial services that we work with, and I do think that's true, but I also think you're only going to win if you play that data arms race by being customer first and customer focused.

James Robert Lay:

Greetings, and hello. I am James Robert Lay, and welcome to the 125th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the Exponential Insight series, and I'm excited to welcome Joe Welu to the show. Joe is the CEO and founder of Total Expert, a purpose-built CRM and engagement platform to create growth and loyalty for modern lenders and financial brands. Welcome to the show, Joe.

Joe Welu:

Good to see you again, buddy.

James Robert Lay:

Always great to see you. Before we get into talking this idea of the human digital connection and how this plays out and to really the work that you're doing over at Total Expert, what are you excited about right now, personally, professionally? It's always your pick.

Joe Welu:

Yeah. So there's so much to be excited about right now, I think the thing that juices us obviously is the pace of innovation, really, the pace of progress in a lot of the work we're doing with a lot of our partners, technology partners and customers particularly, we partner with a lot of great banks and lenders and credit unions out there. And the pace of progress just seems to have been accelerated over the last 18 months or so, and I'm sure you're hearing that a lot, but [crosstalk 00:02:23].

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

... that's really exciting. When you're seeing things happen, you're seeing new milestones, it's a lot of fun.

James Robert Lay:

And that's what we were talking about before we hit the record button, I just did this in episode 124 with Audrey talking about Colby, and how entrepreneurs are going to be more naturally oriented to quick start. So we're wanting to jump in, and get things running and rolling and moving forward in the banking space, it's a little bit different. They're over-indexing, their natural operating strengths are around fact finding and follow through. And we'll come back to these points here. But before we get there, I don't think I've ever asked this question before in a 125 episodes. So you're going to be the first one with this.

Joe Welu:

All right.

James Robert Lay:

I want to roll the clock back, and really what was the inspiration for you to really kick off and found Total Expert? Why go down this path? What inspired you? Because you've got a really good story here.

Joe Welu:

Yeah. So, well, it's a great question. And there's really two parts to that answer. Part one is really what inspired the initial idea to start building technology, and the answer there is rooted in, I was deeply involved in the mortgage and real estate space, and just saw the technology solutions that were coming to market were really just not hitting the mark. There was the level of specificity, the last mile of functionality. You just felt like a lot of the things that were built by the Silicon Valley firms that run a lot of the tech didn't understand how to manage a home buyer and a borrower through a life cycle, and they just didn't get the nuances. So I believed that there was a better way to do it and started really playing with ideas, that was step one.

Joe Welu:

As I got into it, really the inspiration grew and what inspired me grew, and what I saw is just this massive opportunity in how financial services was evolving and thinking about, okay, the future of technology is really where you're going to combine. You got people, the human side and the technology side. And it wasn't going to be a scenario, I believe, that it was never going to be a scenario where the technology replaces the humans, it was really going to be about how it was going to enhance the human. So for example, you're going to enhance a consumer's ability to have financial health and wellness. You're going to help them, if you have great technology enabling the process of them getting a loan, or starting a business, or even getting college loans, or buying anything important in life that requires lending, they're going to have a better process, a better experience of educating them. And ultimately they're going to make better financial decisions.

Joe Welu:

And so I looked at this whole thing of combining human and digital and saying, wouldn't it be great if you could not only enable the organizations, lenders, and banks and credit unions, enable them to serve the end customer better, but wouldn't it also be great if by doing so you're creating better outcomes for the consumers, because the nature in which you're communicating, the level of transparency that happens when you can use data to deliver that educational content and information to the customer at the right time, leads them down a path to making better financial decisions, which leads them down a path of better financial health and wellness. So that's where, as we fast forward a couple of years, the inspiration then really grew to that.

James Robert Lay:

And this gets really personal for you too [crosstalk 00:06:36].

James Robert Lay:

So this idea of financial health and wellness, it's an important subject, it's important to me, I know it's important to you because this really goes even deeper back into just your early childhood and an experience that you live through and watch. Can we dive into that?

Joe Welu:

Yeah, sure, man. It is deeply personal to me, the topic of financial health, or lack of financial health, and how that impacts families and humans and people everywhere. I went through, in my early childhood, five, six years old, my parents as you know, lost our family farm in a foreclosure. And I witnessed just that incredible sadness that my parents had and they were unsophisticated, made some bad financial decisions and that combined with other external factors led to that happening. And I just saw the impact of not having financial security and stability, and what that did to them. And then as the next five, 10

years progressed, things got a little bit better and fast forward then about 10 years or so later, got to see the opposite of that, to where they were able to finally purchase a home again.

Joe Welu:

And the confidence and positivity that, that brought to our household, and my brothers and I, and being able to move into a home that was ours, and having some financial security and stability, it was everything. And it was just profoundly impactful to see both ends of that spectrum. And so the whole idea that really the financial services industry has the ability to not only grow their businesses, but actually deliver that kind of impact to the end consumers is really what drives me internally.

James Robert Lay:

And that's where you and I, man, we're like mines, because growing up, I grew up in a family of modest means. And it took a lot for me to almost reprogram my own mind here, because I heard this over and over and over again as a child, we can't afford it. We can't afford it. We can't afford it. And to me, we're on a much bigger purpose driven mission here to make the world a billion times better by really helping a billion people get beyond that financial stress towards a bigger, better brighter future. Obviously we're not working directly with the end consumer, we're empowering financial brands.

Joe Welu:

But the work we do translates all the way down to the end consumer. Right?

James Robert Lay:

And that's the point of purpose, and you talk a lot about a purpose built CRM, and I want to take a step back, let's reflect over the past 12 to 18 months, because when you think about this idea of purpose, it's probably more important now than ever before coming through the COVID experience. What are the biggest trends that you have seen working with financial brands when it comes to just, we'll call it aligning marketing and sales teams around a purpose bigger than promoting commoditized rates, and putting the transformation of people over the transaction.

Joe Welu:

Sure. So I think you hit on it at the last part of your comment there regarding the transaction, it's now, I think more than any time in the last dozen years anyway, about the human being and the families and the people, it's about being able to truly put the customer at the center and have a relationship with that customer that delivers value and partnership to that customer. And so the transformation that we're seeing where you see teams aligning, marketing sales and service teams, and having really one relationship with your end customer to where they're always at the center of everything that you're doing. So if you're sending out a campaign and then your salesperson is talking to them, they understand that the campaign that went out, maybe why it went out, if you're doing this at a higher level, you're using data and intelligence about your customers so that what you're serving them in terms of marketing, and a lot of times that marketing is maybe educating them about other financial products and services.

Joe Welu:

So if you're doing that right then your sales team, if you're tying those two things together and bringing those things together to have a really one-to-one relationship, those customer facing teams then are having conversations that are relevant and that are in alignment with the information that you just sent out to them. So it's really this whole transformation of what marketing and sales even is, to where it's about connection. It's about adding value. It's about educating, not just selling a rate, not just selling a transaction.

James Robert Lay:

Thinking about this marketing and sales alignment, I want to come back to this point of putting people at the center, putting the customer, putting the member at the center of all of your thinking, all of your doing. What's the biggest roadblock that a financial brand, market team, sales team, leadership team needs to be aware of that prevents them from making this transformation first and foremost internally.

Joe Welu:

Yeah. So my answer actually might be a little bit unpopular, but it's truly how I feel. So the biggest roadblock, I believe, is mindset of leadership teams and culture inside the organization.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah.

Joe Welu:

I believe that is the... it's no longer, technology is not the roadblock anymore.

James Robert Lay:

No.

Joe Welu:

You agree.

James Robert Lay:

Well, because there's an abundance of technology, and they will continue to be an abundance of technology, and digital transformation initiatives fail 60 to 85% of the time, not because of technology, but because of the people who are having to deploy that technology.

Joe Welu:

Yeah. It's the, so we think of everything, you've heard me talk about really the framework at which Total Expert works through, and that framework is data insights and action, to where the intelligence, those insights about your customers and what's going on is combined with actual workflow and action of communicating with the customer and serving the customer. The combination of those two things is where all the value and all the progress is created. You can put customer intelligence and data and analytics and AI in place. And if you're not able to action on it and activate it, it's worthless.

Joe Welu:

And so I was having a conversation yesterday with a large customer of ours in an executive session, we were talking about the reason that projects do not deliver the impact is because of that execution of the the people actually executing on the last mile of integration, the last process change and saying, okay, we're doing things differently now. Today forward, we're not just going to send out batch and blast general marketing, talking at our customers. We're going to segment our audience. We're going to talk to them with context. And then we're going to do the same thing on the sales and customer facing teams.

Speaker 2:

Technology has transformed our world and digital has changed the way consumers shop for and buy financial services forever. Now consumers make purchase decisions long before they walk into a branch, if they walk into a branch at all, but your financial brands still wants to grow loans and deposits. We get it, digital growth can feel confusing, frustrating, and overwhelming for any financial brand marketing and

sales leader. But it doesn't have to, because James Robert wrote the book that guides you every step of the way along your digital growth journey, visit www.digitalgrowth.com to get a preview of his bestselling book *Banking on Digital Growth*, or order a copy right now for you and your team from Amazon. Inside you'll find a strategic marketing manifesto that was written to transform financial brands. And it is packed full of practical and proven insights you can start using today to confidently generate 10 times more loans and deposit. Now back to the show.

James Robert Lay:

And there's so much, if you think about it, 95% of our behavior, our actions, which become our habits, it's all in the subconscious mind. And when you take that individual and then you multiply it out to the team and then to the organization, and you're dealing with something like, let's just say CRM, which requires new behaviors, new behaviors, new habits will require new thinking, new thinking then go deeper, that's new beliefs. CRMs, it's really been a hot topic of conversation in coaching over the last 12 to 18 months.

Joe Welu:

Yeah. Well, let me speak to that just a little bit. I think it's relevant to point. So CRM for one, it's how the technology is referred to because historically that's how people thought about it. I need a customer relationship management platform, but really what we're seeing evolving in the, what we're building is much deeper and broader than just CRM [crosstalk 00:17:11].

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

... because CRM traditionally it's a 30 year old word, it's where I track my sales people's activities, and I record information about the customer. Well, really today, what it needs to be is, if you want to call it CRM, or an experience platform, is the wrapper that we use, because it's really the entire customer journey should be able to be orchestrated between sales marketing and service teams.

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

And that's really what you're trying to do.

James Robert Lay:

And I like that idea of, CRM has, just that word, it bristles people's backs.

Joe Welu:

Yeah.

James Robert Lay:

I was just doing a coaching call last week and they were talking about, they've been struggling with CRM for the last decade. And I almost framed it to them, I was like, if you think about CRM, customer relationship management, versus this newer way of thinking that you and I are talking, experience marketing sales and service, it [crosstalk 00:18:13].

Joe Welu:

Well, so here's a question for you, when I always say, sorry to cut you off, but I always say, what about, so you talk about customer relationship management, what about customer engagement?

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

And how are you going to, at an enterprise, at an organizational level power engagement with your customer, which is really where a lot of the, it's not the management of the relationship in a system, it's the engagement that happens, that's where the value happens.

James Robert Lay:

And then the engagement that then leads to a multiplying effect. So CRM, now it becomes a customer relationship multiplier through engagement to dive deeper, to multiply the value creation through the data, through the insights, through the automation. And how do you help when you're doing these sessions, help others overcome some of the struggles and challenges, we'll call it rooted in past beliefs, to break free from that, coming back to culture and mindset?

Joe Welu:

So step one is we start out talking about outcomes of what they're trying to accomplish. Okay. And a lot of times leaders will come in and will say, we need a CRM, and you start asking questions, why? What are you trying to accomplish? Well, we need visibility, or we need to grow sales. And then you keep going deeper. And usually what we get to is really one of the most important, if not, the most important priority, is they want to improve the loyalty and the relationship they have with that customer, they realize that acquiring that customer is super expensive. So the most profitable thing, and the most impactful thing as an organization they can do is say, let's approach a customer for life type of mentality with every customer we have. Okay. And so then once you get to that outcome, you can say, great. All right.

Joe Welu:

So, if we realize that is step number one, is making sure that you have every possible chance of having a lifelong relationship with this customer, let's start by knocking off some low hanging fruit as step one in this project. So you can't boil the ocean. Most organizations fail because they go down a two year implementation of CRM, they higher consultants, they come in. And before any value's created to the end customer, it's 18 months. Well, I think if anything, we've learned how much the world has changed, can change in 18 months.

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

So I always say, look, let's deliver value in your project in 90 or 120 days. And that might be setting up some basic customer intelligence plus workflow, that might be just that.

James Robert Lay:

That right there is the, I think it's the key. It is the secret to unlock, because 18, 24 months, that's a long time to prove that value. So roll that back, number one, quick wins out of the gate, low hanging fruit [crosstalk 00:21:23].

Joe Welu:

Yes. Progress. Progress is critical to growth.

James Robert Lay:

Progress is greater than perfection. And I think in this space, knowing what we had talked about in episode 124, with Colby, this idea of high fact finder, high follow through, as a natural operating system we need, we have a pseudo need that we need perfection before we can launch, but if we can get quick wins, if we can prove value, that will ultimately build the confidence to further commit, to do even more going further, farther, faster, and it becomes this momentum, it's a perpetual flywheel. I'm curious, marketing has traditionally been over here on one side of the equation, sales has been over here, and then you add service as another mix into this. What are the opportunities now to align them, coming back to what we were talking about before, around a common purpose, with what you consider this human digital connection, because it's not just technology alone, it's technology and humanity working in unity.

Joe Welu:

Yes. So first of all, I think it's understanding that I have a singular customer journey. Okay. That has buckets of where you would say marketing, I think marketing is really being replaced with customer engagement more holistically. Okay. But you have marketing, you have sales, and you have servicing type scenarios, depending on the product, the financial product or service, at different points in that customer journey. So it's really about understanding that I've got a singular customer journey that at different points in time, I'm going to have those functional things interacting with my customer.

Joe Welu:

How do they come together? How do they keep the human in the center at all times? How do we, in a more intelligent way, enable each of those functional areas, marketing, sales and service, to have a more in context, a more value delivering conversation where I'm delivering more value to my customer. So, that's really thematically how you think about it from a technology purpose, then I want to be able to, as my systems, my applications and marketing tools and systems, I have to be able to have data that will flow between those systems correctly and be able to enable engagement, communication, conversations, product recommendations, all of the, really the things that fall under engaging and communicating with the customer or prospect.

James Robert Lay:

I like what you mention about marketing, the idea of marketing being transformed to really think about it as customer engagement. I've been talking about marketing transforming to be experience engineers, because [crosstalk 00:24:18].

Joe Welu:

Exactly.

James Robert Lay:

... engineers can help to create and work with this engagement. You mentioned data, you mentioned AI, we've mentioned automation a few times here. What in your mind is a commonly held belief that this industry has around data, around AI, around automation, that you just disagree with?

Joe Welu:

So, it depends on the level and sophistication of the organization, because I do think there's a lot of you, you and I get the opportunity to work with some really brilliant people in a lot of different organizations

now. Now sometimes they might be the only one in their team. So that's a different conversation, but I do believe that, one of the things that I fundamentally disagree with, if you look at those topics broadly, is that it's just this giant massive undertaking to making progress. I think that's probably the thing I see, the thing that I disagree with most. People should understand that I don't need to, AI can be a longer term thing, but what about just using the customer intelligence that I have now to actually communicate in a more impactful way as a step one.

James Robert Lay:

Right, right. And that comes back to the point we were you were making before, progress is greater than perfection, quick wins show value early and often. I'm curious to get your take on this, because we're talking about marketing, we're talking about sales, we're talking about service. If there's been one major learning over the last 12 to 18 months, it's that work, the idea of work has been massively transformed and will continue, I think, to go through some transformations. How will the future of work continue to transform here? What's your perspective on what we'll call the future work when it comes to marketing sales and service at financial brands?

Joe Welu:

Yeah. Yeah. So I think, this is a big topic, of course, but the future of work, I think the word that comes to my mind is adaptability. And I think it's, you have to be willing and able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, meaning for sure, I need to have really strong digital first capabilities, but I also need to be pairing that with people and humans that understand how to harness it. And so skillset.

James Robert Lay:

So, I think of the world in formulas, you and I were talking about before, I have a background in programming and MIS and [crosstalk 00:26:58].

Joe Welu:

I think I called you a closet nerd [crosstalk 00:26:59].

James Robert Lay:

You called [crosstalk 00:27:00].

Joe Welu:

I'm public facing nerd [crosstalk 00:27:02].

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. We'll come out. And I think that's just the way that I look at the world. And so what you're talking about is what I've put in a formula to where EQ plus AQ is greater than IQ alone. And it's that emotional intelligence plus the adaptability quotient that we can bring to bear is greater than just intelligence alone, because I think intelligence is going to be augmented and supported over the next five to 10 years, even more so through AI, through [crosstalk 00:27:32].

Joe Welu:

Absolutely.

James Robert Lay:

... automation. And therefore, what are we left with? We're left with the ability to make massive pivots through adaptability, but still keeping people, coming back to that point, keeping people at the center of the thinking and doing through emotional intelligence. And so as we look ahead towards, and we'll keep

a short horizon line on this, because who knows what the next, this 12 months, 24 months are going to look like, but at this stage in the game, what are the greatest opportunities that you see ahead for financial brands to either create or capture around marketing sales service through the lens of data, AI automation?

Joe Welu:

I think the greatest opportunity is for the organizations that understand this is still an industry that is centered around human beings and their financial needs.

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Joe Welu:

And I think the organization that understand that at a very deep level, and allow technology to enable them to serve that human being, that customer, in a more impactful way, in a higher quality way that actually leads to better outcomes for the customer, they think about it from the customer first perspective in everything they're doing, not transaction first, but customer first. And I think that's really the big opportunity. I think organizations that do that are going to win the long term relationships. We talk a lot about how it's a data arms race in banking and lending and the areas of financial services that we work with, and I do think that's true, but I also think you're only going to win if you play that data arms race by being customer first and customer focused.

James Robert Lay:

Yes. And that's where this idea of what we've been talking about, human centered growth, there are four areas of focus to consider. You must review what you've done to learn through those experiences, to take those insights that you gain, think about them, and then apply them to the next iteration of doing, because when you get trapped and stuck in the doing, it is a very dangerous and deadly place to be. And to create that space and time, back to your point before, every 90 days, that's the 90 day growth methodology right there.

Joe Welu:

Yes, absolutely. What's your feedback loop? We talk about it all the time with our customers and partners that we're working with, and we talk about it internally, is that, look, you're going to make mistakes, and you're going to learn things all the time. You have to always be going down two parallel paths. You have to have your long term vision of where the industry's going, where you want to go as an organization, but you also have to be focused on these shorter sprints, these 60, 90 day sprints to where, what are we learning, from how our customers are reacting, and how our people are reacting, what worked, what didn't work? What are the micro small course corrections and adjustments that we have to do so that we make more progress the next 90 days? And that's ultimately where magic happens.

James Robert Lay:

It is. And so from a practical exercise, and Joe, this has been a fantastic conversation today. As we wrap up, I want to set the dear listener up for success over the next 90 days for them. What is one small, small, because all transformation, all progress begins with just a very simple step. What's one small recommendation that you could recommend to the dear listener that they could commit to take over the next 90 days to make progress on their own journey of growth here.

Joe Welu:

Do I have to limit it to just one, or can I give you a couple? I'll give you one. So I would say number one, any business and any organization, I want to audit my customer's experience, my customer journey, and understand it and have empathy, so that I can have proper empathy for my customer. And I think it's really true in financial services, but I also think it's true in technology, we are aware of technology business that serves financial institutions and we do the same thing. I talk to our people all the time, the most powerful thing that you can do to make progress is getting perspective and empathy for what's happening with your customer, because that will inform you on some of the quick win things that you can do.

James Robert Lay:

I'd like to level that thought up even further, that's the idea of digital secret shopping coming into play now, because if you can make that commitment, and start small, focus on one product line, and maybe just one area of the buying journey, maybe it's the conversion point. What is that experience? What does it look like? How does it make people feel? And then apply those knowledge over the next 90 days as you're auditing [crosstalk 00:32:19].

Joe Welu:

... learning.

James Robert Lay:

Exactly. As you're auditing

Joe Welu:

I'll give a couple quick examples, I'll give you a couple quick examples. What's the communication that happens when they fill out an application, after they complete an application, after they become a customer? Very simple one. First month, they're a customer with you. What are you sending them? What's the voice you're using? What's the context? What additional value are you delivering? My guess is there's opportunities there for improvement. Those are very quick things in a three to four month window, that you can improve as a bank, lender, credit union, financial institution.

James Robert Lay:

And when you benchmark that against the FinTechs and the neobanks, it's very interesting to see that feedback in the real world. We've done a lot of that against say, Chime and Aspiration and some of these other neocompetitors compared to say the traditional community financial brand, always an eyeopening experience, because I think it's the idea of knowledge and awareness are the first steps towards that future growth. Joe, if anyone's listening, they want to continue the conversation with you that we've started today. What's the best way for them to reach out and say hello?

Joe Welu:

Well, me personally, you can reach out to me, Joe@totalexpert.com. You can always come to our website for information, or reach out to our team at totalexpert.com. So Joe@totalexpert.com, or just come to our site, totalexpert.com.

James Robert Lay:

Joe, I appreciate two things. Number one, first and foremost, the work that you and your team are doing at Total Expert, it is important work. It is meaningful work. It is really, it is life transforming work for people coming back to the stories that you and I had shared before. And then number two, thanks so much for joining me on just another episode of Banking on Digital Growth.

Joe Welu:

Thank you for all the great work you do, man. We're huge fans. And likewise, the work that you guys are doing is hugely impactful for so many people. So you're a true leader in the industry. Always enjoy the opportunity to chat with you.

James Robert Lay:

Absolutely man, and as always, and until next time, be well, do good and make your bed.