

Beyond AI.

The business case for training people, not just language models.

WHAT THIS PAPER COVERS

TEN SECTIONS · ONE ARGUMENT

The business case for training people, not just language models.

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TRANSFORMATION EVERYWHERE

Every company promises a better experience through technology.

Airlines route check-in to virtual agents. AI support bots dominate SaaS customer chats. Hospitality hands out virtual keys for instant check-in. Each one removes a human touchpoint that used to define the relationship.

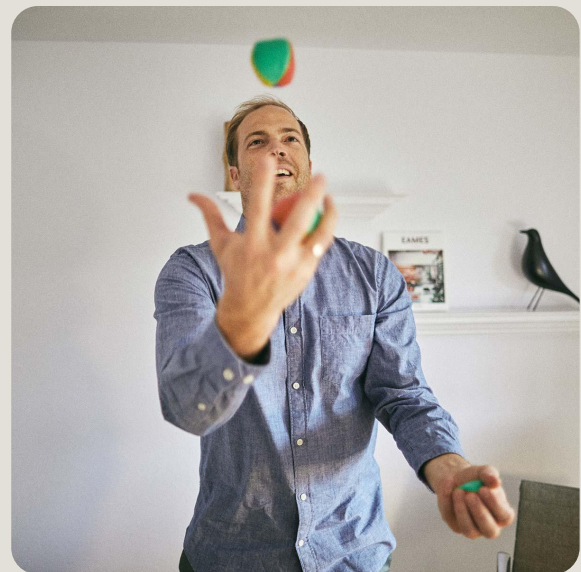
I'm Julius Geis. I founded The People Readiness Company, which helps people show up ready for the challenges, decisions, pressure, and pace of today's work.

My passion for customer experience began 25 years ago, as a young banker in Germany. It was the early days of online banking, and banks globally were eager to adopt the trend. Labor costs had always been a significant issue in banking, and online banking promised a way for customers to handle routine transactions at home instead of visiting branches. The shift was meant to dramatically reduce foot traffic and the need for bank tellers.

The bank I worked for was a regional credit union, deeply embedded in its local community. Management was clear in its instructions. Introduce and set up online banking for every customer we served in person.

About three years later, towards the end of my studies, the bank urgently needed revenue. Cash generation through commissions on products like insurance policies and professionally managed ETFs became critical. Management directed customer-facing employees like me to sell them.

By that point, hardly any customers visited our branches. Precisely because we had successfully encouraged them to bank online.



Julius Geis, founder of The People Readiness Company. The paper begins with his own banking story.

THE CONTRADICTION

That contradiction never left me.

Today, as companies rapidly implement technologies, especially AI, to boost efficiency, I'm reminded of my experience as a young banker. This paper is not intended to dissuade you from embracing technological advancements.

Instead, it focuses on the human touchpoints that still exist between customers and your brand, and on the people readiness of your staff. Anonymity is becoming the default of automated, process-driven customer support. People readiness is what counterbalances it.

Companies don't change. People do.

A founding claim of The People Readiness Company. It appears in every TPRC paper for a reason. Transformation only lands when the people inside it are ready to move with it.

A DIAGNOSTIC

TAKE IT FROM SOMEONE WATCHING FROM THE WINGS

Transactional customer service is a symptom, not a strategy.

We live in a world where customer loyalty is increasingly fragile, where reviews shape markets, and where any public voice (a post, a comment, a support ticket) can move brand perception in real time.

And yet customer service has become a soulless feedback loop of scripts and shortcuts. The irony. Startups in CPG, SaaS, and the AlaaS darlings of disruption are often the worst offenders.

If you are a founder, a brand lead, a C-level exec, or you run a customer support team, here is the bitter pill. Your customer service might be built on tech, but it is failing on humanity.

There is hope. It does not require burning down your stack. It requires people readiness.

This paper is your reminder, and a call to action. People readiness is not fluff. It is fuel. It is the overlooked competency that turns customers into believers. And it is trainable.

It's not fluff.
It's fuel.

THE DULLNESS PROBLEM

Customer service is dull. That is a problem.

Companies with the boldest, loudest marketing often lack presence in their customer support the most. They talk, but rarely listen.

Startups in CPG and SaaS promise more time, more convenience, or higher revenue. Their support interactions feel flat, templated, painfully disorganized.

In SaaS, the responses are often geeky and detached, unable to recognize what the customer is actually trying to accomplish. Instead of responding with curiosity or open questions, the rep defaults to pasting an FAQ answer into a chat box.

In CPG, apologizing gets mistaken for caring. The so-called category disruptors funnel customers into rigid enterprise policies until internal obstacles exhaust every ounce of customer patience.

This is not about performance metrics or ticket volume. It is about progress, tone, empathy, humanity.

If you are too busy pitching vision to notice how your users feel after the purchase, or how well you helped them reach the value they were searching for, you have mistaken brand experience for marketing nonsense.

PWC · CONSUMER INTELLIGENCE SERIES

59% of consumers say companies have lost touch with the human element of customer experience. 75% want more human interaction, not less. The mission may be bold. The frontline feels like an afterthought.

SPEED IS NOT THE VARIABLE

Being busy isn't a justification for emotional laziness.

Empathy is not a delay. Listening is not a luxury. Responding from a place of self-awareness is faster than you think, and more impactful than your CRM dashboards are showing.

You don't need to write a poem. You just need to be present. Your customers will feel it.

Even if you are running fully automated bots, people readiness can be embedded into the language itself. A brief, thoughtfully worded message can convey care and clarity, without pretending to be human.

Let's not kid ourselves. There is still no substitute for human reflection and a real response to a personal story. When someone shares their frustration, their context, or their urgency, what they are looking for is not just a resolution. They are looking to be seen.

Here is the thing. People who are ready can respond outside the norm. They can bend the script, run down the walls of policy, and do what the situation actually calls for. That is where delight lives.

Train your people in readiness, give them real autonomy, and you won't need to beg for 5-star reviews. They will just happen.

HOURS ARE NOT THE ANSWER

Availability ≠ quality.

It is common to see companies list 24/7 customer service as a product feature, almost as if it guarantees peace of mind. For many customers, it does the opposite. Instead of relief, the around-the-clock promise creates more frustration.

When a brand advertises 24/7 support, what customers imagine is an attentive, capable human ready to help at any time. Not a human answering machine or a note-taker logging issues for someone else to deal with later.

Take T-Mobile's business customer service as an example. Support has been outsourced overseas over the past few years. There is nothing wrong with that in itself. Great service can come from anywhere.

But too often these reps start the call with over-the-top friendliness, claiming they are passionate about leaving you with the best impression possible. And then they fail to deliver on even basic tasks.

The problem isn't location. It is that no one gave them the training to bridge cultural nuances, the sensitivity to read the situation, or the autonomy to actually do something useful for the customer.

I would rather reach someone from 9 to 5 who has the training to help than talk to someone at 2 a.m. who can't move beyond a script.

If you spend money to be available 24/7 but not to build capability, culture, and care, you are not building better service. You are extending the hours during which people can be disappointed.

READY AND TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED

You can be both. Ready, and technologically advanced.

Templates are fine. Automation is fine. Even AI-generated replies are fine. People readiness is what lets a human take a template and embed it into the customer's story.

A ready rep can spot nuance. They know when to deviate, when to escalate, when to add a sentence like "I hear you" or "That would frustrate me too," that shifts the entire dynamic. And they can do it without adding time.

**It's not about more.
It's about better.**

SALESFORCE · STATE OF THE CONNECTED CUSTOMER

84% of customers say being treated like a person, not a number, is very important to winning their business. People readiness is what bridges the gap between automation and authenticity.

A WORKING DEFINITION

LET'S DEFINE IT

People readiness.

What it is, why it matters.

People readiness is the capacity to stay focused, communicate clearly, and collaborate effectively precisely when the organization is asking the **most**.

It's not the same as being "nice" or "positive." It's the practice of applying emotional intelligence (empathy, self-awareness, regulation) in real time, where it actually matters.

WHY IT MATTERS

- 01 Customer loyalty.** People don't just leave bad products. They leave bad experiences, particularly if they feel dismissed or unseen.
- 02 Recommendation rate.** Satisfied customers do nothing. Connected customers recommend and advocate.
- 03 Satisfaction scores.** CSAT is emotional. Let's stop pretending it's not.
- 04 Brand equity.** Every touchpoint builds or breaks trust. That includes your 8 p.m. support chat.

BAIN & COMPANY · HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

According to Bain & Company, increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25% to 95%. People readiness is not just feel-good. It is a revenue strategy.



Readiness is a state we can see, name, and develop together. The work begins with the people who talk to customers every day.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE. CAN IT BE TRAINED.

Yes. You train for it like you train for product fluency.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- 01 Awareness of one's state before replying.
- 02 Curiosity over defensiveness.
- 03 Language that reflects presence and care.

EFFECTIVE TRAINING INCLUDES

- 01 Daily reflection on the work and emotional responses.
- 02 Asking intentional questions to build emotional awareness.
- 03 Team sessions to practice sharing, listening, and compassion.
- 04 Role-plays and group feedback focused on tone and presence.
- 05 Individual coaching to turn insights into consistent behavior shifts.

● CAN IT BE TRAINED?

Absolutely.

One of the most common misconceptions about emotional intelligence is that it's a fixed trait, something you're either born with or not. Research shows otherwise. Emotional intelligence is not DNA. It is a capability. And like any skill, it can be developed through structured learning, consistent practice, and real feedback.

Studies from Harvard Business Review, Frontiers in Psychology, and the work of psychologist Daniel Goleman confirm that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and social awareness can all be developed over time with the right frameworks and intention.

Training people readiness builds on this foundation.

Standard responses, next to ready ones.

In each, a standard (an unready) response sits next to one shaped by people readiness. A short note. A question to ask yourself before responding.

01 Wrong item delivered.

CUSTOMER. "I received the wrong item and no one is answering my emails. I'm really disappointed."

UNREADY RESPONSE

"Sorry for the inconvenience. Please return the item and we'll send the correct one. Here's the link."

READY RESPONSE

"Thank you for your patience, and I'm truly sorry this has been your experience. That's not the standard we aim for. I've arranged for the correct item to be shipped and flagged the delay with our team so we can avoid this going forward. If there's anything else I can do personally, I'm here."

Editor's note. The ready response acknowledges the state, not just the issue. It communicates care, takes action, creates a sense of ownership.

Ask yourself. What would I want to hear if I felt ignored and frustrated?

02 Defective product at the worst time.

CUSTOMER. "My backpack broke while I was on my way to the airport. I had to change bags last minute while my Uber was waiting. I'm so frustrated."

UNREADY RESPONSE

"We're sorry to hear that. You can submit a warranty claim at the following link."

READY RESPONSE

"That sounds incredibly stressful, and I'm really sorry your bag failed at such an important moment. I'll expedite a replacement and refund your shipping. I'm also passing this to our product team to understand what went wrong. If your trip continues to be disrupted, let me know how we can help further."

Ask yourself. Did I acknowledge the moment they're in, or am I just processing a ticket?

03 Software glitch. Something doesn't look right.

CUSTOMER. "My emails don't show up the way they're supposed to."

UNREADY RESPONSE

"Please clear your cache and restart the application. That usually solves display issues."

READY RESPONSE

"Thanks for flagging this. I want to understand exactly what you're seeing. Can you tell me how the emails are showing up differently, and what your intended workflow looks like? That'll help us get you back on track faster."

Editor's note. Instead of assuming the issue, the rep gets curious. Readiness here shows up as open questioning. A willingness to pause and gather more perspective.

Ask yourself. Am I solving the problem I think they have, or the one they actually care about?

04 In-person hotel check-in.

SETUP. A guest walks in after travel.

UNREADY RESPONSE

"You're checking in? Name and credit card."

READY RESPONSE

"Welcome. How was your trip in?"

GUEST. "Honestly, not great. My flight was delayed and I haven't eaten all day."

STAFF. "I'm really sorry to hear that. It sounds like a long day. Your room is ready, so you can head straight up and get settled. The kitchen's still open. We can have something sent up or recommend a spot where you can eat and unwind."

Editor's note. The magic isn't in the words. It is in listening and responding to what is said. Being tuned in enough to adapt the moment to the person in front of you.

Ask yourself. Did I just hear them, or did I actually respond to what they said?

05 Shipping delay and silent treatment.

CUSTOMER. “It’s been five days and I haven’t received a shipping update. Is anyone even looking at my order?”

UNREADY RESPONSE

“Orders are typically processed in 3 to 5 business days. You’ll receive a tracking number once your package ships.”

READY RESPONSE

“You’re absolutely right to follow up. Five days without an update feels like being left in the dark. I’ve checked on your order, and it’s scheduled to ship today. I’ll personally make sure you receive the tracking details as soon as it’s out the door.”

Editor’s note. Fast, but not rushed. Real-time information and human accountability. The customer feels prioritized.

Ask yourself. Have I replaced silence with connection, or just filled the void with policy?

Across all five, the unready response solves the ticket. The ready response solves the moment.

USE THE MACHINE, KEEP THE HEART

AI doesn't feel. It doesn't listen. It doesn't reflect. It can still help.

AI can help your team do those things better, faster, more consistently, without burnout. The point is not to replace ready humans with bots. The point is to use AI to help your team write more caring, contextual responses, whether over email or chat.

With the right training, your support team can learn to prompt AI in ways that improve tone, reflect empathy, and reduce robotic rigidity. AI becomes an assistant, not a spokesperson.

● WHAT AI CAN DO

- Draft responses that are more emotionally attuned.
- Offer alternatives in tone and phrasing.
- Help non-native speakers infuse warmth and clarity.
- Reduce repetitive work so humans focus on connection.

AI is the assistant. The human is still the response.

PROMPTS THAT MAKE AI SUPPORT READINESS

- 01 “Write a response that reflects back the customer’s issue in your own words before suggesting a solution. Confirm understanding and ask an open question before offering a next step.”
- 02 “The customer shared a lot of context and screenshots. Acknowledge the effort they made, restate the core issue, and ask a clarifying question to ensure you’re solving the right problem.”
- 03 “Create a message that starts by validating how the customer is likely feeling based on what they wrote, then offer a helpful tone and ask what outcome they’re hoping for.”
- 04 “Avoid offering a fix right away. Show that you’re listening by paraphrasing the concern and inviting the customer to confirm or correct your understanding.”
- 05 “End your message with a sentence that invites continued dialogue. ‘Let me know if I’ve got that right.’ ‘I want to make sure we’re solving the issue that matters most to you.’”

● WHERE AI SHOULD BACK OFF

- **Complex emotions or sensitive stories.** AI can’t navigate grief, loss, shame, or moral distress.
- **Frustrated customers.** Escalated emotional tones need intuition, not logic trees.
- **Policy exceptions.** The bot can explain rules. It can’t break them with compassion.
- **Moments of surprise or delight.** The human ability to break the pattern, bend a rule, or offer something unexpected is still unbeatable.

UNDERSTANDING

VALIDATING

COLLABORATING

Your mantra when working with AI on support. Understanding instead of assuming. Validating instead of dismissing. Collaborating instead of just fixing. Use AI to support people readiness, not simulate it.

Train your people to work with the machine. Don’t let them become one.

STOP PRETENDING PEOPLE READINESS IS SOFT

It's not soft. It's strategic.

Let's cut the crap. People readiness isn't woo-woo fluff. It's the most practical competitive edge you're probably ignoring. Especially in a world where loyalty is fragile, attention spans are short, and one unresolved chat thread can cost you a customer for life.

Support teams aren't overhead. They are the heartbeat of your brand. If they're disconnected, your whole brand feels off. If they're alive, aware, and empowered to act, your customers will feel it. And more importantly, they will remember it.

So yes. Train your team. Build the muscle. Make people readiness a KPI, not a side effect. Use AI if it helps. But never let it become the voice of your empathy.

In a market obsessed with speed, automation, and pipeline conversion, the human element is the only thing that actually sticks.

If you're serious about building a modern brand, one that earns loyalty, creates resonance, turns customers into advocates. Start with the people who talk to your customers. And teach them to care, for real.

The cycle is the practice. The score is the **proof.**

Julius Geis. Founder, The People Readiness Company.

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ABOUT

The People Readiness Company.



Most firms that touch this space do adjacent work. Strategy. Leadership development. Learning platforms. Change management. All of it useful, none of it aimed at the variable that determines whether any of those investments deliver.

We were built to name that variable, measure it, and change it. The framework is the result of fifteen years of direct observation, tested across two continents and across client work that runs from technology companies to higher education, from ten-person teams to organizations of five hundred and more.

WHAT WE MEASURE

Whether a team is in a position to meet the demands of significant change, and how that position is shifting over time.

HOW WE STAY CLOSE TO THE WORK

Every engagement is led by the people who built the framework. Measurement, development, and reassessment run in 90-day cycles that continue for as long as the organization is navigating significant change.

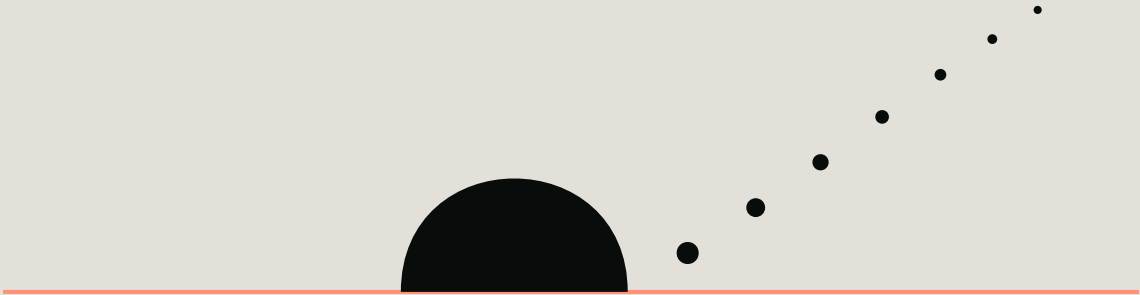
WHAT WE BUILD

The specific capacities the readiness data identifies as missing, through structured group facilitation and daily individual practice, visible in the data within 60 to 90 days.

WHO WE WORK WITH

Private equity and M&A leadership assessing people risk before a deal closes. Transformation leaders whose initiatives depend on people they cannot fully read. Founders scaling through the window where gut feel stops being enough.

Want to talk about a specific situation in your organization? Turn the page for ways to reach us, and the authors of this paper.



Everything is **people.**

The work begins with the human. Always.

GET IN TOUCH

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Thank you for reading.

Continue the work. We're here when you want to talk.

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