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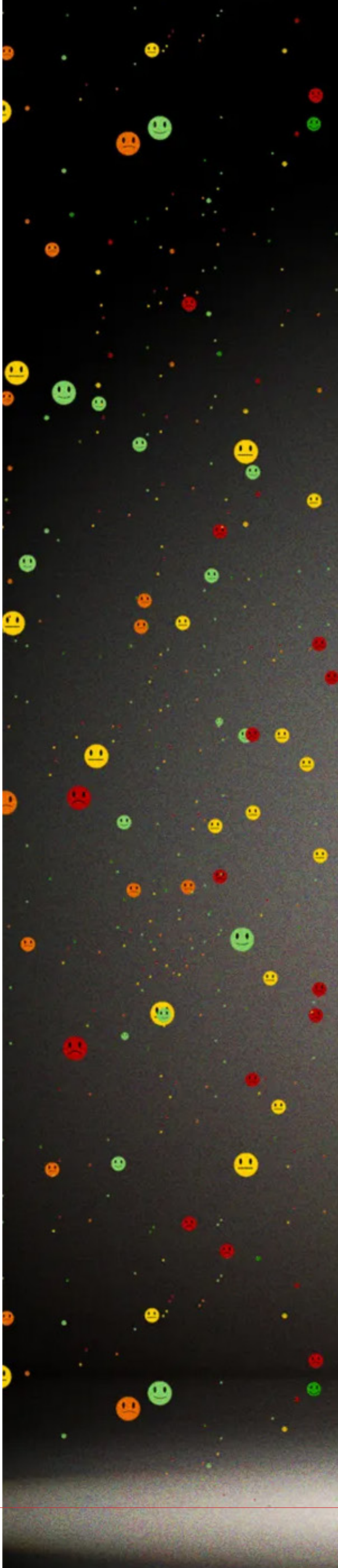
THE DARK SIDE OF NPS® & *How To Deal With It*

Unveiling the Pitfalls of Score Manipulation and Strategies for Ethical Implementation



What is NPS®? – Short explanation with benefits

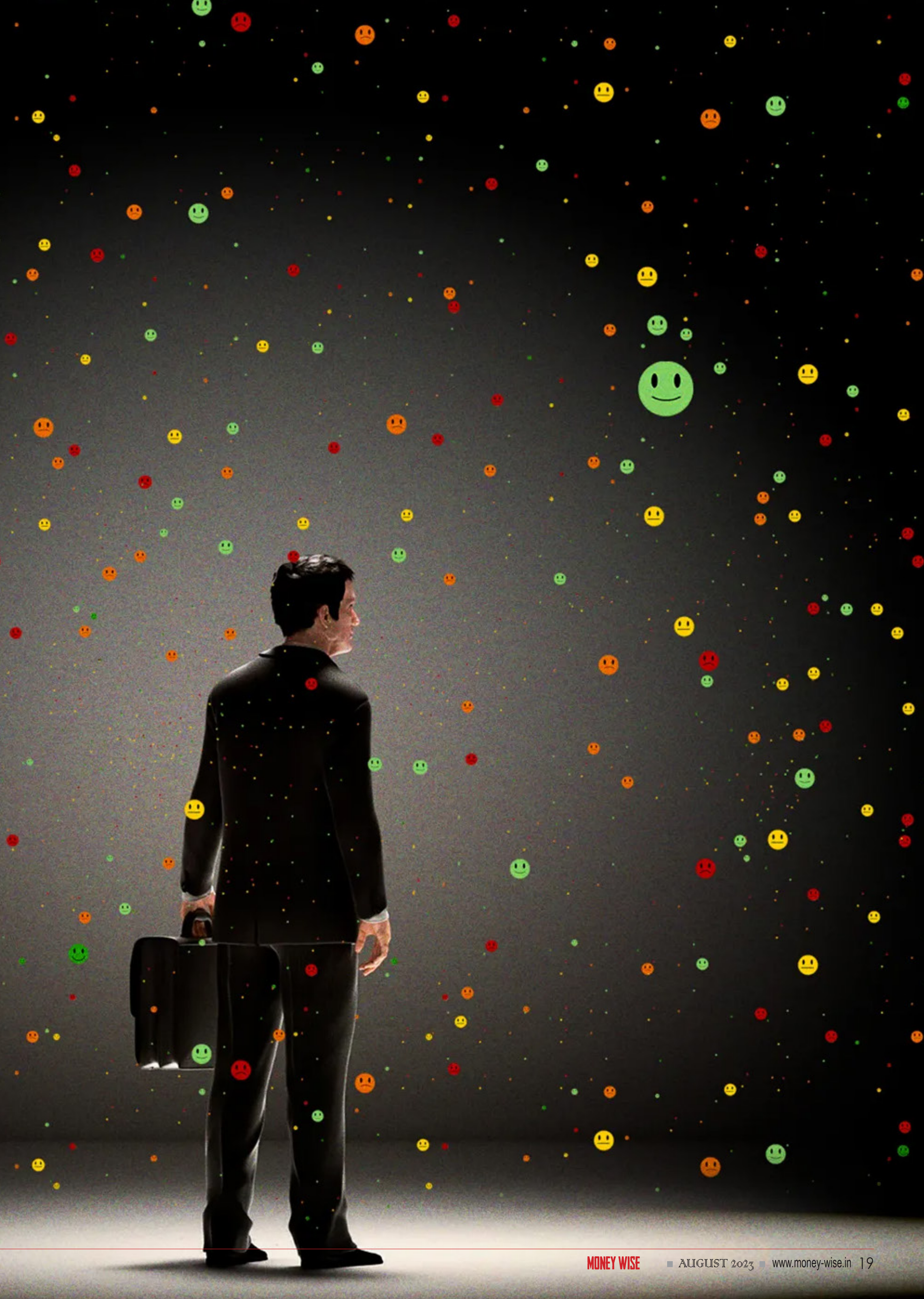
In today's customer-centric world, Net Promoter Score® (NPS) shines as the world's #1 loyalty and growth discipline, embraced by a majority of brands across the globe. As a consumer you would have been asked the survey question *“How likely are you to recommend XYZ brand to a friend, family member or colleague?”* followed by a series of additional survey questions asking you to rate various aspects of the brand and your experience with it.

The power of NPS lies in its ability to unlock valuable insights that can inform loyalty and growth strategies, allowing businesses to achieve remarkable results by focusing on genuine customer feedback. Research by Engaged Strategy and other organisations around the globe have found a strong link between NPS and customer loyalty, referrals, share of wallet and positive reviews.

This said, in the last few months I have been approached by a few brands that have fallen victim to unethical NPS practices. They’ve actually had the opposite effect, with a few suggesting that they are convinced that the score has been gamed and manipulated to the point where they do not trust the NPS score anymore. This is why I decided to share my thoughts on how in some cases the NPS score is manipulated and how to do it right to maximise business benefit.

In fact, I’ve identified 10 critical reasons why NPS programs fail, which I’ve documented in my book **10 REASONS Why CX/NPS® Programs Fail**. Here, I not only discuss the challenges, but also provide a range of solutions that organisations can gain inspiration from and resort to implementing best practice NPS programs.

In this article however, lets specifically explore the potential pitfalls of Score Manipulation and Strategies for Ethical Implementation.



The Good News Story: *A Tale of Ethical NPS® Implementation*

Let me share a powerful example of ethical NPS® implementation.

Many years ago, I was on a call with a customer support representative from Symantec. The support staff was fixing my laptop via a remote access, while he was explaining the issue and his solution to fix my laptop over the phone.

After he fixed my laptop, he said, *"Hey Chris, I noticed that your laptop is a little slow. Would you like me to modify a few settings to increase the speed?"* Now who doesn't love a speedy laptop! I immediately agreed and was delighted at the increase in speed. I was one happy customer for sure!

But that's not what actually blew me away. What truly caught my attention was what this support staff member said towards the end of the call. He said, *"Chris, can you please do me a favour? You will soon receive a survey asking you to rate the service I provided you today. I would like you to please give me feedback that will help me serve customers like you and others better."*

There are a few key points to note here. He was taking personal accountability and, in fact, his statement was literally asking for constructive feedback. In other words, he was sticking his chin out to be hit. He neither demanded nor begged for a good score, but rather asked for pointed feedback that would help him and his organisation improve the service they were offering customers. This sense of personal accountability sets a standard for ethical NPS use, where customers' voices truly matter.

Bad News Stories: *The Temptations of Score Manipulation*

I have heard of several stories where survey respondents have been a victim to cries for good scores by service and sales staff such as *"Please give me a good score as it is linked to my performance bonus"*, or *"If you give us a good score, you get a 25% discount on your next purchase"*.

This is a common sob story in both B2B and B2C scenarios.

We have even come across instances where sales staff fill in the survey on behalf of clients or guide clients on how to respond. There are also instances where only 'happy' clients are selected to participate in surveys to ensure a good score.

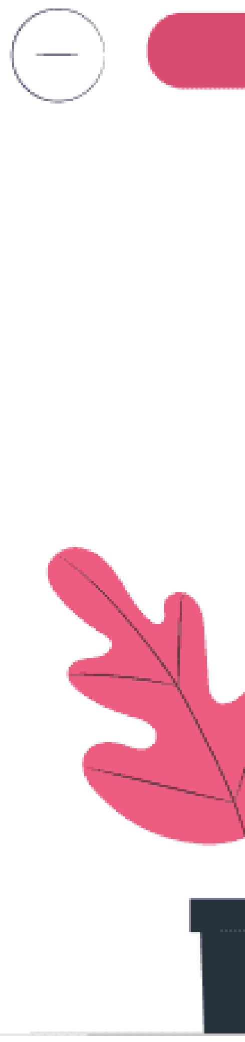
The result is catastrophic as the organisation is flying blind in a delusional state. In the meantime, the brand has no insights in terms of how to improve customer experience so that they can increase loyalty, referrals and reduce churn and complaints.

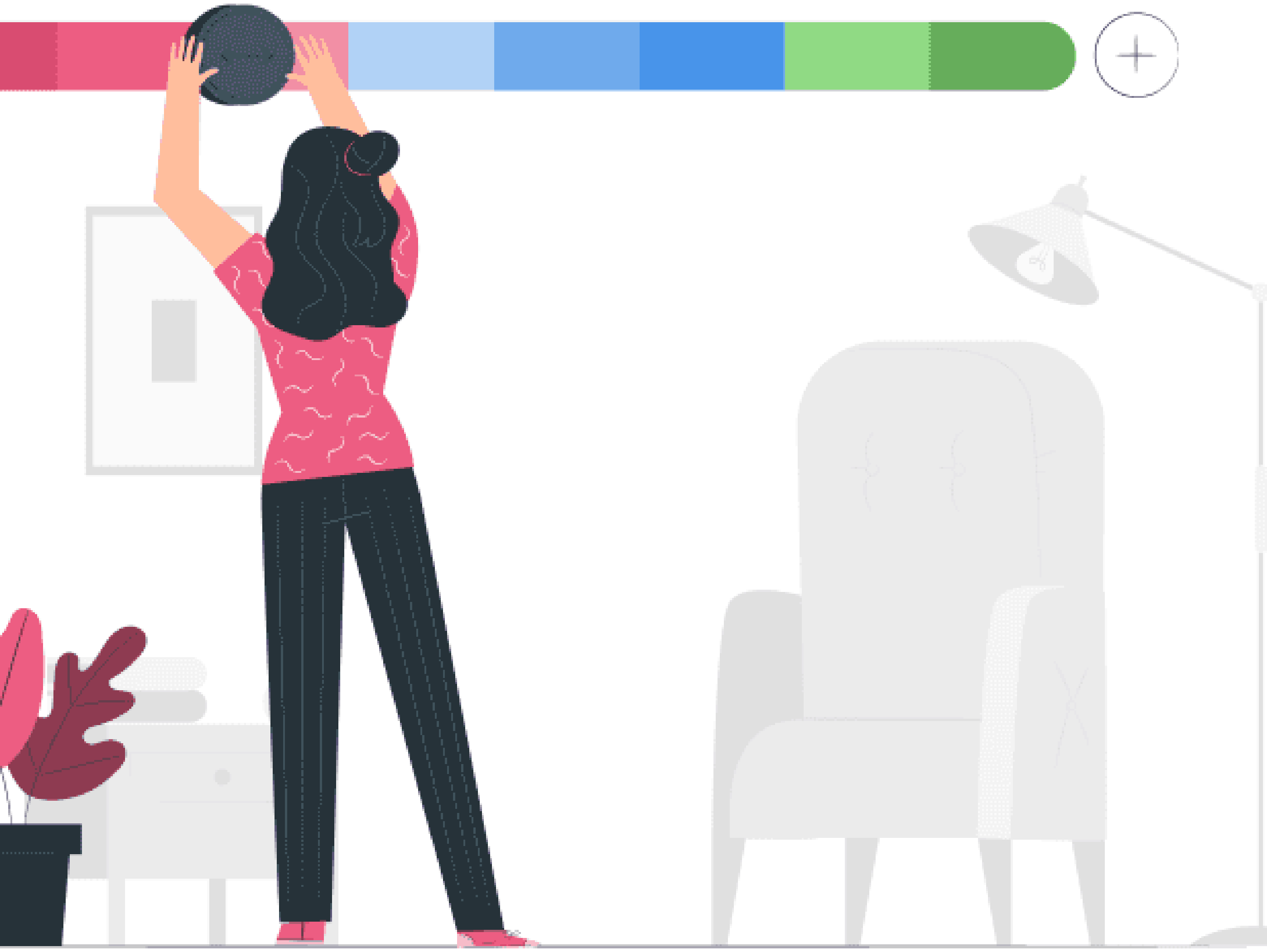
Why do employees cheat with NPS scores?

The main reason why people cheat with NPS® scores is because they are given targets without being provided with adequate support and the means they need to achieve real NPS improvements.

The pressure is intensified when these targets are linked to performance management and bonuses. Depending on the culture of the organisation this can create enormous pressure at an individual level across all levels in the organisation. Intense pressure at a senior level to achieve targets naturally cascades through to lower levels.

This pressure and also the allure of higher NPS® scores, leads frontline staff of some brands to bribe customers with incentives or resort to begging for positive ratings.





Solution: Answer these 5 questions before setting NPS targets

We always believe that without engaged staff you cannot have engaged customers. The big question is how do you engage staff? We strongly recommend answering the following foundational staff questions before setting targets. In fact, we have achieved NPS® increases of 80+ points without setting organisational NPS® targets at an overall level, team level or individual level. So how do we do it and what are these questions?

a. What is NPS?

You need to clearly articulate exactly what NPS® is and how it is all about providing customers with a voice so that their feedback can be used to build a better business by increasing loyalty, growth and reducing costs. You also need to answer how leading brands are effectively using NPS to drive loyalty and growth.

b. Why are we doing it?

You need to explain to your staff that NPS has been linked to increases in loyalty and growth. They need to understand clearly how referral sales and positive word of mouth is the most powerful sales and marketing channel. As a business leader in your organisation, you will also need to help your staff understand how NPS® can make the brand stand out in comparison to its competitors and provide a competitive edge. An aspirational organisational goal such as becoming the most admired brand in the category is a good rallying message for all staff.

c. How do I do it?

Intellectually, staff will understand points a and b above and begin nodding in agreement. They will understand why NPS® is needed and why it is essential for business success. What they may not understand, however, is what specifically must they do differently to create Promoters.

d. Will I be provided with the skills and resources I need?

Linked to c above, at this point though, staff may even understand how to do NPS®, but there will still be question marks around whether they will be provided with adequate training and resources. It is extremely important to equip not just frontline staff, but all staff, with the necessary skills and resources to deliver exceptional customer experiences.

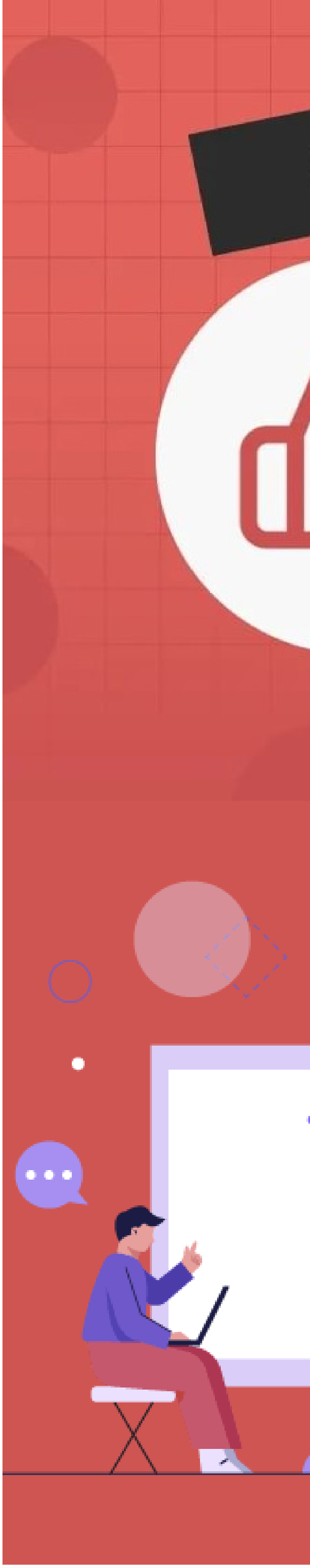
With my clients, I specifically focus on training frontline managers on how to facilitate quick sessions to generate ideas with their team on how to create Promoters and conversion of Detractors into Promoters.

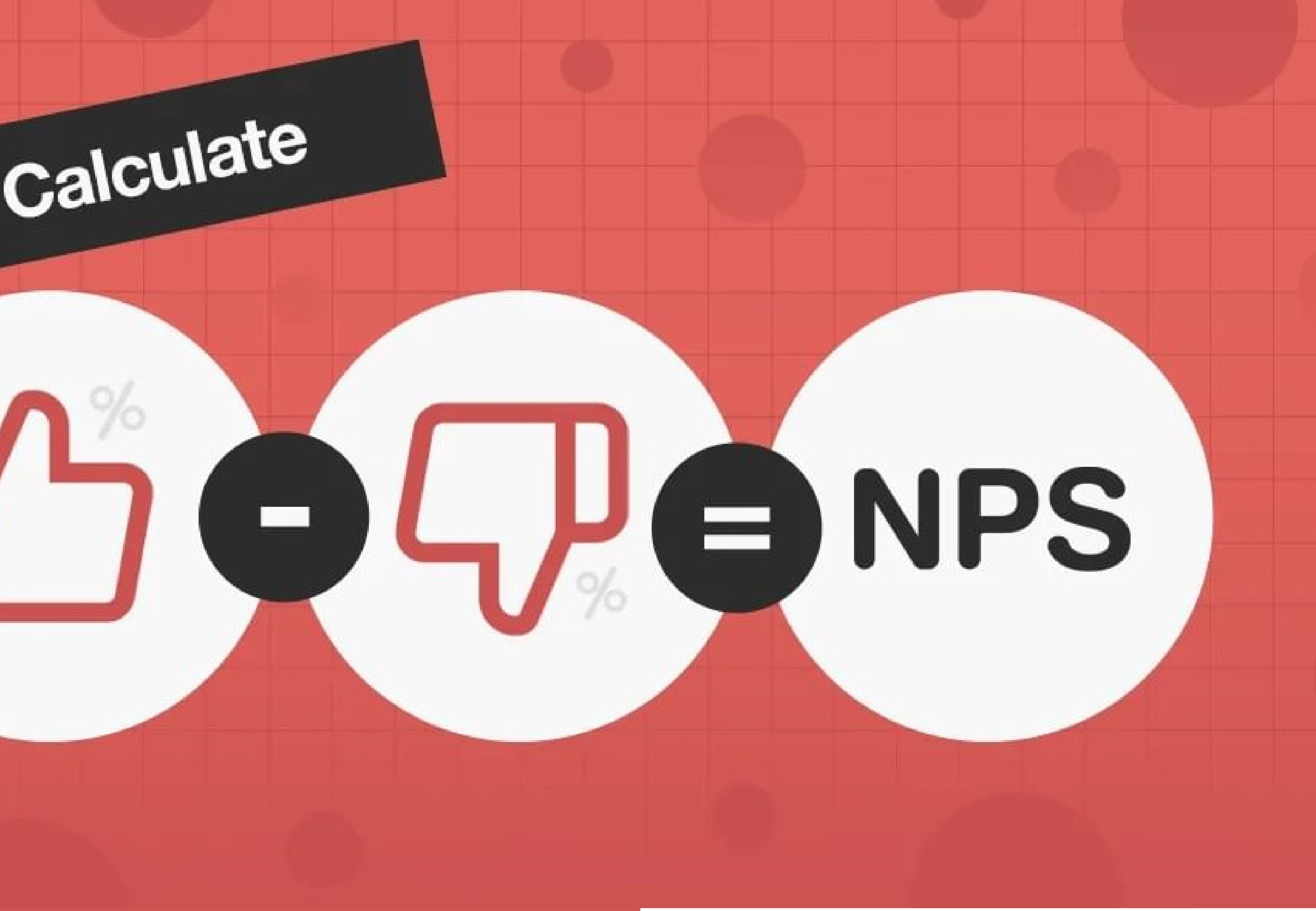
Training is self-explanatory, but what exactly do I mean by resources? As an example, consider a call centre where staff have a target average handling time of five minutes. They know that if they want to create emotionally resonant experiences they will need perhaps an extra minute on average to achieve this. If the management does not provide this, then staff will lose interest in the program because they have not been provided with the resources they need.

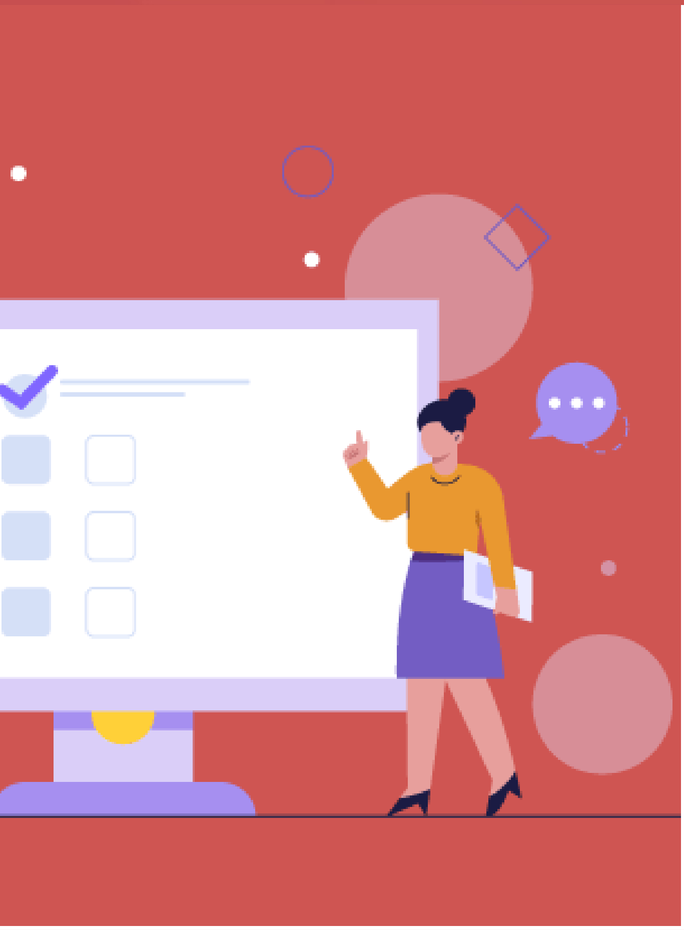
e. What's In It For Me?

It is critical that you explain to your staff how they will be invited within their teams to create and develop experiences worthy of recommendation. This fulfills a core human need of wanting to contribute to something big. This will also mean increased teaming and skills training where they will all learn how to be more creative and innovative. Staff will also be trained in how to deal with difficult detractors and how to convert them into Promoters. They will also be upskilled in inviting customers to not just deliver great experiences, but also how to create new great experiences.

The leadership must avoid unrealistic expectations and ensure that employees are given the time and support to cater to customer needs effectively.







Once you have answered the above questions then you are in a position to set targets. Take care to set targets that are a stretch but also achievable.

Monitor and Audit NPS® Practices

It Is essential to regularly monitor NPS® practices to identify potential irregularities or score manipulation. Internal audits can help ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and address any deviations promptly.

In the turbulent waters of CX management, NPS® stands as a powerful tool. However, its true potential lies in embracing ethical practices. By avoiding the shortcuts of bribes and selective surveys, brands can set sail on a journey of genuine customer feedback and sustainable success.

By prioritising transparency, fostering a customer-centric culture, and empowering employees with the right skills and resources, every brand, including yours, can weather any storm and strengthen their relationship with customers. The ethical compass of NPS® holds the key to unlocking customer trust, loyalty, and a sustainable path to greatness in the competitive business landscape.

For more in-depth details on how to do NPS right, read my book **"10 REASONS *Why CX/NPS® Programs Fail*** | *And your surefire solutions to succeed*".

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