Dr. Matthew Champagne has influenced the practice of evaluation and assessment in higher education and learning organizations for nearly 20 years. As Research Fellow and Senior Evaluator for the U.S. Army Research Institute, National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Energy, Sloan Foundation and Hewlett Foundation, Matt advised 370 colleges and learning organizations on implementing feedback and evaluation systems to drastically improve customer retention, learning, and performance. Champagne was named Technology Visionary of 2015 by SURVEY Magazine for his pioneering work merging psychological principles and online educational technologies.
Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are reimagining the way business is done in their industries like today's guest, Dr. Matt Champagne.

Matt: Are you satisfied? To me that's just not enough. Five, ten years ago I would have said, "Yeah, that's fine." Today, no way. You need to know that these people are lifers. One of the most powerful tools that we have to keep people for life is the survey.

Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

Danny: Today's episode of Business Reimagined is especially close to my heart. As you might know, feedback, data, and audience engagement are passions of mine and I'm always on the lookout for new and better ways to connect with and cater to our growing audience. That's why I was so excited to connect with Dr. Matt Champagne, a professor of industrial organizational psychology, who is an expert on surveys. I learned that most of us are doing surveys dead wrong. Matt’s message is about moving past mere customer satisfaction to true life long devotion. The funny thing is all of Matt's work began with his very unique name.

Matt: I'm supposed to be a bright kid, so I'm going to be an engineer even though I didn't really know what that was. It wasn't until I met the president of my university whose last name happened to be Champagne. My brother and I were really bold. We kind of went into his office and said, "Hey, we keep calling you Uncle Joe, even though we've never met. Our last name is Champagne and yours is the same." He thought that was charming, I guess, because he invited us out for meals and stuff. He became a mentor to me and it turned out that he went to school at Purdue and was an industrial organizational psychologist.

Danny: So Matt took his mentor's advice and went to Purdue where he earned his doctorate. He then became a professor and noticed at the end of the term the students were asked to fill out a course evaluation survey, but nothing about that process seemed to make sense.

Matt: It didn't help the students who were moving on. It didn't help the faculty, some of whom never read it. It didn't really help the administrators who would get the results two or three months later. Of course it didn't help the staff. I would sit there and watch our secretaries, Betty and Jean. Betty and Jean during evaluation week would be in the office 7:00 at night, 9:00 at night, day after day running these forms through a scantron machine, erasing marks that the students had left, retyping the comments. I just thought what are we doing to these poor ladies here?
We're stealing their lives essentially. We have this new thing called the world wide web. Why don't we take these course evaluations, not have the students do them on paper, but do them on a computer?

Danny: Matt received grants to support the research and development of his then cutting edge ideas. His results and findings were impressive, but his university denied his request to implement them. Not once, but twice. Even when Matt pointed out a lucrative business opportunity. When they gave him that second "no", Matt decided to strike out on his own and spent the next ten years helping businesses create better surveys. He learned a lot in the process and how some pointed criticism of the way the business world collects feedback.

Matt: The technology that we have now, step back in time to 1999. In 1999 there was no Skype, there was no smart phones, none of that technology existed. It's just been this incredible boom. If you travel from 1999 to the present you would say, wow, look at this technology, but if you looked at our surveys, if you looked at our evaluation forms, if you looked at how we measured learning, how we measure customer satisfaction, it's the exact same measures. I could pull up instructions off surveys that were built in 1996 and they would have the same instructions on surveys that you receive every day in your inbox today.

Danny: I'll bet you've seen and deleted hundreds of surveys in your own inbox. In addition to the outdated methods, there's something much deeper that people are missing when they set out to collect feedback using surveys.

Matt: This notion of gathering feedback from students after the course is over, and we're familiar with that, if you go to a conference, once the conference is over out comes the form. Once your vacation is over out comes the survey. We call that the autopsy approach. You wait until the event is over and then find out what went wrong. Whether it be the annual survey or any of these other examples, we wait too long to gather the feedback. Now that component really has improved quite a bit over the years where people are understanding that you can't wait to the end. You can't just do the autopsy, you need to ask people at day 1, at day 4, a week into the course. Ask them how are you doing? What obstacles to learning are you facing? What's the best part of the course so far? Is there any trouble that you are having? So that is a great practice. That is the way it should be, but I am going to mention that because there are still plenty of examples of folks not doing that. They are waiting until the course is over before they find out what went wrong.
Danny: If they find out at all.

Matt: Correct. So that’s one idea. Another is what I see a lot of people do. Actually I will say most people when they create questions to ask their students, they do it completely backwards. This goes across most every type of survey making. Course evaluations in particular they’ll say, "What should we ask?" They’ll come up with the questions first, but that's backwards. What people need to do is think of the criteria first. What's important to know from these students? Is it impact of the course, communication of the instructor, fairness of the grading, quality of the materials? You come up with all the criteria first, then second you look at the response scales. Response scales are like strongly agree to strongly disagree or yes/no. Then you ask yourself, "What are we looking at?" Are we looking at quality or satisfaction or frequency? That would suggest what response scales to use, then you choose the questions.

You can always tell when somebody does it backwards. They will come up with the questions first and then they might use the same scale for all of them or they might use different scales, but you can always tell because I look at the course evaluation form and I just categorize it and show it to them. I say, "As you can see here, you've asked three questions about grading and quizzes and assessments, and you've asked three questions about the syllabus and the organization of the course, but look, you’ve asked nothing about did the instructor motivate the students. You've asked nothing about communication skills. Aren't these important?" People say, "Yeah, absolutely they're important." They're not, because they are not on your form. When you just ask the questions, they all sound like good questions and everybody wants all of their questions on there, but it doesn't get evenly weighted and you forget the key criteria. So that's always backwards. Start with criteria, think about what the scales are going to be, and then you write the questions.

Danny: So let's take a step back. This is just a personal passion of mine, but let's go to gathering feedback in general. You approached this clearly based on your experience. Your approach is very different from most of the industry. Before we talk about logistics or strategies, what's the big idea with which you differ from the way most people look at this?

Matt: Gosh, if it was one idea I would say that surveys have to obey the principles of psychology. Everything I do now, having built this up with my own research and writing and research of my colleagues, I've created what I call the nine principles of feedback. Everything has to obey these principles and if they don't, they don't work. For example, social media has gone from not...
existing to what three billion people on the planet using it. It is popular and it is used because it obeys every single one of the nine principles. It obeys the principles of how people work.

For example, one of the principles is closing the loop. Letting people know what they said made a difference. Their voice was heard. That you've acted on what they had to say. Social media does this wonderfully, because somebody says something and you make a comment and you get feedback to your comments immediately. You know where you stand. You know how you compare to others.

Another principle of psychology in terms of those principles is timeliness and frequency. Social media is right there. People are asking questions in real time, when it matters. They're getting responses back. If social media acted like we use surveys, nobody would use social media.

So I tell people make your surveys obey those principles. Look to social media as a guide. If you are creating a survey, think about the timeliness and frequency. When is the best time to ask your people? How often should you ask them? Think about it like a conversation. That's one of my themes. Surveys should be a conversation, which is so different from how we treat it.

Some use the autopsy approach, you wait until the even is over. Some treat it as that one and only time they will ever be able to talk to their customers so they make sure that every body from every department asks every question they can load on there. Or it's an annual survey.

My approach is so different, because I say that surveys are a conversation. You ask a couple of questions. You let your people respond. Then you go right back to them and say, "I heard what you had to say" and you close the loop. You say, "What you said was far different from what others said. Most people thought this. Isn't that interesting. Now I have a couple of more follow up questions." And you ask a couple of more questions and then they respond. It becomes this conversation. When you make it conversational, that's when you get enormous response rates. That's when you get engagement.

I tell people surveys are the key. It's our most powerful tool that we have to gather perceptions from our people. But we use it completely wrong. If we use it correctly, treat it as a conversation, you'll see that response rate increase and increase. When I show people my data, they don't believe it. They say that people get survey fatigue. You ask them too many surveys and they stop answering. I say that if you get survey fatigue, then you're doing it wrong.
We've had examples where we're asking for feedback where we are doing surveys in a training program. We're administering this daily for four weeks. Every single day these people are filling out these surveys and we're getting 90 or 95% of them to fill it out, because it's a conversation. Whatever they say, the instructor comes walking into the class the next day and says, "I heard what you had to say. We're going to make this change and that change. Here's some things that you wanted, but I can't change those. I just want to let you know that I heard you." Now they get high response rate, yet I could get two surveys from some hotel chain in a year and I'll delete both of them. Not because I have survey fatigue, but because it's a bad survey. In my mind there's no such thing as survey fatigue, if you are doing it right.

Danny:

As I'm hearing this, I'm wondering how generally accessible the application this would be in. Let me explain what I mean by that. As I'm hearing this I'm feeling that there are at least four very distinct competencies involved in doing it right. You've got to design the survey effectively. You've got to collect the data. You've got to analyze and understand the results. And you've got to reflect those results back to both the students, to the people who submitted the feedback and make decisions based on that to kind of lather, rinse, and repeat. None of those things are trivial. Like when you were saying how you analyze that data. The students in Australia felt this way. The students in the Netherlands felt that way. There's a sophistication in the analysis of the data.

I mean the old trope is that the average human being has one testicle and one breast, but of course that is not at all reflective of anybody because 50% are men and 50% are women on average. When you take a massive data and look at averages, you don't get any meaningful insights. So in terms of the skill and expertise to craft the survey, I imagine there's technology data gathering easier, in terms of the expertise to analyze the data, which I feel is a part that a lot of people will take for granted, how easily accessible is this? Is this something that if somebody wants to implement in their business and their courses and whatever they're doing, they need a specialist like you or can they learn to do it themselves?

Matt:

I guess what you're bringing up is exactly where I want entrepreneurs and small business owners to be. Some recognition that there's something deeper here. I think I see too many entrepreneurs are told that if you want to know, just ask. Well, that causes some problems, so if I'm just to ask, I use examples from other entrepreneurs I've seen, they will ask some questions. They are not really phrased in the right way or they're kind of ambiguously phrased so different people have different reactions to them and they will answer slightly differently and they'll get 10% of their people to fill it out, maybe 20. Then they do the analysis which naturally as humans
we look for things that are similar to what we believe. We see two data points and we think that we've discovered a trend. We see three students say the same thing and by golly that must be truth, because three students said it. How unusual is that! Now we filter it through this not optimal method of our own experience and what we're looking for and then we act. We take action.

I look at this and I say the 10% that responded are they really representative of your people? They might be, but probably not. They're answering the questions slightly different based on how you framed the questions. You've kind of selectively taken some of this data out. Now you act on it, because it's all the data you have. These are the people that responded. Are these just the extremes? Are these just the people that love what you're doing and people that wanted to teach you a lesson or they had a beef? Where's the 80% silent majority here? I just want to get people to that level of awareness that there's more to it than that. You don't have to just ask. In fact if you are just asking and doing it in this informal way, you might be getting the right picture, but you're probably not. You're probably acting not on what your people are saying.

I do want people to realize that there is a best way of asking questions and I've talked a little bit about that, about coming up with a criteria, what's important. Thinking about when to ask the questions. When's the best time to ask this, should I split it up over multiple times? This one should be asked early on, this one should be asked later. That when they analyze the data to be able to run it through some sort of program. Any free platform can do that sort of analysis. But think about it in terms of the psychology, that people are pressed for time. They want good clear questions. They might want to help you. They want to give you feedback, but if you make it difficult for them, if you ask irrelevant questions and you're asking questions about things they know you can't change anyway, then why are you even asking me this. If you're asking for comments, you've made it so open ended that they're not really sure what to comment on. There's so many ways you can improve what you are doing. These are quick things. These are things that anybody can apply to their surveys to improve it and have this recognition.

Then I think we can get to the question that I think you were talking about. Now if you want to apply everything, that's how I look at it. There are nine principles of feedback. If you want to apply it all. If you want to have the reporting and different modes of delivery and how they're going to collect it, then that does get a little more complex. That takes some training. But again, it's not difficult. It just takes a little bit of time. There's plenty of things that can be done in the interim to give you much better data and more actionable and meaningful feedback from your people.
Danny: Cool. So, Matt, I want to shift gears a little bit. You have a thing where you talk about or speak against the satisfying of customers. You're not big into satisfied customers. You look at a different metric. What's that about?

Matt: Well it's a convergence of a couple of different things. Originally as a researcher I'm looking at satisfaction, just not being a good thing to measure. It's an abstraction. It's like intelligence. We call that an ultimate criterion, because it's an abstraction that's not measurable. We think what goes into intelligence. Well it's emotional intelligence, aptitude, and all these sorts of things and then we construct measures of these parts of intelligence. It's the same with satisfaction. Are you satisfied? That's really a tough question to answer. If I ask you are you satisfied right now? Are you satisfied with your job? Are you satisfied with our company's product? Were you satisfied with your vacation? There's a lot of things that go into it. It's not a single dimensional question.

I was first approaching it from a researchers point of view, but as the years have gone on and you see what's going on in the world. This age of exponential abundance where there's multiples of everything. Some companies just deal with it by accepting the churn. Here in the US there's DISH network and DirecTV and you know that if your a customer with one for a year, you lose the promo rate, so you want to go with them another year and they say, sorry, you have to pay the higher rate. So you switch companies, because the other company is offering you the promo rate. You stay with them for a year and you keep switching back and forth.

Those companies can afford that kind of churn. But entrepreneurs, small business owners, they can't afford this. They can't be in the churn. They have to be focusing on how do I keep every single customer. It can't be just because they're satisfied. I'm satisfied with my web platform. I'm satisfied with my web hosting. I'm satisfied with my mail server, but I'm switching plans on all of them this year. Just because I'm satisfied, there's better deals else where. There's better features else where. Satisfied customers are shopping around. You just cannot have that mentality as an entrepreneur, you've got to go so far beyond satisfaction. Even asking that question, would you recommend this, are you satisfied, to me that's not enough. Five, ten years ago, I would have said that was fine. Today, no way. You need to know that these people are lifers. That they are staying with you for life.

One of the most powerful tools to keep people for life is the survey. It sounds kind of funny, because survey kind of has a bad reputation. I'm saying that a survey is a way of delving into
somebody's brain. Learning what they are thinking at this time. What do they expect? What do they need? You can only get at it, if you ask the right questions in the right way.

Then if you satisfy these nine principles of feedback, you close the loop, you do it frequently, you make this conversational, these are all things that keep building and building to let the customer know that you really do care what they have to say. It's not just fill out my survey. Please take 10-15 minutes to fill out our survey. It will help us to improve our products and services. Nobody believes that. But if you're able to come them and say I just have these couple of questions and they answer it and you come back to say isn't that interesting, what you had to say was exactly what most of my customers are saying. This thing that you wanted was different. Nobody else had said that. You're giving them that kind of feedback, that knowledge of results that people are craving. People don't want financial incentives to fill out your surveys. They're not looking to be entered into some dumb lottery to win and iPad in exchange for their time. They want to know that their voice was heard. That what they said made a difference. When you can demonstrate that, you've got a lifer.

**Danny:** What I'm hearing is that it's not the survey that is the tool. Let me rephrase. It's not the survey that is the secret to creating lifer customers, it is essentially the back and forth conversation. The recognition that they are in an ongoing relationship with you that is getting better and better because you're paying attention. The survey is the vehicle that makes that happen. Is that fair to say?

**Matt:** Yeah, that's exactly right. That kind of tracks my own career. I was first a psychologist interested in decisions, so I kind of got turned into the evaluation guy. The guy that could do this sort of work in universities to kind of becoming the survey guy. It's so much beyond that. The survey as you said is just the tool. It is our most powerful tool, but it's just a tool of gathering feedback and the key are these nine principles of feedback of addressing all of that when you're dealing with your customers.

I can always tell when I'm looking at someone's survey, if I'm looking at their course evaluation form, I can look at their form and look at the principles and if they only include one or two, I can tell them with some certainty that your response rate is going to be about this. It's going to be very low. The more principles you in-bed into your surveys into your course evaluations, the higher response rate you get. That's just because it's psychology.
It's us filling it out for other people and we know this as well. You know that when you get a bad survey, you know what irritates you about that survey. You know why you don't fill it out. You don't have time. You don't think they're going to address your feedback. You don't think they care. You don't think anybody reads this. You've responded in the past and nobody came back and told you what they did so why should you respond again. We all know what makes a survey bad. We all know what makes feedback poor. We just need to take that and apply that to our own work when we're trying to learn from our own people whether they be customers, members, attendees, parishioners, students, clients, whoever our people are. We need to use the survey as a tool, but with all of these principles in place.

**Danny:** That was Dr. Matt Champagne reminding you that when it comes to surveys simply asking isn't enough. You need to create conversation. When people feel like what they say is heard and makes a difference, then the survey means as much to them as it does to you. And that's how you create lifers instead of customers who are just satisfied. To learn more about Matt you could go to MatthewChampagne.com, but he prefers direct conversation and feedback. He would love to hear about you and what's going on in your business, so send Matt an email at Champagne@feedback9.com. That's Champagne@feedback9.com.

**Voiceover:** This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk with Greg Crabtree.

**Greg:** The reality is that there's certain things that you have to have cash for that is beyond break even, so if you have any debt. The only way I can repay debt is to use after tax profits. So if I'm going to break even, that means for every dollar that I repay in debt I got to turn around and re-borrow it back. That's making no progress. Most of the models that we see from what banks will probably generally allow people to borrow against, you've got to have a minimum of 5% profit just to tread water and turn over the debt and repay that. Realistically until you get past 5%, that's why we call 5% the new zero, really we say 10% is the new break even which is what you should be aiming for.

**Voiceover:** Learn more about us at Mirasee.com.