A few tips on...

ALIGNING
THE EMPLOYEE
AND CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

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Purpose beyond profit

Most employees do not leap out of bed in the morning excited by the prospect of making more profit for their organisation that day. Profit may motivate senior executives but it rarely does so for the front-line unless they are shareholders too, as in the case of the John Lewis Partnership.

What motivates employees is feeling connected to the brand promise. That can be ‘delivering happiness’ as in the case of Zappos or ‘saving the planet’ as in the case of the World Wildlife Fund. If you ask employees of Umpqua – the community bank based in Oregon – what their brand promise is, they will tell you ‘making customers feel dealing with Umpqua was the best thing that happened today’. A tall order for any bank!

Connecting people to a purpose is an important way of helping them feel good about your brand. And we know from our research that there is about an 85% correlation between the way your employees feel about the brand and the way your customers do.

More and more organisations are coming to the realisation that in order to deliver a great customer experience, you must first create an engaging employee experience.

The challenge is that many marketers are more comfortable with the first four Ps of marketing (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) than they are with the fifth ‘P’ of People.

We have just completed two years of research with leading brands for our book ‘BOLD – how to be brave in business and win’. The book tells the story of 14 brands who are challenging the rules of business and delivering highly distinctive experiences.

The stories are told through the words of the executives, employees and, in some cases, the customers themselves. What struck us in conducting our research was the unusual attention paid to the employee experience by the brands we studied: brands like Zappos, innocent and O2.

So what can we learn from how these brands have addressed this challenge?

It starts at the top

Senior managers need to set the example. The way they treat employees is reflective of how employees will treat customers. Leaders must communicate a sense of purpose and constantly reinforce the values of the organisation. Above all, they must encourage colleagues to observe and challenge the organisation through customers’ eyes and model this same behaviour in their own decision making.

Aligning the employee and customer experience

We ensure our internal brand values mirror our external ones. You can’t pretend to be one style of brand to your customers if you’re a different style of brand to your people.

Peter Simpson
Former Commercial Director
First Direct
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Hire for attitude

If you wonder what getting and keeping the right employees has to do with getting and keeping the right customers, the answer is 'everything' says Frederick Reichheld in his book 'The Loyalty Effect'. What's critical is that you first identify the fundamental behaviours and values your brand requires and then recruit people on the basis of those behaviours and values.

There are many bright, well-qualified people out there that you can hire, but only a few of them will be the right fit for your brand. Find the people who share your values and then teach them the skills they need, not the other way round. Umpqua advertises for employees in retail trade magazines, not the financial services press, because it wants people who understand customer service rather than banking.

Hiring for DNA rather than MBA requires clarity in the first place about what the brand values are at a deep level and then being prepared to train people with the functional skills.

Brand your training

Develop training that teaches people not just what the core behaviours are but how to live them for customers. Focus on training that really enables people to turn company and brand values into competitive advantage. But make sure that you differentiate your training.

You can’t achieve breakthrough results with uninspiring training. Branded experiences require branded training. You can’t tell employees what to do to be the best – you have to use more innovative and engaging approaches so they ‘get it’ for themselves.

Reward the right behaviors

The soft stuff needs a hard side. ‘People power’ requires that you also develop metrics for evaluating the use and impact of core and specific brand behaviours. Reward and recognition systems need to be aligned with these metrics.

Create a cult-like culture

Sustaining a culture is very hard, particularly if you are growing. One of the things these brands do is to reinforce their uniqueness through the use of ‘rites and rituals’. Umpqua has a daily ‘motivational moments’ session where everyone gathers to have a lively debate or play games that are in some way related to their purpose. Zappos encourages their employees to be ‘weird’ which means they organise parties and theme events where people dress up and have fun. innocent, the UK smoothie maker holds its AGM (A Grown-up Meeting) where all the employees gather to hear the latest news and then have a barbeque. The Geek Squad uses language and titles such as ‘double agents’ to reinforce the zany culture whose sole purpose is to ‘save your ass’ if your computer should crash.

Above all, marketers must make the fifth ‘P’ central to their strategies, and HR’s role must be to help create an employee experience that is a mirror for the customer experience.
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A final note

If you’re a hard-nosed doubter, fostered through years of managing a cynical workforce, or entrenched in an ultra-conservative culture, you may be reading this and saying to yourself “Well, you might be able to do that kind of thing in the USA but not here’.

You would be wrong.

We have seen examples of brands that focus on purpose beyond profit, hiring for DNA and encouraging rites and rituals in the UK, US, Brazil and Asia. Of course, if these practices are fake, fudged or forced, they become trite and will not deliver value for your brand; but when they are driven by a common purpose and shared values, when they are sincere, when they create a great employee experience and when they result in a ‘wow’ experience for customers – they work.

And when that happens you get what the Chinese call ‘Double happiness’

Aligning the employee and customer experience