



A few tips on...

BRINGING
THE EXPERIENCE
ALIVE THROUGH
YOUR PEOPLE

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Bringing your brand alive

Many organisations have company or brand values or a customer focus statement. Few manage to bring these alive for their people in a way that enables their people to bring it alive for their customers.

The reason for this is that most organisations see training as the solution; but all too often, it's actually part of the problem. Here's why:

One – it's often based on generic customer service training programmes rather than grounded in the organisation's brand promise and desired customer experience.

Two – it's wholly HR-owned and therefore often seen as 'just a training programme' and implemented independently of internal communications and marketing efforts.

Three – the content is often bland, frequently patronising and generally formulaic.

Four – it delivers learning to suit the training timetable rather than being delivered when people actually need it or have the time to do it. 'Just in case' rather than 'Just in time'.

So what's the solution?

If you want to create a differentiated experience, you need to create differentiated training. And this training must operate at three levels :



HEAD
knowing what to do
and why it is important



HEART
being motivated
to do it



HANDS
having the skills and tools
to behave in that way

Here, we offer a few guidelines for how to achieve this

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Some guidelines

Start with your brand proposition and desired customer experience

Ensure that you are absolutely clear on your brand proposition, the expectations of your most profitable target customers, and your desired customer experience. This then creates a context for the training of management and front-line staff so that the behaviours you facilitate are directly linked to the experience you want your customers to have. Your front-line people need to know, at a detailed level, what customers expect and value, what the brand promises and what their role is in delivering it.

Think innovatively about the brand values and hallmark touch-points

These are the areas where your people will really need to dramatise the promise in order to differentiate the experience. So these are the areas in which you should also think about dramatising the training. For example, if you want to make simplicity a hallmark of your customer experience then the style of learning needs to be really simple too. If innovation is a key brand value, then guess what?

Evolutionary training not revolutionary

One common mistake when trying to create differentiated training is to label all the old training initiatives as redundant. It's important to honour the learner's previous learning experience, so try and build on the positive aspects of existing programmes where possible and integrate them within the new initiative.

Enable your people to take ownership in designing the training

Too often training is seen as the sole responsibility of HR. Whether you're using external experts to help you in the design, or simply your own internal people, we recommend creating a design team comprising the training experts, HR and a small number of managers to ensure that the learning design is relevant, realistic, engaging, and appropriately linked to other initiatives.

Appoint brand champions

Create brand champions to act as your advocates and the voice of the employees. These are people who can help you spread the word, influence its success and reinforce communications. As such, it's a good idea to make them part of the design team and get their buy in. Select them carefully: natural influencers, credible communicators, good people skills, respected and liked.

Don't rely on trainers. Prepare your own people to conduct front-line training

Focus on training your 'champions' and your best people to train your front-line managers and then creating a process to cascade the skills and knowledge needed to deliver your strategy. Training your managers to deliver the message will enable them to understand the importance of the customer experience initiative, how to deliver it and their role in enabling the people they lead to deliver it.

This approach not only saves costs but also ensures the organisation does not have to rely on consultants for ongoing induction training. This creates ownership at the operational level rather than the initiative being something 'done' to the organisation by consultants. The intention is NOT to turn managers into trainers, but to turn them into leaders and coaches who can set direction for their people.

There is no better way for employees to learn about the experience they need to deliver – than by experiencing it themselves

Create a training experience

Create impact right from the start. One way is to create a launch event where you treat your participants as your guests, with managers acting as hosts. Think about how you can create the type of experience for your employees that you wish them to create for customers. Think about how you invite them, welcome them and the environment you wish to create. Surprise and delight them. What can you do to make them feel special?

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Customer experience training should not be designed to bring about conformity to carefully prescribed ways of behaving. Instead, it should give people the knowledge, motivation and skills to help them create in their own way an authentic and valuable experience for their customers

Some guidelines

Design learning that addresses immediate work challenges and fits around people's work schedules

Rather than taking employees out for days at a time, sessions can be designed to be delivered by your managers as a series of short, interactive modules. This enables them to be built into the pace of the business so that the learning is 'just in time' rather than 'just in case' and can easily be accommodated without too much disruption to people's schedules.

Train your managers to deliver each module and reinforce these through real work assignments that help participants try out skills and approaches in the workplace. This enables them to learn how to translate brand values into personal action, and behave in ways which are on-brand. Learning is thus an incremental process of action and reflection leading to new insights and new ways of thinking and acting.

Brand the training

Create an inspiring look and feel that runs throughout all the communication about the training, and through the training materials themselves. Although you need to build on existing learning, think of new ways of differentiating the style and approach from everything that has been done before. You want to excite people about the initiative.

Measure it against key strategic objectives

Senior management commitment is achieved by a clear, compelling business case which links the initiative to results and the means to track performance. For this reason ensure that you include a measurement process so that the impact can be monitored. A customer experience scorecard will enable you to combine customer experience measures with front-line performance.

Empower people to deliver a consistent experience not a formulaic response

The fundamental benefit that a brand bestows is predictability. If you want to really upset your customers, provide them with wildly different experiences from location to location, day to day, or between one service provider to another. The response from many organisations has been to seek to control the experience by standardising it. In many cases these service standards have been set at the level of the lowest common denominator, thereby creating robotic service encounters. "Have a nice day" has become a symbol of this 'design by numbers' approach to customer experience. The right answer is to keep a tight control over what your brand promises and the design of the experience, but to also give freedom to your people to behave in a way that will meet individual customer needs. Most leaders are terrified to do this. Why? Because they perceive it to be too risky. But here's how Ray Davis, CEO of the US bank Umpqua, sees it:

All of our associates have the authority to make a decision right there and then on what they think is the right thing to do. They are trained to make those kinds of decisions and they do; they don't pick up the phone and ask for permission, they have authority to make it happen. It's about managing risk, and that type of risk – as far as I'm concerned – is minimal compared to the benefit gained.

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Don't forget to align KPIs with the customer experience

We worked with Burberry, one of the world's best known luxury brands and measured the impact of our customer experience work pre-pilot, post-pilot and against control stores in the US, Asia and Europe. We used a concept called the **'Power of One'** which reduces the many complex and often conflicting KPIs to one primary success measure that the employees can directly influence. In this case it was revenue per transaction, a measure of the ability of the front line to sell.

In the same way that customer experience needs to focus on target customers, you need to design your training and focus your effort on those who will make a difference

A final note

Sometimes you just have the wrong people to start with. Some don't want to be trained and some are incapable of being trained.

Zappos has a phrase **'slow to hire, quick to fire'**.

It's more important to recruit the right people with the right DNA, in the first place. So ardent is this belief within Zappos, that they offer all new hires \$2000 at the end of their first week of training to leave as a way of testing their passion to work for the brand.