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Internal Branding: Getting Your Employees on the 'Brand Wagon!'

By Carol Chapman, Principal

This is the first in a series of articles to reveal the substantial benefits and process for getting your employees on the 'brand wagon'.

What do highly successful brands such as Starbucks, Disney, Southwest Airlines, Ritz Carlton, Harley Davidson, Nordstrom all have in common? They share some very distinctive yet similar characteristics of brands whose employees are "behind their brand in every way." What we mean is that their employees truly live the essence of the brand with an undeniable commitment to delivering on the Brand Promise. In this article series, we will explore the three common and critical characteristics of highly successful brands and the five key steps to getting your employees on the brand wagon.

But first, most of us understand the External levels of branding – our advertising, the look and feel of our logo, what products and services we offer; our marketing messages and promotional campaigns. Companies spend numerous dollars on the external levels and particularly in develop marketing messages that are most often NOT reflective of how their employees live up to those messages. How many of us have experienced this? Yes, all of us!

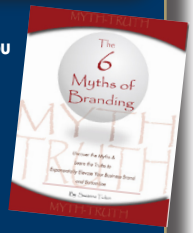
Here's a quick story...

Last year I had my cell phone service "cut-off" not just once, but three times within a four month period – all because of a replacement phone I had ordered and then PROMPTLY RETURNED after finding my lost phone. Each time I spoke with a customer service representative, I was promised they would resolve the issue and my phone service would not be cut-off again. This went on for four months because of their dysfunctional return processes and internal bickering as to who was responsible for resolving my issue. Hey no problem getting the phone, just getting credit for the returned one and keeping my service in tact, so who suffered...MOI, the customer! Not to mention, it was extremely embarrassing to me when clients called me only to hear the following message: "This number has

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been temporarily disconnected!" Everyone knows what that means!

Based on our research, the world's most successful companies recognize and leverage the Internal levels of branding – brand values, internal communications, customer relationship training, systems and processes, leadership development and culture. They capitalize on these to align employees behind their brand, enhance performance and transform them into highly valued brand advocates.

Recent studies show significant measurable benefits of inspiring employees to understand and believe in their brand. As reported in a recent Watson Wyatt Worldwide study:

"The share performance of companies with high employee trust levels outperforms companies with low employee trust levels by as much as 186%."

This statistic is astounding, but hardly unbelievable. How does trust in the work environment affect our behavior with others and our commitment to our brand? Well, trust is the bedrock of every successful relationship, one person to another, starting with your employees and moving on to your customers and progressing further to your vendors and all the people your brand touches in the communities in which you operate.

Characteristic #1: Brand-Centric

Every employee is crystal clear on what the brand stands for and protects the integrity of the brand.

The brand is the focal point of strategy with enduring values that underpin and support the Brand Promise.

Brand-centric organizations engage, motivate and inspire employees to think and act with total brand presence – in accordance with the essence of their brand. Employees in companies that are highly brand-centric do not experience or demonstrate misunderstandings or confusion on how their brand must show up in the market. They have complete understanding and enormous trust and affinity with their brand!

Here's a great example:

Southwest Airlines has been recognized repeatedly as one of the 'Most Admired Companies' over the last 20 years. The Golden Rule or what they call the "Ethic of Reciprocity" is regarded as the most concise and general principle of ethics. It means to treat others as you want them to treat you. This means management treats employees with trust and respect because that's how they would like employees to treat them. Southwest Airlines employees are totally brand-centric. It is reflected in their consistent behaviors in delivering on their motto: "Positively Outrageous Service." They have an undeniable commitment to protect the integrity of what the brand stands for – their "Ethic of Reciprocity" and "Positively Outrageous Service." Southwest hires people who are comfortable with themselves, have a strong sense of service, and are willing to empower themselves to deliver the essence of the brand, "Positively Outrageous Service."



We always ask our clients the following question: Who here is responsible and has full ownership for branding in their organization? We get a variety of answers. The correct answer is EVERYONE. As for ownership – that can be interpreted in different ways such as who leads the charge, who is the champion(s) of the effort. The important thing is everyone IS involved...each of you are representations of your organization's brand.

Remember this: Brand-centric organizations have energized, inspired workforces that have a high level of trust and whose employees have a fanatical affinity with their brand. This projects loyalty and personal commitment to protecting everything that the brand stands for. These are directly conveyed in every internal and external interaction. Make sure your company is Brand-centric, so that your employees and customers alike receive a personal communication of the brand's promise, inspiring positive associations and action. These positive associations and actions lead to brand talk in the community that elevates the presence of your brand in all the markets in which you operate.

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