

SALES AND SERVICE

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THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

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**People
Skills**

**Customer
Engagement**

**Brainstorming
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MANAGEMENT/ALIGNMENT

Reinforcing Engagement

Align personal with corporate brand.



by Hubert Rampersad

INCREASINGLY, GOOD BRAND relationships *with employees* is more important than good brand relationships *with customers*. Employees should be happy first in order to make the customers happy; corporate brand loyalty starts with employee engagement. This can be realized by aligning the employee's brand with the corporate brand.

Alignment is needed because staff members don't work with devotion or expend energy on something they do not believe in or agree with. If there is an effective match between their interests and those of the company, or if their values and the company's values align, they will be engaged and will work with greater commitment and dedication towards realizing the company objectives. Identification with the corporate brand is the most important motive for them to dedicate themselves actively to the corporate objectives and to maximize their potential. When your personal brand is compatible with your corporate brand and combined in the best interest of both parties, the results will be higher brand equity, brand loyalty, and happy stakeholders. Doing

work related to your personal and corporate brand that is interesting, exciting and provides learning opportunities has become a key personal driver. *Intrinsic motivation* is inherently pleasurable and arises from within; most people do something because they enjoy doing it.

Aligning personal brand with the corporate brand impacts the bonding of employees. This energizes them and gives them the proud feeling that they count, that they're appreciated, and that



they make a useful and valuable contribution. Employees are stimulated in this way to focus on those activities that create value for clients. This creates a *culture of peace and stability* upon which creativity and growth can flourish. Work relationships become more harmonious, and employee engagement rises. Low engagement is endemic, and

is causing organizations to incur excess costs, underperform on critical tasks, and create customer dissatisfaction.

There are 22 million *actively disengaged* employees in America, and their dissatisfaction is manifested in absence, illness, and a variety of other big and small problems. Gallup statistics show that unhappy workers cost the economy up to \$350 billion annually in lost labor productivity; and that earnings per share increase 2.6 times when employees are engaged.

By aligning and synchronizing employee's ambition and brand with their corporate ambition and brand you can realize the *best fit* between employee and company. Matching the personal brand with the corporate brand has to do with reaching a higher compatibility between personal and corporate objectives. Too often, we find a *values mismatch*. Instead of matching the *right person to the right position*, many managers simply fill positions as quickly as possible. Hence, they lose money as fast as they lose employees.

You need to get optimal fit between the personal and the corporate brand to enhance productivity and to stimulate engagement, commitment, love, and passion. This requires higher compatibility between personal and orga-

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Customer Engagement

First you need to engage employees.



by Sheila E. Murphy

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF knowledge, models, data, skills or philosophy supporting the importance of *customer and employee engagement*. Engaged employees improve your odds of earning and keeping engaged customers, and customer advocates make firms more valuable.

Obstacles to Change

One or more of five obstacles often prevent us from boosting engagement:

1. The distance between employees and the final products and services that the company provides customers. The layers of function that separate development and the final, ready-for-delivery services easily distract from the final goal. R&D staff may operate in a dimension far from the finished product. Planned enhancements to offerings must make sense from the client view and be understood by staff in product design from concept through delivery. The *service impact* of any product or service must be *linked directly* to the problem that the product solves for clients.

2. The absence of employee contact with real customers who work with the company. Organizations often restrict direct customer contact to front-line service providers, who develop fluency in customer interaction. These staff members often operate at a distance from financial professionals and other support areas. A customer advocacy perspective may exist in certain front-line staff, but that knowledge may not be heard by others. The opportunity for information sharing is clear.

3. Complicated processes that obscure the direct service equation. Employees are frequently busy thinking through and around bureaucratic complications, at the expense of addressing the simplest, most powerful service relationship. Central office staff can lose sight of *what* customers are receiving, how they perceive that service, and changes that are needed. In financial services, for example, I find that highly skilled individuals who meet with the customer perceive their role as *navigators* through the maze of obstacles that interfere with service—such as delays in delivery and repeated requests for client information. Such obstacles reveal

a chance to *make the relationship about the customer*, not the provider.

4. The absence of a clear and inspiring service message by the leader. Many leaders neglect to design and deliver a simple, powerful message that articulates the customer-centric view. In my work, I see the differences in employee performance between organizations whose leaders synthesize a clear, simply stated, memorable service goal and those that do not. Leaders who activate their power to direct committed service facilitate professionalism, leading to outstanding customer service.

5. Systems that support customer responsiveness. Firms that build around a commitment to service gain considerable publicity. Nordstrom's and Zappos



in the retail sector are noted for unusual and attention-capturing service commitments, all focused around leaders who expect service professionals to take charge of the customer relationship and make service the only reality.

Take Six Steps

Take these *six action steps* to create employee and customer engagement:

1. Establish a one-question culture. Make any investment, expenditure, or change subject to a single question: *How will this affect the customer experience?* Consider *only* actions that generate a *positive* response—nothing neutral or negative. Ask, “Who benefits from what we are discussing?”

2. Establish ownership of the customer relationship for each account. Each account must be guided by *one professional*, to whom others hold themselves accountable. The service leader is attuned to the customer's needs and guides all support departments to ensure consistently high-quality service.

3. Structure the culture around customer relationship management and

appreciation. Most hierarchies reward high-ranking leaders and managers. On a lower rung are the service and sales staff, who are dispatched to meet with customers. Often, they must approach their fellow employees and company officers hat-in-hand, asking the favor of performance on behalf of the customer. In organizations that utilize an outside sales force, these professionals are often treated like outside customer advocates. *Reverse this system*, placing the *customer relationship* at the core of what the company does, and strengthening each relationship with a full support team. This need not require more staff, but necessitates *redeploying individuals to play a key role in changing the culture*. Spreading customer accountability results in more engaged employees and customers.

4. Appoint a C-suite professional in charge of customer experience. All areas that directly touch the customer should answer to this professional: customer service, implementation, relationship managers, business development, and sales and marketing. This enables you to *respond to customers more quickly and consistently*. Having a *senior officer* makes a statement about values: *Nothing is more important than the customer.*

5. Design incentives that clearly benefit individual and team performers. Only firms with *the right incentives* have *fully engaged* employees. The compensation system and incentive plan convey a *clear value that the company places on individual achievement*. If this system is flawed, and excuses are offered, employees will resent their leaders. The incentive system must be fair, inspiring, and provide hope for all performers.

6. Recognize, reward, and communicate widely the successes of employees who build customer loyalty and advocacy. Clearly explain to the C-suite and to employees your belief in and support of *customer service drivers* and their results. Cite examples of what is unusual, inspiring, and worthy of replication. Each *example of excellence* in service contributes to new service designs.

Direct all efforts toward maintaining customer loyalty. Integrate key service questions: *What keeps our customer coming back? Is it rational? Emotional? How close are we to losing each key customer? What are we doing about it?*

You need to know what drives customers in the door, and fastens their attention on the offerings designed to enhance their lives or their business. **SSE**

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ACTION: Implement these six steps.