

3 keys to build a strong employer brand in the Service Industry

Today, brands pervade our lives – be it food, clothes, shoes or phones - and drive the value of companies, particularly on the stock market. The brand value of Samsung Electronics (ranked No.6 on Interbrand's "Best Global Brands 2017") is \$56.2 billion – while for Small Medium Enterprises, their sales turnover and assets generally create their value. In either case, the value of your employer brand has an impact on many areas, including your ability to deliver growth opportunities, to hire the right talent, as well retention.

Understanding the new workforce in this regard will be critical for your Talent Management efforts – Sarah Gibbons wrote "I'm a millennial, and I embody a lot of the clichéd things you've heard about the generation: the frivolous wanderlust, the tattoos, the addiction to Instagram, and one pretty powerful behavioural trend – the insistence on ethical substance and integrity from brands, or in other words, choosing to make mostly idealistic purchase decisions. Without a socially conscious framework, your brand means nothing to me or many of my millennial cohort, and without capturing the millennial market, you'll never amass the army of brand advocates you need to partake of the nearly \$200 billion in millennial-driven sales each year".

Unlike many of their Consumer driven organisations like Coca-Cola, many Manufacturing Service companies being technical driven do not focus on this critical area, so this article aims to provide some assistance in what to consider.

So, what is an employer brand?

It is the internal and external perception of your company. It is often not a single 'something' that drives the perception. For example, the belief you have in the Apple brand starts with the shop you visit and the service they provide. The decision to purchase a wonderfully designed product is only reinforced when it works well, and by the reception and quality of the phone. If something does not work, you take note of how Apple deals with maintenance or the return policy. This end-to-end experience drives a belief in you and it is the belief that drives your behaviour - a positive belief will have you returning to buy more Apple products.

In the same way, a person experiences how a company responds to and leads their employees. This will be communicated to others and of course, will influence whether people are retained or if they will look elsewhere for a brand they want to work for.

So, what can you do to build a strong employer brand? There are many actions that can be taken to grow or strengthen your employer brand, and the energy exerted will be driven by how seriously you wish to be taken and how important your employer brand is to the delivery of business opportunities.

Our goal here is not to overload you with the many actions that can help, but to share what we consider to be the critical few – 3 simple things you can do, irrespective of the size of your organisation.

First, it is critical that you **develop and communicate** workplace expectations internally - what is acceptable and what is not. In developing the expectations, try to reflect the organisation you want to be and the people you wish to hire and retain. For example, as a software company, you will inevitably hire younger generations. Having flexible work hours and dress codes will help you, as these are important attributes today! However, frankly, these are the easy wins – expectations around leadership style and development of the team will carry far more weight and will be shared amongst top talent more than the hygiene factors.

The second step is to **reinforce and redirect** workforce behaviour's. When a leader is seen as driving the right behaviours, share their success, its impact on team morale and the impact on the organization's growth. Equally, when a leader does not drive the right behaviour, they need to be told and redirected to what is expected. If this leader is permitted to continue with their unacceptable behaviour, it will undermine your employer brand building efforts.

The most important contributor to your employer brand is for the leadership team to view it as equally important as product brand value. In the great brands I have worked for, I can remember very clearly the good and great leaders who absolutely represented the brands they led. They made me proud to work there, valued my contributions, reminded me of my obligations to the employer brand in **what they said, but most importantly in what they did**.

The real employer brand is defined in the moment when an employee issue raises itself in the workplace. Is the company compassionate, caring or mechanistic in its HR actions? The rest of the workforce watch, as this will define exactly the company they work for.

In summary, value your employer brand as much as your company/product brand. Set expectations, hold people to these expectations, and *always* walk the talk. Companies as well as people define themselves everyday by what they say and, more importantly, do. There's no doubt - great employer brands built with this in mind will attract and retain top talent.

For more information on 'Building your Employer Brand', please contact the authors directly on Richard Cowley at richard.cowley@servicepeplematters.com or Dag Gronevik at dag.gronevik@servicepeplematters.com