

Engagement and corporate brand reputation: what's the link?

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⌚ 8th Feb 2017

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The reputation you project as a company is today most strongly created and conveyed by your people and their behaviours, rather than your traditional branding, your advertising campaigns or your office premises.

The way your leaders and employees interact with all your stakeholders, not just clients and customers, and how they make them feel, will result in an experience for that stakeholder that will often get remembered and talked about, whether positively or negatively.

Furthermore, the way in which your employees communicate with others and talk about your company will be largely dependant on how they feel when they are at work, or how they are treated by their line managers; how valued and respected they feel and how proud they are to work for your organisation. We already know that most people leave their job due to poor line management, but everyday behaviours are driven by emotions and this could be costing your brand and bottom-line dearly too.

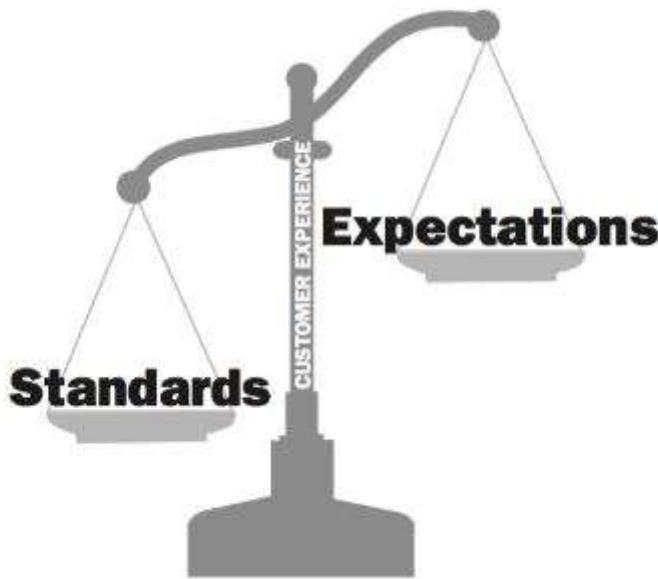
We see this illustrated most powerfully with the John Lewis brand where it is clear that the employee brand and levels of engagement are managed very closely. For my latest book I interviewed the Board Retail Director of John Lewis, who told me; “The single biggest focus for us is our partners’ (employees’) happiness”. It is the John Lewis emphasis on the role of the individual that makes the individual feel valued for what they personally bring. This results in the consistent customer service and experience they provide and that they have been well-known for across many years.

So we've established that there is a clear link between employee engagement and corporate brand reputation. However, I would bet that you might in all honesty be putting more importance on having a great brand reputation than really ensuring that your employees are happy, and yet the latter feeds directly into the success of the former.

The gap is increasing

The environment we live in and do business in is ever-changing – as consumers and clients, and as suppliers and other stakeholders in a business too, we perhaps sub-consciously put much more value on being treated well and receiving a great experience that we can talk about and that makes us feel good, than in the traditional standards and expected levels of customer service.

Today we expect more, but in reality that quality of experience is often lacking. Yet it should be so very simple to achieve.



Credit: Corporate Brand Personality (Kogan Page, Feb 2016)

We are constantly presented with advertisements that give us an insight into the experience we can expect to have when we visit the furniture store, the supermarket or the theme park and the experience bar is set high. With our work

at Walking TALL being focussed in the corporate brand reputation area, we have found that standards are lapsing rather than rising and that the height to fall from is sadly ever-increasing.

A public insight

TripAdvisor and Yelp have such a breadth and reach now that most companies in all sectors can be subject to review on them. There is only one thing that customers write reviews about and that is their experience of a brand.

There is no product or service that can overcome a bad customer experience and that experience will always be created by the people they come into contact with. This is another great reason why employee engagement is paramount to achieving the company reputation you want and need.

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Customers will be driven to express their views on TripAdvisor when the experience differs positively or negatively from what they expected, so what a fabulous opportunity to get talked about by doing something different and unexpected. In order to do this however, your people need to feel trusted and empowered, and then recognised for what they have created to ensure best chances of it happening again and again. Such a seemingly straight-forward and simple way to stand out, but not something that is that common in businesses to the degree that is intended.

Peter Merrett, head of customer experience at JLL Australia told me that; “Our values are simple – making peoples’ lives at work as easy and enjoyable as possible is key for us. Trusting and empowering people is so easy to do so why don’t all employers do this?”

Think wider

To consider that it's only your client-facing people who need to be trained or invested in to create a level of employee engagement that in turn will create a positive corporate reputation, is an easy trap to fall in to. What about your support staff, accounts payable and procurement departments for example?

On numerous occasions, a corporate brand has been tainted for me when I've had to deal with some so-called back-office departments. A noticeable difference in behaviours and communication standards has many a time given me a very negative view of that company, sadly severely diluting all the good brand reputation work that the traditional client-facing staff have created.

So now we have established the close connection between employee engagement and your corporate brand reputation, we should move onto how you can deal with the potential danger areas and ensure that your brand is supported and reinforced by engaged employees. This will be covered in [Part 2](#) (<http://www.hrzone.com/engage/employees/employer-brand-creating-a-company-your-employees-feel-proud-to-work-for>) of this series.

Part 2: Create a company your employees feel proud to work for
(<http://www.hrzone.com/engage/employees/employer-brand-creating-a-company-your-employees-feel-proud-to-work-for>)

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