

It's a Brand's New Day

By Valarie Willis

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After the layoffs and budget cuts, now what? Are you living up to your brand promises or are you falling short on customer experiences? This article focuses on sustaining your organizational brand and the power of values and brand. The lead article below is written from the belief that when the focus is only on the bottom line and people are ignored, the organizational brand suffers, as customers lose sight of what you stand for, and they no longer trust what you can deliver.

The news is full of stories about downsizing, job evaporations, and budgets being slashed into shreds. After all is said and done, what happens to the brand? Did it survive? Or is it bruised and battered? Leaders in the organization are responsible for the integrity of the brand, and they have to pull their heads out of the financial data long enough to assess the current state of the brand and of their talent.

We know that, when there is a shift in the organization as strong as this economic shift has been for many, the brand can become diluted if no one is asking, "What about the brand?"

Let us not forget that in the center hub of organizations is the talent, and, by the way, the talent *is* the brand. It is the talent in an organization that brings its brand to life. If the talent are no longer happy, if they are concerned about their own welfare, or they've hunkered down to stay out of sight, the brand may be on its last breath as well. And when the brand is struggling to survive, the impact is on the customer experience. The talent may become non-caring and cynical and these attitudes can permeate into how the customers experience the brand.

When there have been strong shifts in the organization, then the organization must recalibrate itself and set the organization back on course. We believe that organizations can best do this by taking these steps:

1. Revisit the ambition or goal of the organization and connect people to it.
2. Managers spend time on the front lines talking to people and getting a handle on the issues.
3. Re-state the brand promise and ensure that everyone knows how his or her job affects the promise.
4. Take a look at the changes in the organization and assess the impact on the brand and the impact on the customer experience.
5. Design a course of action to put the brand back on track.

A brand bruised and battered can have customers headed towards the competition, which is exactly the opposite of an organization's aims. In tough economic times, it would serve an organization best to focus on keeping their current loyal customers/clients. Now would be the time to re-think how to make the brand truly distinctive in the marketplace.

Excellence can be achieved when the brand, the talent, and the customer experience are in alignment.

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