

Are you a trusted leader who engages the workforce?

Are you a trusted leader at work? You may be caught off guard just a bit by this question, since it's not something most managers and leaders are often asked, nor is it something managers and leaders frequently ask themselves. So it's no surprise if you are ill-equipped to answer right on the spot.

Take a moment to reflect on this question, because it's worth answering. Do the people you work with trust you as a leader? If you are like most of the supervisors, managers and executive leaders I've asked, you are probably not so sure. This alone can pose problems in fostering an engaged workforce, because an engaged workforce depends on employees trusting their leaders.

The benefits of engaging your workforce are simple, straightforward and difficult to refute. An engaged workforce is more empowered and motivated to deliver a branded experience—an experience your company becomes known for because you are living the brand, delivering your company core values and promises. When a company does this, it leads to more loyal customers who buy more of your products or services and do so more often.

One of my favorite business quotes (I'm not sure where it originated) is "People do business with people they like." I first heard this during a client's sales training program and quickly realized the relevance to other areas of life, especially leadership. Let's modify this quote to fit into the context needed here: "People do business with people they like and trust."

In the example I'm using, "people" refers to employees you work with and supervise. Achieving engagement among employees depends on your ability to earn their trust. Employees need to have confidence in you as a leader who will live the brand—live the values—and not simply try to hold others accountable for living it. They need to know and believe that you understand the desired company experience for both employees and customers, passionately deliver it each day, and make



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sure others are doing the same. You'll earn more trust as a manager of people when you learn to effectively and consistently manage by the values, or as I call it, manage the experience. Doing so leads to a culture where everyone is focused on living the brand.

What I've found over the last decade in my vast study of leadership models is that most tend to have a common fundamental goal for the leader to inspire others. Inspiration requires trust. It enables you to influence others and have an impact on the way they think and act. Others' willingness to be influenced by you depends completely on whether they trust you. Without trust, why should people do what you ask or suggest? This is especially true if you are asking them to do something that is challenging or simply not in their natural way of doing things.

Want to be a trusted leader? Think about this: How many times a day do you have the opportunity to remind others by initiating a conversation about the branded experience? Making it part of the conversation is a leadership skill to be learned, practiced and mastered over time. Mastering this skill is one aspect of managing the experience that enables leaders to remind the workforce every day about what is important and how each employee makes it happen.

Here are three ways for you to become great at reminding others to live the brand by behaving in ways that are consistent with your company's core values and that lead to a desired branded experience.

■ Capture and share living-the-brand moments. Add 60 seconds to regularly

scheduled team and employee meetings to share the success of someone who has demonstrated your company's branded experience in a way that led to a positive outcome. A simple callout and round of applause can go a long way.

■ Conduct a 10-minute living-the-brand assessment every six months. Have employees complete a quick and easy semi-annual assessment on how consistently others in their work area are living the brand. This touchpoint with employees is a terrific reminder. Two assessments a year will provide four reminders as long as you are thoughtful and strategic in sharing the results with the workforce.

■ Share the customer reality. Would you agree that your company would be better off if each manager spoke to one or two customers every week about the experience they have with your company? Of course you would. Then put the discipline into action and have managers reach out to customers and engage in a conversation about their experience, then share what is learned from those valuable discussions with employees. Share both the good and the bad.

Managing a branded experience builds trust. If you use these three ways to remind employees, you will be positioned to earn more trust by sharing your conviction for living the brand. In addition, sparking conversations with others will create an environment of open dialogue where expectations are clearer and personal responsibility rises—an environment with more engaged employees who help create more loyal customers.

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