

Use a 60-second reminder to bring your company's values to life

Does your company have core values? I have yet to meet a company without them. However, that does not mean all companies “live the values” every day. All too often, I walk into a company or pull up its website and see core values proudly displayed, which makes me wonder what the true intentions are. Is this company simply announcing to employees what it wants to be known for? Or does it hope that customers will view the core values and form a positive impression that makes them feel better about spending money?

In either case, if a company doesn't go beyond announcing its values, it can't expect employees to embrace them, personalize them, or act them out in their day-to-day work. And it can't expect increased sales as a result of customers experiencing the values in action.

Instead of announcing your company values, get every manager focused on creating reminders of what it looks like to live the values—every day.

Just last week I was speaking with Karen, director of human resources at a company that made a significant investment in defining and announcing a new set of values. The company gave speeches, held a picnic and sent a letter from the CEO to introduce the core values of “Innovation, Teamwork, Customer Focus, and Our People.”

Next it set up a new employee recognition program to promote the values, providing a forum for employees to acknowledge each other for demonstrating the values in action. In addition, it integrated the values into job descriptions, performance reviews and new employee orientation and training. While these efforts should be applauded, Karen mentioned that the momentum and excitement lasted only a few weeks.

“If I'm not promoting the values every day, no one else is thinking about them,” she says. “The challenge for us is getting others to embrace and do them. We just can't seem to make it part of our managers' and employees' daily thinking.”

Karen's challenge is the problem most companies face—getting everyone (especially managers) to think about and live the



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Gregg Lederman

values. Making this happen requires that every manager see it as her job to live the values and help others do the same. Let's face it, speeches, parties and pep rallies simply won't get the job done. These activities frequently turn out to be nothing more than what we at Brand Integrity call happy talk!

Happy talk sounds insightful and in some cases quite motivating at the time. But when people get back to the office and realize that nothing has really changed and no measures have been taken to create visibility or track progress, nothing positive results. In fact, pep rallies and speeches filled with happy talk can do quite a bit more harm than good when employees see them as another example of wasted time and resources or, even worse, an insincere attempt at making positive change happen.

The missing ingredient for Karen's company—and maybe yours—is reminding.

Your company's success in living the values will be directly correlated to the number of reminders that you and your management team can create from day to day, week to week and month to month. Believe me when I say that your ability to get your company's values into the hearts and minds of employees will be based less than 1 percent on training, speeches, pep rallies and the like. Instead, 99 percent of your success will come from creating the necessary reminders.

Secret to success

Let me share an example of a company that very quickly went from announcing its values to living them every day through the power of reminding. A few years back, Rochester-based Genesee Regional Bank created a set of core values and—like Kar-

en's company—announced them, incorporated them into employee recognition efforts and made them part of performance review systems.

Additionally, it defined a set of specific behaviors behind each value, and every six months it administered a short, confidential survey asking employees to rate how consistently they felt others in their work area did the behaviors. These efforts were great ways to remind the workforce about the values and their importance—but they weren't enough to help keep the entire workforce engaged with the values every day.

In 2011, GRB decided to refresh the values and reposition them as the GRB Experience. It refined the values into a more clearly defined set with a few simple and actionable behaviors. GRB continued to evaluate the consistency of the behaviors through a semi-annual survey and also continued to encourage employees to recognize each other for living the values. What it did next was quite interesting and effective. CEO Phil Pecora stated: “We didn't want to simply market the values that drive the GRB Experience. Our goal was to make sure they were top of mind each day.”

The company incorporated a new and very powerful reminder that really got the attention of the workforce. It began a simple act that we at Brand Integrity call the Sixty Second Reminder. All it required was that each manager add the GRB Experience (the company's values) to his regularly scheduled weekly meeting agenda and spend 60 seconds highlighting either a recent example of the GRB Experience in action or a specific behavior to focus on in the week ahead.

Within six months of actively using the Sixty Second Reminder, GRB's scores on the employee survey of how consistently the behaviors are delivered increased almost 10 percent. And there was a 700 percent increase in employee recognition in the form of stories of the experience in action—examples of employees delivering the values to each other and to customers.

Can you take 60 seconds a week to share

a story about someone living your company's values, delivering an experience your employees can be proud to be a part of and your customers will come to appreciate you for? Of course you can. That's one minute a week. Of the 10,080 minutes that make up each week, all it takes is one—one minute focused on talking about the val-

ues your company wants all employees to think about and deliver upon each day. A 60-second reminder can move your company from the happy talk of just announcing the values to actually living them.

Gregg Lederman, CEO of Brand Integrity Inc., is a professional speaker on the customer experience, leadership and cul-

ture change. He is an adjunct professor at the Simon Graduate School of Business at the University of Rochester and is the author of "Achieve Brand Integrity: Ten Truths You Must Know to Enhance Employee Performance and Increase Company Profits." Read more from Gregg at www.gregglederman.com.