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Why Employer Branding Matters Now More than Ever



By: Bob Kelleher author of *LOUDER THAN WORDS: 10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps That Drive Results*

About a year ago, I was asked to work with a retail client (“Company X”) who was struggling to increase [employee engagement](#) during these volatile economic times (then again, who isn’t!)

A 3-day meeting was scheduled to address the issue, which first focused on operations.

I was fascinated with Company X’s diligence and science in understanding their customer demographics and buying patterns. They utilize external research consultants, video cameras, focus groups, internal research, customer interviews, etc. to better understand who their customers are and what they’re buying. They understand when customers buy what they buy, and when they stop buying. After two days with this team, I was impressed! “This company gets it” I concluded.

As we kicked off day three, the leadership team presented their employee engagement challenges. Their employees (“associates,” as they called them) appeared disengaged; surprisingly, in this economy, voluntary [employee turnover](#) was alarmingly high.

When I asked the leaders why they work for Company X, they stumbled. When I asked why associates stay, they weren’t sure. When I asked about their [employer brand](#) they admitted they didn’t really know.

So, here we have a company that was spending a lot of time and money to better understand their customers, but had no idea who their employees were? If this story sounds familiar to you.....read on!

Understanding your Employees as Customers

I often tell employers, “You don’t have an [employee engagement](#) issue. You have a hiring issue.” Quite simply, they don’t understand who their employees are, who excels at their firms, and how they can [hire the best people](#).

Let’s contrast Company X with The Timberland Company -- a company known primarily for making and selling boots. I got to know The Timberland Company when conducting research for my book *Louder Than Words, 10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps...that Drive Results!* Unlike the retail chain Company X, The Timberland Company has high levels of employee engagement, a best-in-class 8% voluntary turnover among their store associates and is very profitable.

What is Timberland doing different? They truly understand their brand, the behaviors and traits of people who excel at The Timberland Company and the people they should be hiring. Timberland is a “purpose” company that’s focused on corporate social sustainability, supporting volunteer efforts; they believe their company has a bigger purpose than just making money.

Consequently, Timberland hires store associates who possess the same behaviors and traits as their brand. They also understand the importance of linking product and employment brand. For instance, even part-time Timberland store associates are given time off with pay to volunteer to work for the local homeless shelter or to build homes for Habitat for Humanity.

Tri-Branding your Company Brand

When I work with new clients, the first thing I do is to help them define their company brand with these questions:

- Why do people stay with your company?
- Why do people want to work for your company?
- Who are your stars; what are the common behaviors and traits that your stars possess?

I often ask them a simple question: What do BMW, [Apple](#), and [Southwest Airlines](#) have in common? They are all exceptional at linking employment and product brand. Apple hires the most creative people to make the most creative products. BMW hires people who are driving enthusiasts to build the ultimate driving machine. Southwest Airlines hires people who have “fun” in their DNA.

These three companies also excel at a practice I call *tri-branding*. In addition to linking both product and employment brand, they also get their customers to sing their praises or live their brand. For instance, I’m a Droid user, and I continue to be surprised at the number of iPhone friends who take delight at “trumping” my Droid apps with their own Apple apps. They’re actually living the Apple brand.

So, Who Should You Be Hiring?

To help leadership teams better understand who they should be hiring, we define the common attributes of the top 10% of their workforce and/or pinpoint common attributes of their most engaged employees. This simple exercise is often the first step in helping a firm identify their employment brand. It uncovers a common set of value-based behaviors and traits at their firms -- traits that are often overlooked in the [hiring process](#).

I've often been shocked at the emphasis placed on education and skills, and not nearly enough on understanding the behaviors and traits that an organization treasures. The most engaged employees are engaged because they happen to possess behaviors and traits the firm values. Understanding who they are within an organization is the first step in understanding and building your employment brand.

Next: [10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps that Drive Results](#)

Author Bio:

Bob Kelleher is the author of the critically acclaimed book, [Louder Than Words - 10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps ...that Drive Results!](#) and is an award winning speaker and consultant. Bob is also the CEO of [The Employee Engagement Group](#), a leader in providing proven and practical services and tools to leadership teams across the globe to help them better engage their employees and drive profitable growth.