

Growing Customer Loyalty

From The Boardroom To The Front Lines

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What is happening to your customer loyalty momentum? Put another way; are your customers more or less loyal than they were 90 days ago and why? How do your customers experience your Brand and Company every day?

Customer loyalty is growing in importance as a topic across industries as more companies are faced with the need to grow customer loyalty utilizing limited resources. Companies are making substantial investments in marketing dollars attempting to build the loyalty of their customer base and acquire new business. The majority of these investments are targeted directly toward incentives or motivating customers.

What is the number one factor that impacts customer loyalty everyday in both large and small companies? We believe that the Front-line employees who directly interact with your customers' everyday have the single largest business impact on loyalty. Front-line employees know the customer best and are key influencers in customer buying decisions. There are a growing number of case studies across several industries that validate this point of view. However, most senior management teams under-invest resources in improving front-line employees' attitudes, engagement and commitment toward their Brand/Company.

How do you "win the hearts" of your front-line employees resulting in building and sustaining greater customer loyalty? It begins with an ***independent***, 360` evaluation of your Employer Brand. This involves "facing reality" of the true unfiltered current employee insights as well as attitudes toward your Company and Brand. The 360` approach assesses your Company's strengths and weaknesses (gaps) from an employee perspective across several Company/Brand dimensions including:

- ***Mission Statement***
- ***Beliefs and Values***
- ***Brand Essence***
- ***Brand Promise***
- ***Trust***
- ***Brand Momentum***
- ***Shared Vision***
- ***Brand Communication***

The assessment will need to measure the overall employee attitudes, engagement and commitment to your Company/Brand as well as highlight any generational differences in Brand attitudes (e.g. Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers, Millennials). The survey questions are tailored specifically to your Company and employees to produce the most accurate result. This assessment cannot be a "cookie cutter" approach with common questions across companies and industries with relative rankings against key variables. Rather, this approach requires ***independent***, in-depth, one-on-one, confidential interviews with Front-line employees to understand the deeper employee insights and attitudes toward your Brand. The critical inputs from these interviews are utilized to complete the 360` assessment of your Employer Brand.

An “Employer Branding Blueprint” with a specific action plan is created from the assessment that leverages key Brand strengths and addresses weaknesses (gaps). The Employer Branding plan is designed to build an “emotional connection” between the employee and your Brand. This critical connection drives Front-line attitudes, engagement and commitment going forward. The barriers to this connection are removed as part of the Employer Branding Blueprint. For example, in one case study it was found that a lack of a shared understanding of the future Company vision was one of the barriers to creating the critical bond between the Boardroom and the Front-line employees. A specific action plan was built to specifically address this issue. An Employee Relationship Plan utilizing a variety of internal communication tools (e.g. two-way open forums, e-newsletters, e-mails, intranet, etc.) can also play a critical role in bringing the action plan alive throughout the organization. Ongoing qualitative and quantitative surveys are conducted every 90 days to measure results vs. plan.

The investment you decide to make into Employer Branding may have one of the highest ROI values relative to almost any other marketing investment choice. The results can be measured by improved Front-line employee performance (e.g. better customer relationships, execution, etc.), acquisition/retention of top talent, lower turnover and higher morale throughout the company. All of these outcomes have a dramatic, positive and sustainable impact on customer loyalty.

Companies that successfully build an Employer Brand Blueprint from the Boardroom to the Front-line employee will continue to grow customer loyalty over time and create a sustainable competitive advantage.

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