

Employees - brand champions of organisations



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21 Nov 2012

Focusing on employee-centric strategy before being client-centric should be the key of every organisation's success. It seems most organisations have made clients their first priority instead of those serving the needs/wants of the clients. Customer advocacy is important but it begins with ensuring that the employees live and breathe the brand before any external stakeholder, which will result in customer satisfaction.

Employees spend most of their time working for the brand, acting as ambassadors would not be too hard should the basics be taken care of. This responsibility has been given solely to marketing gurus, influential famous individuals; there is nothing wrong with all of that however; we need to change our priorities. That can be done through great internal communication programmes like staff engagements through suggestion box/mailbox, staff awards, idea generating competitions etc.

Companies that are getting it right

Companies like First National Bank (FNB) have stayed ahead of the curve of their competitors when it comes to innovative ideas because of its staff members. Its internal programmes show that being employee-centric drives the success of the organisation. FNB has an innovators' initiative for staff members to come up with innovative ideas on how to make the bank successful. The team that comes up with a great idea gets rewarded greatly. That creates the buzz and gives employees something to look forward to.

This initiative acknowledges that the people that know what is best for the clients are people on the ground and allowing them an opportunity to effect change shows that they are valued. According to the FNB website "First National Bank (FNB) has awarded in total R4 million to the 2009 winning ideas through its innovators initiative, in a bid to improve its service delivery and *at the same time motivate staff to higher levels of excellence*".

Unilever South Africa, the number one of South Africa's Top 10 Best Companies to work for in 2011 understands the employee-centric concept. The company believes in up-skilling graduates for strategic areas; performance based bonuses are paid annually and cash prizes known as Oscars that reward on competency and delivery reported on www.africanbusinessreview.co.za.

Creating a culture of commitment

Creating a culture of commitment is not done by micro-managing employees but rather by the treatment that management practise with staff members. Take the South West Airline, an airline company in Dallas Texas, which has staff members that would go an extra mile to do more because of how they are being treated. Herb Kelleher, President of the organisation is known for being inspiring to his employees.

According to the case study on South West Airline written by Terry Hill (University of Oxford) and Alex Hill (University of Kingston) "Kelleher believes in leading by example rather than by direction. If staff works overtime, he turns up in person to thank them. And once a quarter he spends a day in the front line: serving drinks with the cabin crew, working with the baggage handlers, selling tickets, getting to know both passengers and staff."

It starts from the top, once leadership show commitment and appreciation for what the employees are doing - no matter how small the responsibility. From cleaner to the COO, each person is important as all these responsibilities interlink. Staff members turn to go an extra mile and do more than they are paid to do because of way they are being treated.

Linking employees to the brand of the organisation is imperative as well and it is not an impossible task.

ABOUT ZIMKHITHA MQUTHENI

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