

# Employees: credible spokespeople and sources, how to leverage this trust

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Consumers are losing faith in information that brands publish online and on social media as they become increasingly savvy about the myriad of tactics used by marketer to reach them. The rules of engagement with consumers have changed.

But, good news: In the 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer, they found that 52% agreed that employees are credible spokespeople and sources of information. And smart businesses are using employees to get their marketing messages in front of the right people at the right time, in the right way.

Employees are the bridge between a brand or company and their consumers. In a world that is so connected by social media, where transparency is king and information travels globally at the click of a button, the adage “our people are our greatest asset” is truer than ever. Whether it’s the receptionist welcoming visitors or the sales rep visiting potential customers – they all play a role in representing your brand and its vision, mission and values. What is staggering is that few people see themselves in this way; they do not understand the power they have to connect with potential clients, suppliers and employees through advocacy of their company’s brand.



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In March 2016, LinkedIn released some interesting insights on the effect of employee advocacy for brand engagement and how this differs when an employee shares updates versus when a company does. For every update that is shared, LinkedIn discovered that if employees shared a post, they received a click-through rate two times higher than if their employer shared the update.

There is no doubt that employees should always be fully briefed and managed as brand ambassadors. When cultivating a culture of brand ownership amongst employees, you need to dedicate time and ensure everyone at all levels is kept up-to-date on the latest content and product/service developments, as well as how they can bring the company brand to life and off the newspaper print and Twitter feed.

## Creating brand ambassadors

People make their best contributions to organisations that make them feel valued and recognised. The aim of the ideas

below is to touch the hearts and minds of employees; they need to be reached at a personal level as this is where change happens. Leaders should use this as their guiding principle. The over-riding objective for leaders is to create an enabling environment for employees to live and talk about the company brand. It is not about motivating employees; they need to do that themselves. Here are some ideas of how you can create an enabling environment, an environment that your employees will want to tell the world about:

### **Personal environment**

- Address individual inhibitors; to varying degrees, everyone carries “baggage” that keeps them from being their best selves. Conduct a survey to understand these individual inhibitors and to address those that have an impact on employee engagement.
- Provoke paradigm shifts; our behaviours are driven by our perspectives, our thoughts about the world. Facilitate short workshops to challenge employees to see their worlds in a way that aligns with your corporate goals

### **Social environment**

- Create a platform for employees to reward each other for living the brand, in real time and with immediate return (a move away from the formal performance reviews that everyone dreads)
- Build the brand through constant messaging; we all respond to subtle cues, subliminal messages that enter our consciousness without us even realising. Develop a portfolio of “products” that reinforce the behaviours that will support your goals.

### **Virtual environment**

- Provide guidelines and a clear social media strategy that can be followed by everyone who is employed by the company. Too many people are still ignorant to the power of the net. Outline to employees the key messages that should be communicated via Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media platforms.
- You're not managing your reputation online. Your customers are. If you haven't figured it out yet, not everyone is saying nice things about your business (as much as you'd like to think that they are.) More online brand ambassadors mean more positive comments, reviews and referrals to your business.
- An effective way to break through clutter is to work through people's social networks on and off-line. Often with Facebook ads it takes thousands of impressions before you get just one click. The average click through rate on social media posts for individuals is a lot higher. It's estimated that on average two friends will click on your content.

Notice that each of the ideas above is focused on how individuals act and react to one another. There is nothing here that would be achieved in a PowerPoint presentation in a boardroom.

## **Pitfalls to avoid**

Before you start, beware these pitfalls:

- Not everything will resonate with everyone so you need to be agile in situations where you see an idea failing. Stop and try something different with the people concerned.
- Cultures are not built from the top down. Whatever you do needs to be driven by your employees. Find influencers and ambassadors throughout the business to lead change from within.
- People are easily overstimulated and overwhelmed. Keep your plans simple so that they are easy to implement and easy to maintain.
- Behaviours are only sustainable if the environment supports them. Do not try to implement something without the infrastructure to measure results and celebrate successes.
- Teach your brand ambassadors the art of professional copywriting. What they publish is a reflection of your brand, so they also need to understand your communication guidelines and protocols. Your internal marketing and communication department, if you have one, will need to upskill your employees. They will then have to relinquish some degree of control over corporate communication.

## ABOUT DEIRDRE ELPHICK-MOORE

Deirdre Elphick-Moore, has an Honours Degree in Psychology and over 10 years of international experience in human capital management at Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. Co-founding The Office Coach in 2009, she now focuses on personal and workplace effectiveness training and development. Her relaxed, engaging style encourages people to learn more, remember more and apply more in their workplaces, as well as inspiring to consistently better themselves in the work place. Contact her on [deirdre@theofficecoach.co.za](mailto:deirdre@theofficecoach.co.za).

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