

Delivering the Brand

Nine Principles of Change Management

Scores have written about the making of great brands. Much of the writing focuses on the clear communicated benefit, the sharp understanding of consumers' lives, the need for reach and frequency, and the rest of the brand communication bible. Less has been written about the critical importance of the promise being delivered consistently, clearly, memorably, and uniquely in the customer experience. As we have written in other Thoughticles, the brand is the experience, the experience is the brand.

Where does this take us as we move squarely into 21st century brand management? For one, who owns and is responsible for the brand? The CEO? The CMO? The head of advertising? One could argue that brand ownership does indeed rest with individuals in roles like this. Someone has to raise his or her hand and say, "I am responsible for the positioning of this product or company. I own the promise at the heart of our brand."

But the brand promise is more than the essence of what the company or product stands for. For it to have any realized meaning, it has to be delivered. And, that's where ownership needs to be re-thought. Ownership of brand delivery rests not just on the individuals mentioned, it rests within each and every person in the organization. This notion is what has spawned ideas like "brand ambassadors," where each person owns the responsibility to deliver the brand promise.

If you think creating a market-differentiating brand promise is hard, try implementing the promise throughout the organization so that everyone is clear about what it means, what they need to do, the attitudes they need to model, and how they need to "live it." Executing a brand promise that takes an organization from a certain,

accustomed culture and way of doing things into a different place, requiring different behaviors and processes, is not to be underestimated in its challenge, or its payoff. When one looks at stories of great brand delivery, many firms could come to mind – Amazon, Apple, Nordstrom's, Disney, Zappos, Southwest Airlines – add your favorites to the list. What you may likely find is that these exemplary companies were in large part born that way. Indeed you might point to the founder or early CEO who pointed the way, and through ceaseless passion and conviction shaped the culture and the brand, and everybody who came on board.

What is often missing in these exemplary brand stories are the ones that had to confront the need to deliver a new brand different from the current one. This task takes us into the land of change management. The task for re-branding may range from being modest to an extensive undertaking. For example, it may range from fine tuning the meaning of the brand to completely changing the organizational DNA. In either case, there are principles that Hansa brand delivery professionals have relied upon to affect this type of change. The principles apply to any type of change; how extensively they need to be implemented will vary based on the degree of change required.

1. Leaders Lead The Way. It sometimes is a weary cliché to say the CEO is responsible and must provide the direction for X, Y, or Z. But, in the realm of organizational change, that is where it all must start. In consulting with organizations, I can usually tell what the CEO is like based on conversations with managers and staff throughout the company. Conversely, I can often predict what the organization is like by talking to the CEO and the rest of the executive team. Funny how that works.

So, in delivering a brand and creating an organization that can live the brand, leaders must lead the way. Leadership buy-in and role modeling of the brand promise is paramount. Nothing will more quickly undermine efforts to get people to live the brand than leaders who don't walk the talk, who don't exhibit what it means to deliver the brand, or who don't communicate the brand essence and hold people accountable for the brand.

It starts with the CEO, but leadership responsibility does not end there. Indeed, it has to cascade through multiple levels of leadership in most organizations so that brand management is built into the very fabric of organizational practice.

2. Change Is A Process. Fundamental to delivering the brand promise and affecting organizational change is recognizing that change is a process – not an event. Many organizations get this wrong, fueled by their desire to “get the brand out there quickly.” Perhaps the strategy might be to hold an employee brand rally, or send out the new brand book, or call an all - employee meeting.

These steps are all fine, but insufficient. Just because we say something is so, does not make it so. There has to be a deliberate commitment to see organizational change as a process that transpires over time, not with one event, but usually a system of actions designed to not just communicate, but to act in different ways that express the brand promise in daily work.

3. Change Requires Alignment. Alignment means that people are heading in the same direction. People understand and can verbalize in their own words what the brand is about, where the organization is heading, and what needs to be different. One mistake companies often make is to tell people, “You are empowered; go

forth and conquer, be our brand ambassadors” without developing the needed grounding in what the brand means and what is different. Empowering employees is a good thing, but doing it without the needed alignment

Nine Principles of Change Management To Deliver The Brand

1. Leaders lead the way.
2. Change is a process, not an event.
3. Change requires alignment.
4. People adopt change when they see the WIIFM, “what’s in it for me.”
5. Behavior change requires accountability and reinforcement.
6. Managers need to be coaches.
7. Communication needs to be purposeful.
8. Learning needs to have an action component.
9. Progress should be measured.

can create organizational chaos – a lot of well intentioned people doing a lot of well intentioned things, with the result nowhere near a consistent delivery of the brand.

4. People Adopt Change When They See The “What’s In It For Me,” the WIIFM. I recall working with Harrah’s the global gaming leader (now Caesar’s). Their top executives made sure that all employees could clearly draw a line of sight from what their brand meant (warm and friendly service for one thing), what it meant for the customer, and what it meant for employees – a better and more enjoyable place to work and a more

rewarding place to work. Employees were incentivised with cash bonuses based on customer satisfaction with their gaming experience. Employees could be overheard talking about their plans for what they were going to do with their bonuses in a given month. WIIFM, can mean bonuses and compensation, but also a more enjoyable work environment and a place that is thriving because of customers responding well to a well-delivered brand. By the way, when implementing your brand, do not forget an essential point – affecting the employee experience is just as important as the customer experience. They work together to deliver the brand.

5. Behavior Change Requires Accountability And Reinforcement.

Have you ever coached a kid's team? Did you ever succeed by telling or showing a youth how to do something like a swing of the bat or a stroke in the pool without also correcting the child's attempts to try the new technique? Probably not. How important was praise for efforts in trying and for getting it right? (Answer: Very.) How effective was chastisement and punishment for making a mistake? (Answer: Destructive.) Adults in companies are not kids, but the principles of changing human behavior that we apply with kids carry some commonality with adults. Simply put, we need to correct wrong behaviors and reinforce good ones. There are differences, however, with adult learning that we need to consider, as explained more below.

6. Managers Need To Coach. Coaching adults requires the ability to provide feedback, a demonstration of what should be done, and an understanding of what adults need in order to change. Adults learn best when they feel they have a voice and are valued for their own individual worth. They need a chance in the coaching process to share their ideas and ask questions. They need a chance to express their interpretations of the brand. Managers who coach well recognize that people believe most what they hear themselves say.

7. Communications Need To Be Purposeful.

Delivering the brand requires a strategy for communications that recognizes people absorb new direction and learn through different means. Some people might be readers, some might be watchers, others might be doers. The communications strategy needs to consider multiple methods and channels to allow people to “get it” such as intranet blogs, conversations with the CEO, store-level back-room posters, flyers, briefings, workshops, presentations, and so forth. The strategy also needs to consider who needs to know what, when. It should consider how to communicate crisply in a world where people are increasingly intolerant of anything more than sound bursts. It needs to thoughtfully consider what needs to be reinforced continually, and how new employees will be immersed.

8. Learning Needs To Have An Action Component.

In order for people to learn, they must do. People need an opportunity in delivering the brand to actually try out new behaviors or implement new processes. Then, they need a chance to examine what they did and reflect on whether it accomplished what they wanted, or whether they could make adjustments to further improve. For example, suppose we wanted people in a hotel to deliver a different brand experience through, in part, their maid service. Perhaps we want the maids to make guests feel pampered and recognized. We might have training for maids that enables them to: understand what recognizing guests means for the brand, generate ideas on how to do it, go to guest rooms to try it, and reconvene to share experiences and best practices on how it worked.

Maybe the new behavior was as simple (or hard) as calling a guest by name (let's assume the maid had a guest list with names by room). This could be a totally uncomfortable behavior for some maids to interact with the guest, but having the chance to try it (say in a training session role play to start), and then for real with

feedback from a supervisor coach, and a chance to reflect on how it made the guest feel and how it made the maid feel can take the learning to the next level – behavior change.

9. Progress Should Be Measured. At some point people will ask whether the new brand is in fact taking hold and whether it is making a difference. Planning at the outset of the brand delivery strategy for how to develop and track performance measures will go miles toward answering these questions. A more compelling case of the actual change that has occurred can be made if grounded on a pre-and post-delivery comparison.

Beyond tracking and reporting progress, measurement also can act as a motivating force for change. People like to keep score; they like to see how progress is being made. Tracking progress can actually create momentum in the organizational change process. Further, it can highlight where gaps might need to be filled, for example, an organizational unit, store, or restaurant that might be underperforming relative to others. Armed with facts and data, one can then intervene to help, diagnose sources of mischief, find high performers who might serve as mentors, and make improvements to get the underperforming unit “on brand.”

Lastly, I would like to stress how delivering the brand and affecting the needed change takes time. If you think you will deliver a new brand, change the organization, and

then move on to other things in a couple months, forget it. **The organization not only needs brand ambassadors, it needs brand stewards – to keep the brand alive, ensure its consistent delivery, and keep it fresh and current over time. If there is no commitment to this, the organization could well be like a bungee cord and spring back to wherever it was before, and that’s usually an undesirable place.**

The rewards of delivering a differentiated brand can be enormous. Think of companies you know, and ask yourself, let’s do here in our organization something that can be even better than what they have done. Let’s deliver a brand promise that lifts the spirits of our customers and our employees. Let’s make our brand promise come alive! Is it hard? Yes. Is it worthwhile? Yes.

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