

LOST IN THE LABYRINTH: BRAND ENERGY POWER AND VISION CLARITY

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Engage the workforce in fueling the brand to change internal conversations and get the energy flowing in the right direction.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *In this installment of the Lost in the Labyrinth series, I focus on Brand Energy Power, an organization's internal furnace that breaks down silos and builds brand momentum at every level. But how do we build Brand Energy and continue to fuel the fire? Vision clarity stokes the furnace and builds into each business unit a sense of connection to the rest of the enterprise.*

Brand Energy Power™ is the internal furnace that fuels the Customer Experience. It is the result of the deliberate actions of leaders within a company to apply vision, strategy, business drivers and budget to operational execution across functions throughout the enterprise. Brand Energy Power breaks down silos and builds brand momentum at every level. This creates a contagious power that moves throughout an organization; this power attracts and retains customers and staff, enhances brand penetration, and protects revenue and profits.

Vision Clarity

So, how do we build brand energy? First and foremost, we must have a clear vision because vision and brand go hand in hand. Vision is not tangible. It is not setting a goal of selling 30 widgets by the end of the month. Vision is about your future. Yet, often when you mention vision, eyes roll and the mind goes on vacation. Cynicism rears its ugly head and vision becomes simply a joke. And in some cases for good reason!

Let me give you an example. I came across a vision video on a major corporation's web site while doing some research. The CEO had obviously rented some studio space, filled it

with some employees (all of whom wore name tags), and videotaped his pronouncement of the new company vision for permanent record. He opens with a question, using this really monotone voice. With ridiculously calculated gestures, the CEO asks what the vision is for this company going forward. He replies to himself and his audience, "It is three words: energy, growth, leadership." He asks his audience to "think about what these words mean."

The CEO continues in this disingenuous manner, demonstrating everyone's worst nightmare of company visions. The audience appears completely disengaged; it is truly unbelievable that the video posted on their website. The speech is so rehearsed and the gestures so contrived that the message comes off as false. This is the very kind of display that fuels the cynic's view of vision.

There is no mention of "how," of responsibilities or of operational elements. And no mention of breaking down barriers or the building blocks to success. It is pure executive hallucination at its finest, and likely at its most expensive. The audience is bored and is looking blankly at this man. Yet, the video pan of the audience remains in the footage, including at one point capturing a man actually asleep. (I guess you could call the video

authentic from that perspective.)

In the CEO's final comments on leadership he asks a series of questions, none of which he answers. He repeatedly asks if leadership SHOULD be this or SHOULD be that, without ever providing any clarity whatsoever for this vision.

Well, I am here to say that you can SHOULD all over yourself and it achieves nothing. Vision is not about shoulds; it needs to be about clarity. Leaders need to explain exactly how the vision is going to be operationalized at each and every level. Otherwise, you will breed cynicism where there needs to be clarity.

Executives and everyone else need to put the vision to use to break down silos so that crossfunctional collaboration is organizationally supported. Technology investments, process improvements, product performance, and even hiring and training must be aligned to the vision to fuel the customer experience at all touchpoints.

Vision clarity MUST BE both reasonable and achievable. I can have a vision of being in great shape by Friday; but that is probably neither reasonable nor achievable. To be effective, vision must be right. It must be right for you personally and it must be right for the company.

The biggest killer to vision is inconsistency, where one thing is said and another is done. We've all seen upper management bring in the experts to analyze the company, decide how the company wants to be perceived, and go on to publish the deadly "vision memo" or poster. Or as in the previous case, a vision video is published with no strategy behind the execution of the vision. It then falls on deaf ears. People have heard it all before and their cynicism is reaffirmed.

Vision clarity is the job of leaders at every level. They must link daily activities, projects and initiatives back to the vision. It is kind of like back to the future because vision is how we see ourselves in the future. Everything we do every day is either in alignment with that or it is not. It is everyone's job to get on board with the future.

Vision has to be valued, it has to be real, and above all, it has to be clear to be effective. In the long run, having vision clarity brings costs down and revenues up because operational efficiency and effectiveness is widely known as a critical success factor to

long-term growth. Vision clarity spurs brand energy and building brand energy is every single person's job. Go ahead and say it out loud: "I am responsible for Brand Energy Power!" (That may be a bit much, but you get the idea.)

The Branded Experience

Link your brand to all contact center activities. This can be particularly powerful for quality monitoring and coaching. I think we can all agree that not many folks are born with coaching skills. Far too many organizations willingly assign coaching duties to supervisors without considering the skills requisite to influencing real change. The fact that a person can use a form and determine if the agent "did or didn't" do something is a far cry from being able to influence or persuade that person to change.

Framing feedback within brand parameters takes the coaches "opinion" and bolsters it with clarity. It become clarity when supervisors are able to pose questions like, "How does what I observed support our customer experience?" In this scenario, brand behaviors are reinforced. Of course there is an assumption in this scenario that a branded experience has been defined and the associated behaviors identified and documented to aid the

coach in achieving improvements.

This branded experience also applies to internal, crossfunctional relationships. No business unit exists in isolation, regardless of operational silos. Silos that have been erected slow the burn of brand energy.

How much power is your organization's brand energy furnace generating? The mission of vision clarity is to stoke the brand energy furnace and to build into each business unit a sense of connection to the rest of the business. If there is a backlog in the warehouse, no matter how "nice" the agents in the contact center are when angry customers call, there is little that can be done to salvage the brand. At that point the agents are pretty much only "authorized to apologize."

However, the contact center can report on the impact of the backlog. It can demonstrate the impact on cost and experience by dedicating resources to analyze more than the traditional contact center metrics. This is the kind of situation that some contact center leaders shy away from reporting because they don't want to "throw anyone under the bus." (Anyone except the customer that is.)

Vision clarity must be an obsession across the enterprise. Operationalizing the brand fuels brand energy via targeted coaching, streamlined processes, optimized technol-

ogy, crossfunctional alignment, and executive support.

Take a look around your operation. How is the energy? If it is low and needs help, try really hard to make refueling FUN. Have a Brand Fueling station; post a good customer story or collect a branded item. Conduct a contest: What Did I Learn About Our Customers This Week? Do this every week and you will have valuable intelligence to share.

Begin bravely to minimize productivity metric "coaching" in exchange for grown-up and professional discussions about what the contact center is trying to achieve. In this model, your agents would no longer be labeled "tardy"; they would be given a "ticket" for a Vision Violation. When agents achieve a goal or objective they could earn a Vision Victory or Experience Excellence "badge." Be creative and have some fun delivering on the branded experience!

If you truly work toward engaging the workforce in fueling the brand, the conversations will change and the energy will flow in the right direction! •



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