

# Engaging Employees to Deliver a Branded Customer Experience

A process that requires strategic planning,  
dialogue and cross-functional collaboration

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## Introduction

When we think about what makes a brand great, we often define it through our own experiences. And while we may experience brands through a logo, advertising or websites, the most critical touchpoints are people.

When the people in an organization understand their brand – who they are, and what they stand for – they create truly memorable experiences that ultimately drive loyalty and enhance business performance. In this sense, the corporate brand provides a powerful engine to align employee behavior with the brand and create a differentiated customer experience.

However, creating a unique customer experience is not as simple as it sounds. Employees do not suddenly snap into action once they've read a brand booklet or watched a movie at a company event. Engaging employees to deliver on the brand is a process that requires strategic planning, dialogue and cross-functional collaboration.

It begins the moment you start thinking about redefining what your organization stands for, and needs to be sustained over the long term. It means taking steps to engage leaders and key influencers to act as role models, clearly defining brand behaviors, creating relevant communications, investing in function-specific training materials and aligning the organization around the brand (and ultimately around the customer).

In this paper, we'll explore five ways that organizations can engage employees to deliver on the customer experience. While this is not intended to be comprehensive, it should provide an overview of the complexity of employee engagement and how it can be integrated holistically into a branding project.

The connection between customer loyalty and employee engagement began over 20 years ago when James Heskett and his colleagues at Harvard Business School created the Service Profit Chain.

The links in the Service Profit model are as follows: Profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. Loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of services provided to customers. Value is created by satisfied, loyal and productive employees. Employee satisfaction, in turn, results primarily from high-quality support services and policies that enable employees to deliver an experience to customers that is promised by their brand. This groundbreaking work continues to be validated by new research.

For example, Gallup recently found that more engaged workplaces are:

- 50% more likely to have low staff turnover
- 56% more likely to have above-average customer loyalty
- 38% more likely to have above-average productivity
- 27% more likely to report above-average profitability.

Another recent US study validates these measurements. It has been shown that the financial performance of organizations is significantly correlated with employee engagement. It was reported that, for the typical S&P 500 business, a noticeable improvement in employee engagement was associated with a \$95 million increase in revenue.<sup>1</sup>

**If the links between employee engagement and customer experience are so obvious, why don't we think about it more when we're beginning a branding project? And what does it really mean? When, where, and how do we begin engaging employees?**



**The Service Profit Chain**  
Heskett, Sasser, Schlesinger/Harvard Business School

<sup>1</sup> *Management Issues*, February 2007

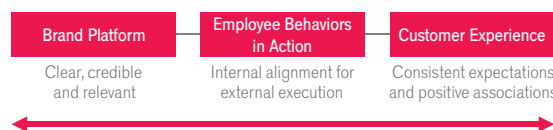
## Five steps to success

Through our work with global clients, we advocate the following five steps to develop employee engagement in times of change.

### Step 1: Engage leadership and managers as role models for behavior

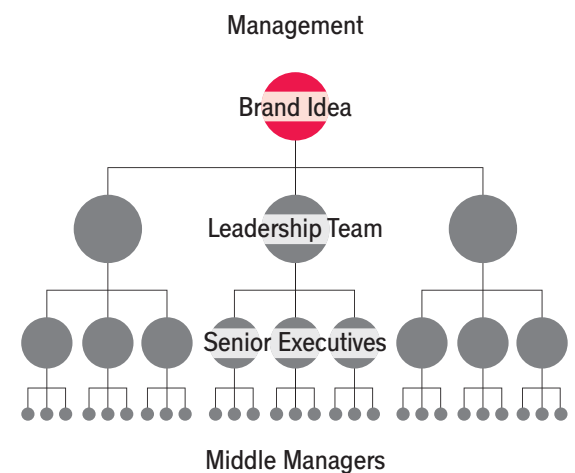
Change starts at the top. As we know intuitively, it is essential to secure buy-in from the CEO. We also know that the leadership team must be aligned to be credible. As we often learn in employee interviews, any misalignment at upper levels is readily obvious to employees. If the leadership team is actively engaged throughout the process, they are much more likely to become role models and frequent communicators of the brand message internally. Managers are seen as role models for behavior, and employees will not change unless their manager changes. Senior managers must understand what they need to do differently and act on this quickly. They must be encouraged to live these behavioral changes, and be rewarded and recognized for their efforts.

The corporate brand provides a powerful engine for aligning employee behavior with the core purpose and promise of the organization to help create a differentiated customer experience.



### Step 2: Involve the right employees as completely as possible in the process

Often, organizations fail at employee engagement simply because they don't segment their internal audiences with the same discernment as their external audiences. At Interbrand, we work closely with staff in communications and human resources (HR) to identify the most influential employees, by level and function and then specifically by name. Since we can't always communicate everything to everyone, we want to set a strategy that empowers credible, influential employees to cascade information to others, and to provide these influencers with the tools and training they need to deliver this information effectively.

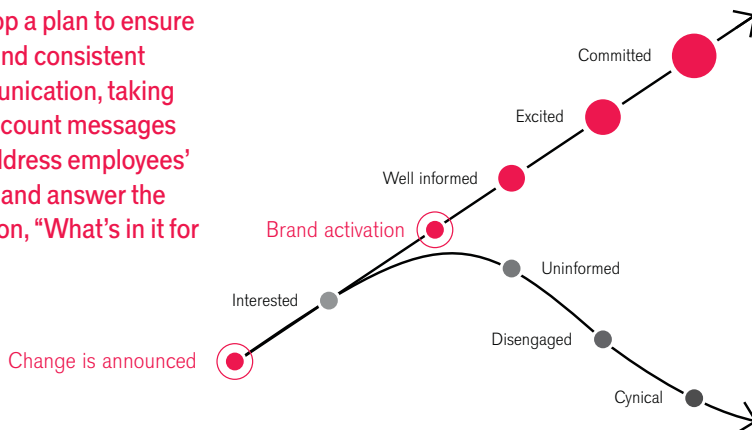


Middle managers are a critical link to employee engagement.

## Step 3: Develop a communications strategy and plan

We know that clear, consistent communication is essential to the success of any project. But it's surprising how many organizations move right into tactical execution without creating a comprehensive communication strategy that keeps employees informed and excited about the project and what it means to them. Decide early in the process what needs to be communicated, and to whom, and what is still 'work in progress.' Develop a plan to ensure ongoing communication, taking into account messages that address employees' needs and answer the question, "What's in it for me?"

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## Step 4: Align the organization around the brand

Involving HR and communication teams in a branding effort is absolutely fundamental to brand alignment. To ensure credibility, organizations must redesign HR processes and procedures to support any changes in values and behaviors. This includes areas such as recruitment, orientation, training, promotion, compensation and reward and

recognition. Align policy and practices around the brand, and clearly define the criteria and behavioral expectations for areas such as compensation and recruitment to reflect your commitment to the brand. Then, put a process in place to measure, reward and recognize the right actions and behaviors – because what gets measured, gets done.

## Step 5: Provide the right tools, training and resources for employees

Throughout the branding process, it's crucial to provide information and training that builds employee understanding, trust and confidence in the changes that will be forthcoming. Key 'influencers' and 'change agents' need training to empower them to engage others. Creating a long-term plan to evolve and institutionalize these tools and resources is imperative to sustaining momentum. We recommend that brand training be integrated into ongoing sessions for brand ambassadors, leadership teams, sales or customer-facing employees, communications and human resources.



## Conclusion

Connecting employees to the customer experience and consistently informing them about their vital role as part of a trusted team are both critical to branding success. By following a systematic, strategic process, you can move your employees from awareness of the brand to acceptance of the brand attributes and adoption of corresponding behaviors. The rewards can be sustained success in delivering the promised customer experience, leading to loyalty and security of earnings.

Founded in 1974, Interbrand serves the world with over 30 offices in over 20 countries. Working in partnership with our clients we combine rigorous strategy and analysis with world-class design and creativity.

We recognize the importance of brand in this increasingly competitive business environment and tailor our services to client needs. Our services include brand analytics, brand valuation, strategy, naming and verbal

identity, corporate identity, packaging design, retail design, communications, brand engagement and digital branding tools.

We enable our clients to achieve greater success by helping them to create and manage brand value.

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