thenetworkone: how to attract and retain talent

a collection of essays from independent agencies and employer branding specialists
In an age where uncertainty is the new certainty, agency staff acquisition and retention remain high on the agenda of many independent agency owners.

There is one thing we can be sure of - your agency’s culture, behavior and reputation will influence your ability to attract and retain the best staff.

Curating a positive working environment and reputation is known as employer branding, and a strong employer brand is key for staff acquisition and retention.

There are several ways that agencies can improve their employer branding.

Firstly, how diverse is your office? Showing diversity in your staff is highly attractive for potential employees; more importantly, it ensures you have a mix of skills, personalities and points of view, which leads to better and more creative work.

There should be variety in how you promote your company. Video marketing is a useful tool to show potential employees what life at your agency is like. If you have a friendly team and a company culture you’re proud of, video marketing will highlight this.

Of course, it doesn’t stop there: retaining your team is equally important. One of the best ways to do this is to make sure your employees are having a positive emotional experience at work. Try to make sure the environment isn’t too stressful and have mental health support in place for those inevitable hectic periods. Not only will this help with staff retention, but their work is likely to be better, too.

In this essay collection, independent agency leaders and experts from around the world will provide advice on how to improve your employer brand and, in turn, how to attract and retain a talented and happy team.
Agencies are filled with different roles with different, sometimes very extravagant, titles. Each title has its own description or a job profile which then describes what this person should be doing. The profile is predefined, and person is found for the role. However, aren’t we all different although we have a similar title? What if we could work in a role where we can get the most out of it with a smile on our faces?

Finnish ice-hockey juniors just won gold in the World Champions. Coach Jussi Ahokas created a team from scratch by thinking about the personalities, who plays well with whom, who can best support the number one scorer etc. He built the team around each player’s personal strengths and ambitions and how they fitted into the team. No room for lonely rock stars. Results were amazing. The team was united since the first game. It requires a deep knowledge of each personality to discover their superpowers.

“No room for lonely rock stars”

The ideology of creating a perfect team in businesses needs to have a similar process. Each person is hand-picked to take care of the role in the team, where they are known to have the most experience, ambition and skill. Sounds simple, but in a world of thousands of titles, this ideology falls behind into everyday routine.

We started to really work on this dilemma last fall when we created our own agency purpose. It continued the work that we had done around our values, the core of the brand and Mission & Vision. Basic stuff for our clients, but we had not done this exercise properly for ourselves. The whole purpose-tsunami that went across the marketing and advertising world last year set the scene for us too. What is really the purpose for us? As we are an integrated agency with a 20 strong core team and over 200 creative specialists working on demand, our job is mostly to create perfect teams for our clients based on the ambitions, skills and experiences that each person has.

The recipe is quite simple and eye opening. The work starts with yourself. What is relevant to yourself? Then we take the values of the company and start stirring. Add your business model and future plans into the soup and go back to yourself. There you have it. We were able to create our own purpose into one phrase which is relevant to our values, business model and to each person who is part of the Supersonians.

Recipe for finding the purpose:
1. Discover yourself, what is important to you?
2. Look into your company values, what is important to us?
3. What is unique to your own business model?
4. What are your future plans?
5. Reflect that back to yourself - is it relevant to me?

Through this exercise we found our own purpose: “We want to free people to create added value through their own superpowers and ambitions.” The next phase is to discover all the superpowers within the organisation and start acting on them. Results will be amazing. I promise.

Samppa Vilkuna is Co-founder & CEO at Superson in Helsinki, Finland

www.thenetworkone.com
5 Ways to Increase the Impact of Your Employee Engagement

According to Deloitte, “employee engagement has become the top issue on the minds of business leaders”. Not really a surprise when Gallup’s 2017 poll showed that a measly 15% of employees worldwide are engaged in their jobs. So what do organisations need to do to up their game? We believe there are 5 key things to consider when developing employee engagement programmes:

**Up the stakes**
It’s time to stop treating employee engagement as the poor relation in marketing. By putting the same thinking, energy and creative focus into internal campaigns as you would to consumer facing ones, the chances of successfully connecting with employees and getting them to feel motivated and involved with your employer brand are far higher. Attention spans for everyone are dipping to a 6 second low, so a poster campaign in reception isn’t going to cut through the daily grind and deliver impact.

**“It’s time to stop treating employee engagement as the poor relation in marketing”**

**Invite participation**
Unsurprisingly the level of involvement employees feel in their organisation directly correlates to how engaged they are – but this doesn’t mean only encouraging the advocates and fans to be part of your internal campaigns, it means inviting EVERYONE to have a voice. Including detractors, because once they become part of the conversation and feel they are listened to, you are already a step closer to moving them from critic to convinced.

**Story do – don’t just storytell**
Create experiences that fully engage your employees and you will deliver a more effective internal culture. A 2015 study by Glassdoor found companies that focus on employee experience beat the return on the S&P 500 by as much as 122% between 2009 and 2014. And this extends to how you run internal campaigns – it’s not just enough to tell a good story about your brand, you need to bring it to life through experiences that can engage on multiple levels.

**Lead from the front**
Global studies reveal that 79% of people who quit their jobs cite ‘lack of appreciation’ as their reason for going. People don’t leave companies; they leave bosses. Make sure your leaders have the tools and skills to be good leaders and then put them front and centre of your employee engagement activity – because if your leaders aren’t seen to be driving your internal culture, why should anyone else bother to get involved?

**Make it count**
Obvious though it seems, if you don’t measure the effectiveness of your employee engagement activity; how do you know if it works? Continually evaluating, optimising and refining what you do and getting a gauge on what is working, and the impact you are having on your employees is the only way to see if you are shifting the dial.

In the words of the highly respected Harvard Professor and leading organisation change expert John Kotter, ‘The central issue is never strategy, structure, culture, or systems. The core of the matter is always about changing the behaviour of people.’ And that’s what good employee engagement does.

---

Charlotte Bunyan is Head of Strategy at Collider in London, UK.

---

www.thenetworkone.com
When Like-Minded Folk Come Together: How TeamAsia Built and Nurtured a Family from a Company

TeamAsia is an integrated marketing experience (IME) agency that takes brands to the next-level experience of visibility. For 27 years, we have been looking after our partners’ needs, crafting impactful solutions that allow them to actively engage their audiences through events, public relations, digital and creative services. We’re all about meaningful connections that elevate brands and businesses.

Since our inception in 1992, we have helped industries and brands grow in the Philippines and across Asia. We’re proud to have been part of ushering in tech giants like IBM, Intel and SAP, working with global brands like Google, Uber and USAID, as well as nation-building efforts with the Philippine IT-BPM industry and the Department of Trade and Industry. TeamAsia also organizes international conferences which gather representatives from the private and public sectors to discuss global trends in various fields like the International IT-BPM Summit, ASEAN Creative Cities Forum and Exhibition, and the East Asian Insurance Congress.

We owe our success to the people behind these next-level experiences – the most passionate, dedicated, and determined group of individuals we fondly call TeamAsians. When like-minded folk come together, great things happen and we believe it’s all about the culture.

“When like-minded folk come together, great things happen”

Five core philosophies embody TeamAsia’s culture: (1) We seek to inspire and be inspired. The laid back but passionate environment makes TeamAsia the perfect community for work-life balance. (2) We think big. We create magic by making substance and visibility meet, be it through in-depth research or big ideas. (3) We believe that driving passion at work and at play keep us going beyond limits. (4) We strive to create a bright environment, where our team and our partners feel elated about the things we are doing. (5) And we live! We give back not only to society, but most importantly to our people.

Our culture remains strong through monthly team engagements called “Pop Up!”. Pop Up lets us take a break from the daily agency grind to bond, share stories and welcome our new members. We do activities created by TeamAsians for TeamAsians like our annual summer getAway and #TAkot Halloween party, Jedi sessions on the latest trends in our fields, learning sessions on personal branding and piggy bank sessions for smarter financing. We’re very proud to have been recognized for these special moments by the Philippine Quill Awards.

TeamAsians are also committed to helping children pursue education through our My Dream in a Shoebox campaign. We repurpose old shoeboxes and fill them with school supplies for underprivileged communities. On our 10th year, we distributed over 65,000 shoeboxes nationwide and supported 100 scholars in farflung communities with the help of our amazing partners and volunteers.

We’re all about meaningful connections – that’s what our culture is about. Being in the creative and marketing field can be tough; but, when like-minded individuals come together, inspiration and collaboration take the work to a whole new level. Just like our mission of bringing our brands to the next-level experience.

…”

Beatriz Lim is Managing Director at TeamAsia in Manila, Philippines
We look to attract and retain people who are not only smart, solid marketers, but also wired to work collaboratively and solve problems. Four ingredients help us accomplish this:

**Transparency.** Openness is a crucial aspect of our culture. It helps us attract the right people, and it keeps them engaged. One of the practices we keep disciplined about is opening the books. At each quarter close we hold an all-hands meeting during which we share the details of the agency’s financial results and distribute a set portion of profit evenly to the team. People appreciate the bonus, but they get more excited about seeing the results of their hard work, sharing learnings, hearing where the agency is headed, and discussing what needs fixing.

**Vertical Focus.** We dedicate teams to industries, giving people the opportunity to become experts not only in their craft but also in their clients’ businesses. They dive deep into the vertical’s challenges and opportunities. They play significant roles in identifying the players we’d like to work with and winning them as clients. They gain confidence and a point of view, which they bring to campaign strategies.

We balance this approach with cross-industry collaboration and regular rotations. Team members need new challenges, clients need a fresh set of eyes on their business, and we need to break silos in order to spread learnings across the agency.

**Team Leads.** Members across departments have the chance to interview to become dedicated team leads, giving them responsibility for client relationships, program success and engagement profitability. In doing this, we break the tradition of account leads being solely responsible for the business side. The client gets an accountable team and a robust strategy, and the team member gains new skills and challenges.

For team members who prefer to focus solely on their craft, we offer an alternative: becoming a practice lead to help the agency evolve its offering.

**No Time Tracking.** Years ago, we eliminated time tracking from our lives. We made the move with clients in mind. They hire us not just to get campaigns off the ground but to understand their business, provide a point of view, develop a thoughtful strategy, and adjust the program mix as things change. All of that was difficult to do in 15-minute increments and unpleasant change order conversations. So, we replaced the currency of time with an allocated team and a modified agile approach to regularly identify and reprioritize workplans with client agreement.

Of course, the absence of time tracking quickly became a selling point to team members as well. This is a no-brainer: nobody likes tracking time.

None of these practices have been perfected. We routinely search for the daily rhythm that allows a storytelling lead to dive deep into creating an asset while fulfilling her team lead responsibilities. With no time-sheets, at times a team member has to wade through an ambiguous scope discussion with a client. The good news is, entrepreneurial team members like to be part of a work in progress.

...
Our Agency Model: What We Learned from Working with Startups

When I left my network agency job to found RED², I couldn’t have imagined the shape it would eventually take. I knew it had to be different and I had over a decade of learnings to draw on, of course. But little did I know, it would be from working with startups - our clients - that I would learn some of my most valuable lessons. Everyone knows attracting and motivating people is important. The best agencies have the best talent and so it’s always a key battleground when it comes to competitive advantage. Yet the high turnover in our industry suggests we’re still not getting it right - and long hours, overwork and burnout have become bywords for some.

It was a wake-up call, then, when I started working with startups and experienced first-hand their differing approach to people. Of course, there are good start-ups and less good start-ups, just like in the agency world - but I noticed some clear themes that became a fundamental part of our agency model.

For me, it all comes down to building your business around your team, rather than trying to fit them into a preexisting structure. This has a knock-on effect for processes and career progression that, we’ve found, galvanized our business.

**Processes built around people**

This sounds simple enough, right? But I bet we can all remember working somewhere with illogical workflows or an outdated, archaic structure.

When we first opened our doors, one of our clients was keen to work extremely closely with us. Even going so far as to share resources such as our agency workflow planning and office space. They were a start-up and as their business grew organically, so did our way of working.

Rather than applying rigid processes, we only use what’s needed - even getting rid of some traditional agency processes and adapting others as we go. We now use workflow tools like Basecamp and Jira across our client portfolio as well as other more specialist platforms, such as Airtable for collaboration and content creation.

We’ve effectively adopted work patterns more typical of a startup than a marketing agency.

Giving your people the tools to collaborate is only half of the equation, though. We physically built our agency around a dedicated space: the RED² Collaboration Hub. Open. Efficient. Collaborative. It includes a bar, lunch area as well as dedicated meeting and ‘break out’ areas, but it’s so much more than your typical open plan office design.

Here, we’ve kickstarted a digital community by providing a communal space to meet and share ideas. This includes not only our team and clients, but digitally-inclined members of the local community. It’s also where we host presentations, training and networking events to bring cutting-edge digital thought to the region. We’ve previously had attendees from the likes of Google, Facebook, LinkedIn and Comscore to share their knowledge and be inspired in turn.

**Fluid career progression**

The other great facet of start-ups I noticed was their approach to career progression. Skillsets tend to be broader, less siloed and more fluid. It’s completely different to the, often transactional, way most agencies operate.

By focusing on each team member’s individuality, you get the most from them. It’s common for start-ups to think of themselves as springboards or stepping stones for people’s careers; that is, they acknowledge the possibility of career routes, not one route that fits everybody.

With this in mind, we no longer have a formal ‘training’ programme. All of our team – from the PAs to our management team – are encouraged to take Google and Facebook exams, but beyond that, every employee’s personal development is tailored to them. If they want to learn something, they’re given the resources to learn it.

This more fluid approach has already paid dividends; from deepening our knowledge in specialist new technologies to whole new disciplines and departments.

**A final thought**

While a start-up culture will not be right for everyone, we put a lot of our success down to this model. For us, it’s not just business sense, but common sense. And, by adopting the spirit of a startup, our people are not only more effective, but they’re also much, much happier too. ...

**Luke Janich is Founder & Chief Executive Officer at RED² Digital in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**
Today, many job seekers want more than just a job to pay their bills. They want a job that they love, a challenge that provides opportunities for growth and a company culture that fits with who they are.

For all these reasons, more and more efforts are being made by businesses to develop employer branding programs as a way to highlight their company among the thousands who are hunting for new talent. This means using the best marketing principles to communicate their job opportunities in an attractive and effective way, mainly through digital channels.

**Why video content?**

Videos enable brands to deliver a stronger message, full of information and emotions, to users within seconds, making it a powerful marketing tool. Video brings words to life and, as job candidates want to “feel” your company’s culture in order to validate it before coming for a face-to-face interview, video content is the best way for them to get an inside look at your work environment and determine whether it’s the right fit.

Since most of the job seeking experiences start through digital channels, online video – which represents 74% of Internet traffic – makes this format the ideal way to communicate your employer brand and company culture, both for candidates and for employees.

For a great example that describes the company and its brands in a refreshing and upbeat style, look for Reckitt Benckiser’s “Make Your Move” video.

**The recipe for success**

These are the main elements to consider in order to build a solid video strategy for your employer branding program:

**Show your people**

People connect best with other people, so it is better to give your brand a face. Show the people, not only top managers, who work for the company, and let them tell the real story.

Diversity in the workplace is one of the most valued characteristics among candidates. Show the different types of employees in terms of ethnicity, experience, style, or interest. It gives candidates an idea of where they would fit in. You can even turn them into internal celebrities; as we at LaviniaNext did for Banc Sabadell by making programs for internal and public use, presented by their experts and even a road movie with their top managers so that they could explain the year’s objectives and results in a different way.

**Show your workspace**

Your company should be a pleasant and interesting place to work (and if it is not, you should turn it into one). However, to communicate this message in a static way is quite difficult. Candidates are now much more demanding and they want to see the company’s atmosphere before deciding to pursue employment there.

**Show your company culture**

Talented candidates want to know that the company they are applying to not only offers professional growth, but also a strong, specific culture and values. You need to introduce them to your company, to your work methods and social benefits, and inspire them at the same time by showing the company’s purpose.

**Draw their future**

The best candidates want not only a job description but also aspire to understand upcoming projects and challenges that the company is facing. Use your recruiting video to highlight the exciting projects and initiatives that the potential candidate will have the chance to be a part of in your company.

**Keep it short**

Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution, everybody knows that people have a short attention span, so try to keep your video short yet concise. It should be long enough to communicate your message, but short enough to maintain engagement throughout the entire story.

**Target your communication**

As more and more job opportunities demand candidates with highly specialised skills, it is necessary to take advantage of the segmentation options of both the recruiting job platforms and the paid media ecosystems available to amplify your message.

**Deliver multiple application channels**

Browsing through a long corporate form-page to apply can be stressful and demotivating and it may even delay the application process. This is why companies need to offer a vast range of options to allow candidates to apply on an easy or familiar access platform (e.g. social media).

To summarise, with the use of a solid online video content strategy, companies and recruiters will be able to provide a quick glance at a company culture and environment, creating an emotional connection with candidates and maximising their chances to recruit and retain the best talent.

---

*Xavi Fisa is Head of Strategy at LaviniaNext in Barcelona, Spain.*
The fischerAppelt Factor

Attract potential applicants and retain current employees – a difficult endeavour that takes dedication and stamina. In order to achieve this, the agency group fischerAppelt relies on eye-catching campaigns and real benefits for its team.

For their campaign “Bring your parents to work”, fischerAppelt invited the parents of three employees to their respective offices and asked them to take over their children’s jobs. A film team accompanied the parents as they navigated their children’s daily tasks. The outcome of the campaign was not only a very entertaining short film but a great employer branding case: Website traffic to the fischerAppelt career page increased by 60 percent and more than 50 new applications were submitted as a result.

“Movement. Diversity. And a “just do it” attitude.”

Next to “Bring your parents to work”, fischerAppelt also initiated the well-known recruitment campaign “#HiredAsATeam”, which led to major publicity in the trade and public press as well as an entirely new agency for the fischerAppelt group: The insolvency of the former German airline Air Berlin left many of its employees in a difficult position – including the airline’s e-commerce team around Dr. Pascal Volz, former Vice President E-Commerce & Online Sales. As the team wanted to continue working together, they decided to market themselves jointly through a website under the synonym #HireUsAsATeam. The team application quickly went viral and offers came flowing in. In order to differentiate themselves, fischerAppelt decided to create a digital answer – a 1:1 copy of the team’s website “Nice Team. We’ll take it.” This homage also went viral and more than 65 publishers picked up on the campaign. As a result, a new agency “fischerAppelt, performance GmbH” was founded with the former Air Berlin team who is nowadays already supporting ten customers.

High-profile recruiting campaigns are a great way to attract new talents. However, what ties an existing team to the agency and how does fischerAppelt show dedication to their employees? A recent survey amongst fischerAppelt employees revealed that team spirit and solidarity are greatly appreciated. Just like freedom, trust, quality and pride in one’s own work. And what words do employees say best characterize fischerAppelt? Movement. Diversity. And a “just do it” attitude.

“Just do it” is also one of the major topics of the annual agency weekend held by fischerAppelt for all of its employees: people from all nine office locations in and outside of Germany come together and learn about the most recent topics, goals and visions. And it’s not only these big, yearly events where ideas are exchanged: “Mission management” is another initiative that brings fischerAppelt employees together. Participants can select between different training courses that best fit them – professionally and personally. But also, young talents get the chance to prepare themselves for future careers at the agency: With the “Challenge4” program, trainees receive special training for roles such as editors or consultants. And for those employees seeking international experience, fischerAppelt provides a professional exchange program with other agencies as part of their membership with the worldwide PROI agency network. Additional benefits like internal events, special employee discounts for online shops and gym memberships round out the advantages of being part of the fischerAppelt group.

In order to get an idea of work life at fischerAppelt, employees from office locations all over Germany keep their followers up-to-date with fun content on the agency’s own Instagram account. Both employees and outsiders can see what creates the “fischerAppelt factor”.

Benjamin Werner is Head of Group Marketing at fischerAppelt in Hamburg, Germany

www.thenetworkone.com
The mental health epidemic continues to sweep up millions of people across the world. A quick Google search reveals that almost every major country is struggling with the increased demand for mental health support. The significant decline in Government funding is leaving people with nowhere to turn for help. With only 41% of adults with a mental health condition receiving help, people are even turning to dating apps and Google, rather than doctors, for support.

"When you look at the extraordinary prevalence and impact on people’s lives, it is clear that mental illness is fast becoming one of the defining global health challenges of the 21st century.” – Jeremy Hunt, former Health and Social Care Secretary, 2018.

The problem has become so big that the world’s first Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit opens in a few months’ time. Ministers, academics and policymakers from more than 30 countries will descend on London to find out how to deal with this growing problem. In the meantime, with little support elsewhere, workers are turning to their employers for help – especially as three in five employees have experienced a mental health issue because of work.

Three in 10 employees in the UK have been formally diagnosed with a mental health issue. This is estimated to be costing employers anything between £74bn and £99bn a year through absence and low productivity. Alarmingly, we aren’t even preparing our young people for the difficulties they’ll face once they’ve started working. Among the 2.3 million university students currently studying in the UK, 75% report needing mental health support. The proportion of young people entering the workforce for the first time with symptoms of anxiety and depression have increased by around 20% year on year since 2010.

“Workplace mental health support has now stopped being a ‘nice to have’ and has started to become an essential employer brand differentiator”

Workplace wellbeing initiatives are now at the top of the agenda for both employers and employees alike. As the modern employee struggles to find a work-life balance, one in two say they want more wellbeing support at work. Eighty-four per cent of employers now acknowledge that they have a responsibility towards their employees’ mental wellbeing. According to the 2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey, 82% of employers are now actively working towards improving the wellbeing of their staff. This means workplace mental health support has now stopped being a ‘nice to have’ and has started to become an essential employer brand differentiator.

Falling unemployment rates have led to an increased demand for skilled workers and many sectors are reporting to be struggling to find the right people. It is estimated that 86% of an organisation’s most qualified candidates are already in work and not looking. This means employers need to market their employer brand better than ever before. Organisations that display a positive employer brand get twice as many job applications as those with negative brands. Some of the most well-known brands like Google, Apple and Disney, are looking towards wellbeing as a way to market themselves to existing and potential candidates.

Those employers with a reputation for being caring, empathetic and nurturing are gaining a significant competitive advantage. UK employer Anglian Water say for every £1 invested in employee wellbeing, they’ll get £8 back. As mental health is one of the key contributors to productivity, and wellbeing support improves employee loyalty, building the business case to invest in wellbeing has never been stronger.

But workplace wellbeing is more than just an ROI and a promotion of healthy habits. It tells an employee that their employer cares about them. Employees that are free from illness and worry are in the best position to make sure your business is in just as good shape.

...
You can’t attract the best talent by doing the same thing as everyone else. You have to stand out. Not just through your work, but in the way you promote yourself to candidates and introduce your organization to them.

Imagine if a hotel, an organization in the business of making you feel welcome and comfortable, was cold to you when you arrived. You’d be turned off pretty quickly, right? Impressions matter and, as an advertising agency, you need to not only look the part but also play the part.

Candidates are judging you and they want to be inspired. They expect you to be different. So, let’s flip the script. Here’s how to attract the most creative candidates to your agency.

“Judge them on merit, not their background”

Throw out the résumé.

It doesn’t tell you anything, and talent can’t be trapped on a piece of paper. Talent needs to be showcased. Instead, give candidates an opportunity to prove it. Set them a task that resembles the work they’d do if you hired them. Depending on the role, it can be a design challenge, a marketing assignment, solving a problem for a customer or developing a concept. You’ll get to see them in action and, in turn, they’ll get a glimpse of what it’s like to work with you. Judge them on merit, not their background.

Ask them to design their own job.

That’s right, let them have a say in what they should do. Why? First, you’ll end up with infinitely more empowered employees, which means higher productivity and lower staff turnover. Second, it’s a great way to measure creativity and see how far the candidate pushes the boundaries. Clearly articulate your values and the purpose of the role but leave the “how” to the candidates. Make them write the day-to-day responsibilities. Turn it into a competition and see who bowls you over.

Close the deal.

When you bring the best performers in for a face-to-face discussion, don’t waste their time, or yours, on silly résumé questions. You know they can do the job because you’ve already validated their skills. Instead, focus on two things. First, spend time on how you would work well together. Generate rapport. Figure out how to set your future hires up for success. Second, sell to them. Remember, they have options. Why should they choose you? Tell your story and tell it well.

“When you bring the best performers in for a face-to-face discussion, don’t waste their time, or yours, on silly résumé questions”

If you build your hiring process around these three principles you will draw the right people to you, almost effortlessly, because it will play to the strengths of top creative talent. You will have a platform that lets them shine.

Omer Molad is Co-founder and CEO of Vervoe in Melbourne, Australia.
Five Advertising Thoughts for a 280 Character World

As a graying copywriter, I remember the days when long copy was effective. Today, many of you and all of the high school basketball players I coach have the attention spans of a flea. So for the Twitter generation, here are a few thoughts for your consideration in bite-sized form.

“If you don’t have a life outside of the office you are useless to me.” The best agency people live full lives and bring their experiences back to the agency. I believe effective marketing embraces empathy over entertainment, and to have empathy for other people, you must interact, live and embrace life outside the myopic and self-important bubble of advertising.

Working from home kills agency culture. Sometimes I work from home. Sometimes my people work from home. But at my place, we embrace working from home as a matter of need, not policy. I like my people to be in the office. Talking, interacting, challenging, listening and pushing themselves, embracing every nuance of face-to-face collaboration. If agency culture is important to you, then you need to accept that culture is organic. It is alive. It is not working at home in your pajamas.

Technology is great, but algorithms don’t buy stuff. People do. Procurement departments and technologists like numbers and data. Numbers and data are black and white and simple. People are not. We are illogical, make emotional decisions (just look at the divorce rate for example) and constantly do the unexplainable. A deep understanding of people and why we do what we do and buy what we buy comes from studying people, not data. Data is not always the answer, but rather helps us ask better questions. In my opinion, technology that influences human thought is powerful, but technology that replaces human thought is waste.

“Be proud of where you work, the culture you create, the way you treat your employees”

Millennial employees change jobs. Don’t take it personally. Stop trying to make your agency more appealing to them and instead make your agency more appealing to you. Be proud of where you work, the culture you create, the way you treat your employees. Offer great employee benefits because you like what it says about your priorities. Be an agency that stands for something, not everything. Have a purpose. Because at the end of the day, that’s what millennials want.

Quick show of hands, who out there would like to be owned?

All agencies come into the world as independents. Most go out of business, as most start-ups do. Some sell themselves. And some grow, thrive, and make noise while maintaining their independence, their flexibility, their perspective. Today, independents are hot. Big name clients want them. Because they operate with freedom, flexibility and passion. They are obsessed with creativity, not holding-company bottom lines. They attract smart people with chips on their shoulders and something to prove. Right now, being owned extinguishes some fires. Being independent starts some.

There you go. A few incendiary realities from the perspective of a pragmatist who has seen much, learned some, loves this business, and still won’t go on Twitter.

…”

Steve Connelly is President and Copywriter at Connelly Partners in Boston, MA, USA and Dublin, Ireland
The number 27 took on a great significance for hasan & partners group last year as that’s how long our flame has flickered. It’s special because it’s the age that creative luminaries including Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, Amy Winehouse, Janis Joplin, and Jimi Hendrix, to name a few, entered the mythical 27 Club, a cultural meme documenting the deaths of musicians, artists and actors.

We’re very much alive and just like a band we are more than the sum of our parts. We’re a seven-piece rock and roll jazz symphony, an experimental fusion of funk, soul and punk power ballads. Our band is called One Team, seven units across three countries whose skills together form an orchestra of problem solvers.

Enough of the whimsical metaphors, we’re an agency, we help our clients achieve their goals, but we can’t do this as a bunch of strangers who happen to work in the same office or flock together from overseas for a once a year company social.

Just like a band, our creators work smarter when they know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. That’s why we invested in a two-day offsite where we mixed up teams, brought in inspirational speakers and asked people who didn’t usually work together to solve real client business problems.

It was a magical experience that ended with a snowball fight, not real snow, but paper. Each ball had a handwritten message on it – an action, a purpose, something to influence their work on our way to the group’s target positioning. Each crisp piece of paper and prose was crumpled and thrown, the recipient had to catch and read… then throw on to someone else. A snowball chain of inspiration.

After the event, we fixed these 300-plus insights to a wall that can be revisited. It’s quite poignant and thought provoking, and illustrates the diversity of our people. This one shared experience bound a collective of multiple personalities into a new found respect for each other.

Every day we face a storm of change, whether political, economic, technological, social or cultural, it’s a ceaseless journey, which is not always an easy ride. But, by acting collectively, we harness our creativity and can solve any challenge. That’s the hasan & partners group spirit, One Team.

This copy was written while listening to The Doors’ Riders on the Storm. Thanks for the inspiration Mr. Morrison, see you on the other side – when we are ready.

Eka Ruola is CEO, ECD at hasan & partners group in Helsinki, Finland
The Orchestra of Employer Branding

Schwartz Public Relations is a midsized agency specialized in integrated communication on tech and digital topics, based in the heart of Munich, Germany. We are no large network agency and don’t have their market power or visibility. Therefore, our employer branding requires completely different tools and strategies to make sure we are seen as a relevant and attractive agency for potential and current employees. In the following, we want to share our thoughts and experiences with employer branding, and the challenges that we’ve been facing.

We at Schwartz Public Relations like to compare employer branding to an orchestra: dozens of instruments and musicians, each of them producing a different tone. But together they create impressive music. With great sensitivity, active listening, but also guidance and foresight, a conductor arranges all instruments. At the same time he relies on the contribution of every musician.

Although excellent music is a unique mix of all sounds, one instrument is essential for the perfect tone: the violins, in our case the employees. For us a sustainable people strategy and maintaining the current team is key. Our colleagues are the most important ambassadors – to attract new staff and grow together.

“...a sustainable people strategy and maintaining the current team is key”

We run the agency humanely and with a strong “down to earth” attitude. This means that we treat our colleagues with the highest level of respect and full trust from the first moment they start working here. This resulted in us being awarded as the “best agency to work for” in Germany by the Holmes Report for two years in a row. We give guidance and support wherever needed, while we encourage engagement, new ideas, rethinking of established processes and the mindset to take decisions. Based on a philosophy of absolute transparency – with a clear understanding of client needs, expectations and contracts from trainee to management – everyone is able to decide about level and timing of service. This not only enables every team member to take over responsibility but also leads to high motivation.

Next to this inside perspective, employer branding obviously has an outside perspective as well. For us this is based on building up and continuously working on a good agency reputation.

The framework for this is the agency itself, like percussion instruments building the foundation for the strong sound of the orchestra. For us this starts with a representative office, where we gladly invite clients and where we love to work. Being in a network with international partners like within thenetworkone is another important aspect to leverage global opportunities and foster an open-minded agency culture, where everybody is willing to learn and to evolve. At Schwartz PR we also give high importance to our own agency marketing: proactively communicating relevant stories and news via our own social media channels and to influential communications media strengthens the positive connotation with the brand and its visibility in the market.

As most of our new colleagues come from other agencies, it helps that also our competitors are aware of us, for example, when they talk about Schwartz PR as strong competition in the next pitch. We initiated regulars where agency leaders meet and have the possibility to get to know each other. This network also enables to be part of the “gossip”, the social lubricant that supports a certain position in the market and that connects with the right people.

Even building up relationships with relevant journalists and influencers is essential. They are an important voice in the communication industry – and some of them are part of our team today. With regards to the reputation and its impact on employer branding, we should not forget the power of well-known clients. Working for famous brands helps to attract new colleagues. At the same time, they can increase motivation within the existing team: When talking with friends and family everyone loves to mention major brands to receive recognition from listeners.

For us, employer branding is a continuous challenge. It requires sensibility, persistence and lots of listening. Similar to conducting an orchestra.

...Julia Maria Kaiser is part of the Agency Management at Schwartz Public Relations in Munich, Germany...
Attracting and Securing the Best Talent

There are 3 main topics I'm going to cover here:

1. How to identify the talent you need
2. How to attract them
3. How to secure them

**Identifying the talent** – the most critical part of the process. We have all hired a mini-me or a carbon copy of someone who leaves. This does not create a diverse agency and is not a long-term talent strategy. Spend time thinking about the type of skills and personalities needed for your agency to realise your vision. Even at a junior level, you must hire people that will help you to reach your future goals. The agency model is changing rapidly and the talent that agencies are hiring needs to change with it. Be open to people with new skills from different backgrounds.

"Even at a junior level, you must hire people that will help you to reach your future goals"

A basic exercise is to examine your current skills in your agency and assess how well this fits against what you need for the future. As a team, you can then build the skills profiles of the talent you need. It’s also useful to do a psychometric or personality profile for the management team or even everyone. This can be fascinating to look at what your agency comprises of. Debate the results of these exercises as a management team and identify the types of people you need for the future of your agency. Build some personas, just as you have done for clients...

**Attracting the talent** – firstly you need to be visible. Write articles that are published in the industry. Speak at events, or run your own events and promote them through your social channels. You need to PR your agency and make sure your work is seen. If you are looking for graduates, speak to universities and look at internships and partnerships.

Your website must be up to date with your best work, new wins and new hires. Candidates are always interested first of all in the work you do and then the culture. Culture is often tricky to show. A great way is to have a walk around video of the office, meeting lots of people. Interviews with employees and why they love working there, pics of social events.

Finally the role. Don’t write a generic job description asking for an ambitious self-starter. This is a key marketing document. Make sure it has personality, is interesting and exciting. If you really want to sell it why not interview the line manager about the role and post the video?

**Securing the talent** – Think about your interview process in-depth. Who is going to be involved? How many stages? If there’s going to be a presentation task, create the task before you begin. What do you need to find out and how are you going to find it out? It’s important you ensure the candidates get to know your agency and has a great experience too. Make sure that each interviewer has a defined role in the process. A key part is for someone to understand the candidate’s motivations. Without this, you are unlikely to be able to secure them.

Simple things such as taking a tablet or a laptop into the interview to make notes to pass on to your colleague and to show creds on. Candidates hate being asked the same questions over and over. After each interview make sure the feedback is constructive and fed back quickly. Even if a candidate is unsuccessful they should have a good experience and spread great word of mouth. Having an awful interview experience will hugely damage your brand.

...
Nurturing a Jam Session Culture

As we openly state in the foreword of our website, the name “Jazz” is no coincidence. We are a jam session of talents and expertise, with respect for personal expression and style. We take things personally. We don’t buy into recipes, patterns, shortcuts for creativity. But we do believe that creativity is a shortcut to have impact.

Most of our efforts internally are done to keep the right balance between the chaos that nurtures creativity and allows personal expression and the discipline and perseverance that having an impact requires. It comes down to a few principles:

1. **Talent is rooted in our humanity** and it must be our shared aim to nurture the talent of each one of us to the next level. When we recruit, we look for the personal talent of that person. Many times, it is not directly linked to the actual skills which may be acquired, but it is an ingredient that transforms the work of that person into extraordinary. For example, Andreea, our Creative Planner has a genuine talent in photography. She is not an Art Director, but she uses her talent to observe people, to expose insights that are hidden to plain sight and this is what takes her strategy work to the next level. We do our best to nurture her talent and support her passion for photography by protecting the time she needs to do her personal projects such as her latest: Hiding in Plain Sight.

2. **Hungry for work.** When we started out the agency, we aimed to create a place where work comes first. We, as co-founders, love to do the work, we are involved in agency projects and we contribute directly to the output of the agency as all people do. We believe that the success of the agency happens when each person feels that they are fighting for their personal objectives. We say that one should be in Jazz for as long as they feel they are thriving and progressing.

3. **Hungry for impact.** We are not a gang of artists, we are people who understand that the work we do needs to create impact for people at large and for the businesses of our clients. Creating for impact requires more than talent, it requires strategic thinking, know-how, discipline, perseverance, empathy. Hence our search for people who are strongly driven and do not give up easily. Most of the times it is hard to create work that meets all requirements to deliver impact. That is why we look for people who do not give up even when it is hard. Also, we don’t do work for creative festivals, we only register work that had a real, demonstrated impact. We try to keep away from creatives who are too much in love with creative awards.

4. **Hungry for new/agile.** One of the best parts of our industry is that it is changing with an exponential rhythm. Effervescence is everywhere around us. We believe that the only way forward is to constantly challenge and feed ourselves with the ‘new’ that is around us. That means that we are looking for people who have an autodidact mentality, who are always looking to learn something new, who ask themselves for trainings or exploration sessions. This is another reason why we encourage personal projects, where people can explore in more depth new territories, which will further contribute to their work sooner or later.

5. **Honesty pays off in the end.** Some of the people we recruited have said that what convinced them to join, besides the work we do, is the blunt description of what it is like to work at Jazz, with good and bad, which was given to them during the interview sessions. We invite the potential colleagues to talk to people they know in the agency, and find out how it feels to work among us, just to make sure that they are not coming with false expectations. We realized that it is more effective to be bluntly honest from the start rather than bring people who come for the wrong reasons and will feel uneasy quite soon. Also, if someone is not in a good place, we approach the subject honestly and with empathy, looking for ways to help that person get out of the situation. Sometimes, difficult decisions need to be taken, to extract the person from a context that does not work out for them. Some other times, we realize that our time together has ended and that person needs a different context to thrive. As a Romanian saying goes: we do not “hide garbage under the carpet”.

Irina Pencea is Managing Partner and Co-Founder at Jazz in Bucharest, Romania

…
It’s All About the Culture

Our head of strategy often quotes Peter Drucker when counseling clients about their brands: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Leadership at Marcus Thomas also strongly believes this. The culture is constructed in order to focus on brilliant, effective work and a balanced work environment. Both lead to attracting and retaining talent. Here are some ways we’ve focused on culture over the years:

Define your “why”.
Simon Sinek urges leaders to find the purpose, cause or belief that drives a company. For instance, he states Apple’s why is to “challenge the status quo.” Ten years ago, we defined our purpose during strategic planning: Make a Mark. We exist to make our mark for our clients, our industry and our community. Often, this means making smart bets on the future. Some examples, in our case, are betting on future tech: growing digital and social capabilities early in the cycle, creating our own media trade desk and programmatic capabilities that are tied tightly to performance analytics.

We exist to make our mark for our clients, our industry and our community.

Never compromise on your values.
Fun is one of our values. Whenever we poll our staff on how we’re doing, this one always comes to the top. Summer cookout Thursdays during lunch and full-blown integrated brainstorming sessions help support this value. Inspired thinking is another. This one requires all of our staff to constantly ask a better question. From accounting to planning to creative, everyone questions if there’s a better way to get to a smarter solution. When hiring, we find people who align with our values. If someone isn’t curious, doesn’t have a sense of fun, isn’t interested in anything outside of work, we’ll pass.

Be transparent.
Many years ago, our research group started to poll our employees to see how leadership was delivering on our vision and values. From that came a need to communicate more often with staff. We started weekly stand-up staff meetings during which we showcase new work, discuss upcoming new business efforts and standard housekeeping. In addition, we have longer quarterly meetings when we review financials to date, celebrate employee anniversaries and enjoy a happy hour.

Listen to and recognize your people. When staff is aligned with the agency’s values and strongly urged to pursue their passions, it creates an entrepreneurial spirit here that is unmatched. Employees have the power to steer their careers; and they have the tools, resources and mentorship to take it to the next level. We recognize the people here are the agency’s biggest advocates and we are constantly working to evolve and diversify because we know that they are the key to the continued growth and success of our culture. In return, we’re rewarded with recognition like being chosen as one of 25 companies in Ad Age’s 2019 Best Places to Work. This kind of publicity not only bolsters employees but also helps us attract new ones.

Joanne Kim is Chief Idea Officer and Morgan Connor is Director of Culture and Coaching at Marcus Thomas in Cleveland, OH, USA
Employer Branding as a Key to Success

Employer branding has been gaining influence in recent years, impacting not only our company but, most of all, emerging as a long-term human resource strategy to attract and retain a talented workforce. It is more than just a buzzword we use. We apply it to promote a clear view of our culture, what we stand for and what makes us different and desirable as an employer.

“Attracting a recent graduate is not the same as attracting a professional with 20 years of work experience”

One of our goals is to attract and retain high-quality candidates and to position the company as their employer of choice. How do we do this? By delivering our best in all the work we do, sharing responsibility and holding ourselves accountable for results, innovating every single day, challenging the status quo with new ideas, finding ways to grow and, above all, encouraging a sense of belonging, by sharing culture and values. And this is the tip of the iceberg.

Through creating an organizational environment that serves to execute the company’s strategy and, at the same time, for employees, the company becomes an extension of themselves. By doing this we are driven to go beyond our limits to achieve excellence as a company. This excellence impacts our image and the services we provide to our clients.

Our culture expresses itself in a philosophy and a mission to discover and share talent to meet the expectations of our clients. Our company is not an isolated island, it maintains continuous relations with stakeholders, contributors, partners, suppliers, and clients from who we can learn with and who influence our everyday culture. Furthermore, our employees need to feel that they are fully recognized within the company, and, at the same time, provided with a balance between work and their life outside of work. All of this leads to easier access to a better life and knowledge. In turn, this leads to domain expertise which is what we, as a company, look for ultimately. In this line of thought, the culture of every company must be strong and have an environment beneficial to unveiling the full potential of people. A company with this kind of culture can then be a talent magnet.

In our experience, the key to success is the way we cherish and care for people, regardless if they’re internal or external to the company. This starts with understanding people and their behaviour, as well as having good communication inside and out. We achieve this with constant training (e.g. work-shops on communication). Communication is in constant evolution and change so we must try to adapt constantly so that we can be able to reach everyone regardless of age and way of thinking. Attracting a recent graduate is not the same as attracting a professional with 20 years of work experience. We as a company must be able to adapt to their needs, goals, aspirations, and desires. Employer branding must give people more than a job, it must create an experience and a connection between themselves and the brand across different dimensions.

It is also important for the company to be concerned not only with people but with the world we live in through social responsibility. This can be aligned with the company’s mission more broadly and its organizational goals. In this context, companies should have a purpose, and this is the way to really apply employer branding.

In addition, it’s important to mention that our own experience in this field, and an increasing demand for services related with employer branding, inspired us to develop specific and high-quality services, that complement the corporate events and internal communication services we already had, and that we now deliver to our clients, with proven results.

Finally, we would like to add that our employees are the most valuable brand ambassadors that we have. When current employees talk about the company, this helps the brand become stronger because awareness increases and when brand awareness increases, sales increase in parallel.

...
The Richards Group

How many times have we all seen the question in an RFP that asks us to talk about what makes us different from our competitors? It’s a reasonable question. After all, that’s what they’re counting on us to do for them — help them stand out in what is likely a crowd of brands vying for the same consumer. Fortunately for us, we have a strong story to tell, and it never changes.

Our culture is what sets us apart from our peers. It truly is our definitive point of difference. Despite our tremendous growth over the 43 years we’ve been in existence, we have fiercely retained our flat organization; our open communication; our allegiance to longevity, not seniority; and our commitment to independence. (We’re not for sale. Not now. Not ever.)

Remember that painting we’ve all seen called “The Peaceable Kingdom,” where the lion and lamb, bear and ox, leopard and child all coexist in perfect harmony? That’s basically the setup or environment we’re trying for at The Richards Group.

We’ll never get there, of course, being human and all. But the degree to which we actually have succeeded at peacefully blending our people of varied — some would say naturally hostile — roles is the degree to which we’ve demolished walls, getting rid of the barriers, physical and psychological, that impede the free flow of ideas, opinions, and personal contacts.

We have no departmental lines and don’t segregate ourselves by job function. Everybody has neighbors with different jobs. That way, people with diverse roles on a client’s business not only talk to each other, and thus get the work done faster, but also see how hard their counterparts work for the same cause. And that breeds respect.

“Everybody’s making decisions all day on behalf of our clients. We want no secrets.”

We can and do make decisions that are best for our clients and our people without regard to quarterly numbers or attitudes on Wall Street. Which means our clients get focus, stability, creativity, and continuity.

People often comment that our culture reflects a strong streak of independence. And that’s okay with us. Because “independence” isn’t just a word we live by — it’s a word we revere.

...
Leavingstone. Creative by Nature

How does a German advertising guy end up working in Tbilisi? I guess my best answer would be to visit Georgia yourself. You’ll know. It’s a place that is characterized by friendship and creativity, growth and opportunity. It’s where you can rediscover your love for advertising. I never wanted to work for an advertising agency again. These guys made me change my mind.

Georgia is a country of roughly three million people on the Southern side of the Caucasus mountains, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. And a very special place. They even have their own alphabet, and it is wildly different from any other alphabet on the planet.

Wildly different is also a pretty accurate way of describing the advertising scene in this small country – its largest agency Leavingstone included. That’s partly because Georgia has always been pretty unique to begin with, but partly it’s the result of recent history as well.

Most of the people that are in charge of the creative industries here are no older than thirty. The whole advertising industry was born when they were born, after the downfall of the Soviet Union. And it was more or less reborn after the war with Russia ten years ago. Which makes Leavingstone one of the oldest agencies in the country. Age: eight years.

You can see, feel and understand it immediately when you work with them. Everyone is a digital native. The average age is somewhere in the mid-twenties. You feel more like a part of a community rather than a company. It’s entrepreneurial, creative, and a bit anarchic. Sounds like what an advertising agency should be, right?

“You feel more like a part of a community rather than a company.”

Georgians are about togetherness and experiences. They were always forced to communicate, collaborate and find creative solutions. Georgia is the definition of a real social network. And Georgians are creative by default. They even invented wine-making some 8,000 years ago.

So, it’s no wonder that all of Leavingstone’s work that received international awards is stuff that was done for digital, experiential, or social media. Instead of shooting commercials, they send people passing by to virtual Ireland, create online films starring a bunch of hamsters, or send a guy hovering over Tbilisi in a flying hammock.

Working with them is not exactly easy when you’ve learned the trade in Germany and Switzerland. But for anyone who has had enough of ego-infested work environments, constant overdoses of pressure, the omnipresent lack of joy and opportunity, and enough of these strange industrialized forms of creativity – this is the place.

They’re a hundred young and motivated, unconventional and naturally creative people somewhere in their twenties, doing all kinds of things from social media to artificial intelligence, from web development to mobile apps, experiential marketing to web design. Visit them. Tbilisi is the city that loves you, and Georgia is beautiful.

Folker Wrage is a Business Consultant for Leavingstone in Tbilisi, Georgia
There’s a perception that employer branding is all about the long holidays, the table football, the ping pong, the beers on Fridays. I think that’s a bit like painting a house that needs a full structural overhaul.

What truly motivates people to buy into your brand, and become the best salesforce for it, is essentially all about shared purpose and trust. Trust takes time to build and is quickly lost when behaviours within businesses don’t match the messaging that employees consistently receive.

You can tell your staff that they’re valued as much as you like, but you need to show them in your day-to-day actions, messages, and behaviours that that’s the truth. For many leaders, that takes courage, behaviour change and letting go of control. That’s scary, but if you can pull it off, it’s revolutionary in terms of business growth.

Think about your own company culture. Do you hire people who are just like you or people who challenge you? Hearing opposing views is tough, but if you can create a culture where those opposing views are welcomed and embraced, where people can contribute to strategy even if their views don’t always hold sway, you’ll learn, you’ll spot more opportunities and your business will thrive. Create a culture where those conversations take place in whispers in corridors and you’ll have disgruntled employees spreading bad news about your brand in no time.

Do you deliver feedback regularly and in a focused way, addressing issues that just happened, when they happen? Or do you wait for the annual review and offload it all then? Giving great feedback is challenging, but at the end of the day, it has a more positive impact on your brand than beer and ping pong.

What’s your purpose? Do your employees know where you’re going, what you’re trying to achieve, what difference you’re trying to make for your clients, your sector and your industry. Are you consistent and clear about the kinds of business you take on, the way you deliver to clients and what you consider important in the way you deliver? Do your employees think you care more about the numbers on the spreadsheet than their motivation and well-being? If they do, the impact on your brand can be quick and significant.

I was very struck by something Angela Ahrendts said recently about the new instore Apple Creatives. Their job is to inspire and make every customer experience the best it can be. They have no sales targets of any sort. The result is that motivation levels have increased significantly, staff turnover has declined, and sales have gone up. In the creative industries, that’s a story to take note of.

So, what can good employers who want to protect their brand do to ensure that they win the talent war and enhance their reputations in the process? Here’s my 5-step route map to a strong employer brand:

1. Ask yourself honestly whether you are treating your employees as you would like to be treated yourself. Identify the gaps and build a strategy to reduce them.
2. Ask yourself if your team really understands your purpose as a business? What gets you out of bed in the morning? How can they buy into that? How can you communicate that passion to them and build it within them too?
3. Ask yourself if you really welcome input on strategy from your team. Do you want to hear what they see and experience?
4. Ask yourself if you give regular, consistent and timely feedback to everyone you deal with, or do you dodge those more challenging conversations? Dodging them will adversely impact your brand, but dealing with them, even if it’s hard, will positively enhance your brand.
5. And finally, ask yourself if you really and truly have the right team, a team you can trust and who all add value to the business. The essence of great leadership ultimately is to get the right people on the bus and that sometimes involves letting some people off at the next stop. The good people on your team will thank you for it.

Lindsay Paterson is Co-Founder and Executive Coach at Coaching Consultants in London, UK.
When it comes to employer branding, the key focus should be on brand itself - an intangible asset differentiating the company from its competitors. Note, it’s not just brand identity you can see, but rather a brand experience, namely what you can feel. Since your company is being chosen among others not just by customers, but also by your current and potential employees - businesses are looking to define and strengthen their employer brand with a twofold goal in mind - attracting and retaining the best talent in the market.

So what are those attributes which define employer brand and communicate company culture, its position and quality?

The perception people have on working at your company is shaped by a complex mix of acceptable behaviors, symbols and systems that are practiced in a business. At One Philosophy Group of Companies (OPGC) it is exactly shared culture, vision and values that have united 5 companies with mission of creating the reality we want to live in. This leads to providing richer expertise and better value to clients by helping them truly make the most of their moment in history. As a part of OPGC, Changers consultancy is the talent management and leadership development custodian, that is driving OPGC’s employer branding.

How do we address these three directions at One Philosophy?

When we think of behaviors, it’s the role of leaders, first and foremost to demonstrate values, model action patterns and communicate messages to the organization to achieve its strategic vision. Thus, one of our focus areas is holistic leadership development. Every year OPGC Leadership team has an offsite strategic retreat outside Ukraine, where our leadership team focuses on self-reflection, building trust, mastering practices and is aimed at improved talent management and business growth.

Symbols communicate what really matters to the business, how the decisions are made, and what is rewarded. Our key activity here is Values in action awards – the key annual recognition event at OPGC, rewarding employees (beyond the management team) who embody the company’s values in everyday work. The prize the employee gets is an opportunity to participate in an international professional event, to learn and network to be a better professional.

Systems are processes and practices your company has for highlighting trust, communications style and priorities. The valuable instrument herein is OPGC Culture code, which is co-created with the team and acts as a behavior guide on what is expected, encouraged and rewarded at OPGC, setting the right vision and enhancing value-driven approach to everyone’s actions.

The business case for investing in employer branding through culture is simple: culture strongly influences decisions your people make, the way they spend their time and the nature of their interactions. And it works only if pursued as a continuous process.

Our experience at OPGC has crystallized some brand success factors:

- personality & vision of the founder and leadership team.
- collaborative approach - to build engagement.
- authenticity - which aims at living in every action we take.

We constantly reflect and adapt our programs to strengthen the employer brand and stay relevant to the changing needs of the workforce in 2019+.

Among other things, this helped us become the Best Agency to Work For in EMEA region according to Holmes Report in 2018, which also manifests the value Changers can create for their clients in defining and strengthening their company culture, building a strong employer brand.

…

Oksana Semenyuk is Co-Founder and CEO of Changers, part of One Philosophy in Kyiv, Ukraine
www.one-philosophy.com
Why Thawing Out the ‘Frozen Middle’ Holds the Key to Sustainable Engagement

Over the last decade, we have seen a shift in the perception of employee engagement, from what was once an HR ‘nice-to-have’ to a fundamental driver of business success. In one of my favourite quotes, Jack Welch captures the importance when he says:

“There are only three measurements that tell you nearly everything you need to know about your organization’s overall performance: employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and cash flow. It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it.”

However, with this welcome recognition has come unwelcome complexity, as new technologies and a plethora of models, mantras and metrics all too often get in the way of what really matters – building deeper connections with your employees.

Having spent much of the last decade working to engage teams across a diverse range of industries, there’s one thing I can guarantee – there’s no ‘silver bullet’ for employee engagement. No matter how cool the technology, how striking the communications or how revolutionary the process, sustainable engagement only happens when a business adopts a relentless focus on three fundamentals that shape the employee experience:

• A great story with a sense of purpose and humanity that your team can make their own.
• Authentic leaders who use the story in their own way to shape a culture that connects the business objectives with the passions of their teams.
• An everyday experience that reinforces your promise to inspire belief, commitment and innovation.

While all three are essential, it’s leadership beyond the C-suite (the so-called ‘frozen middle’ of managers) that holds the key to long-term success. As the excellent Ethan Mollick, Management Professor at Wharton Business School puts it: “Pay closer attention to your mid-level managers. They have a greater impact on company performance than almost any other part of the organization.”

Over the last few years, we’ve learned a lot about how the best companies are stepping up to the challenge – and it’s fair to say (apart from a few notable political exceptions) the old-school Alpha male command and control model of leadership is fast becoming a thing of the past.

As new business models, generational shifts and innovative technologies reshape the world of work, simply managing a team is no longer enough. To really drive performance, today’s line managers need to be leaders and coaches, inspiring their teams to perform at their best every day by showing empathy, fostering candour, challenging bureaucracy and democratising ideas.

Of course, the problem is, all too often, people become managers because they are good at their job, not because they possess the skills they need to thrive. So, what can organisations do to transform their line managers into authentic leaders?

Well, alongside investing in Learning and Development programs, senior leader commitment and lots of hard work, here are a few tips and practical suggestions that can make a difference:

1. Actively listen to them – give them a platform to openly express what matters most to them and their teams.
2. Avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach – equip them with a range of tools and the freedom they need to engage their teams in a way that works for them.
3. Make it personal – get them to co-create a ‘charter’ with their team, written in their own language, that shows how they will support the purpose and ambition of the business.
4. A chance to shine – create a small number of high-profile interventions each year focused on the business strategy that line managers can shape, own and deliver.
5. Embrace the collective – empower leaders to tap into the collective intelligence of their team to uncover issues, stimulate new ideas and make them feel involved and valued.

With employee engagement now recognised as a driver of business performance, it’s time to recognise the pivotal role this group plays in shaping culture, stimulating innovation and unlocking the value of your most important asset – your people. So, let’s involve them, let’s make them feel valued, let’s invest them and by doing so we’ll turn our ‘frozen middle’ into our best business advocates.

Richard Burton is Managing Partner Engagement at Brandpie in London, UK
How to Deactivate the Automaton?

Literature tends to show us some of the most powerful realities about human nature. As the character in I, Robot, by Isaac Asimov, Stephen Byrley states: "It is the obvious which is so difficult to see most of the time. People say 'It's as plain as the nose on your face. But how much of the nose on your face can you see, unless someone holds a mirror up to you?"

Precisely, when we as companies face the need to attract and retain the best work team, we are not simply dealing with achieving productivity and efficiency indicators; we are faced with the profound need to offer the people who work with us the possibility of finding personal fulfillment in what they do. The fact that we work every day with people, usually makes us forget how human the motivations that guide our collaborators’ behavior are.

Yes, it is true, it is easier said than done, but the first task we must set when strengthening our "Employer Branding" is to deactivate the automaton that we carry inside, so we can dare to transgress the routine, and break the moulds that put us in a box along with the rest of companies that offer services like ours. The creative collaborator, the one who thinks differently or the one with more added value in his work is usually the type who aspires to work in a differentiated environment, in an environment that appreciates his human condition with aspirations.

Collaborators are often asked to "think outside the box", but rarely does the company analyze which box is it in. Are we in a box with prefabricated recipes for success? Are we in a stubborn quest to innovate without a clear objective? Are we perhaps in a desperate attempt to be at the forefront of technological applications? Or maybe, are we very focused on applying measurement tools to our results? From which box are we proposing our strategic decisions as a company?

From our experience, the way to deactivate the automaton is essentially not to lose the horizon of our coherence and business vision. This hasn’t been a simple task, far from it, to consider an open, decentralized and remote management model, out of boxes and offices, but integrated by the centripetal force of our values and interests, has also meant the need to favor conditions that give employees a sense of freedom and at the same time a deep sense of belonging to an organizational structure that cares legitimately for their welfare.

In this regard, even our three values as a company have given us a disruptive approach that breaks conventional construction. These are "compound" values that make their meaning more robust as they are complementary and indissoluble: Creatibertad (Creativity + Freedom), Feliquilibrio (Happiness + Balance), Comprofianza (Commitment + Trust). All of them, in turn, are integrated by a purpose that has been essential for the company: sustainability.

Staying true to these centrifugal forces, to these values and interests, has meant a great commitment to adjust our spectrum of customers to those who share our world view. This is something that is very relevant in competitive markets such as the one in which our business is developed. However, these bets have brought us valuable advantages, from being able to work with clients who are better attuned to our business vision, to the fact that our collaborators feel closer and more faithful to a flexible and open company in every sense, except for the values that keep it integrated.

...
How Tonic Attracts and Motivates its Sunshine People

We are in a people’s business. It means we are only as good as our people. When we started 15 years ago, Dubai was a lot more transient than today. People came for 2 or 3 years and moved on. Being in Dubai at that time forced us early on to articulate and communicate our culture very clearly and consistently.

Tonic was founded on a very distinctive proposition: delivering creative solutions to solve business problems. That’s easy to say. But when nobody knows who you are, it’s hard to compete with the established agencies. To attract the right people, often from overseas and to keep them was very challenging. Dubai wasn’t really on the map back then and the agencies were fighting for a much smaller talent pool. We had to communicate our culture but also to make it meaningful and tangible.

While our business has changed many times since 2004, our culture, beliefs and values are the same. We still believe in hiring shiny, happy and crazy people. People who see the glass half full, who focus on solutions, who take risks, who are always ready to learn from failure and have a good laugh in the process. What Mandela used to call sunshine people.

“It means they work better. Because they manage their time as they see fit they ensure their work is done well. It sounds simple, but it took a lot longer to implement properly than we anticipated. Today we have a solid HR policy that’s working well. Today our clients love our culture and our people. They value that everyone in Tonic focuses on output and quality of work. As a result, both our clients and staff stay with us longer than with most agencies.

We went full circle. We were forced to communicate our culture to attract the best talent. In return, this talent and that culture is what is helping our business. Today we have some of the most professional staff in the region and our staff turnover is less than one third the regional average. That’s also probably why we keep our clients twice longer than the industry average and have more fun than most.

…

We knew from the get go that to keep our staff creative and happy they needed to have a good life. We all need to feed our brain if we want to stay creative. No matter what makes us happy we need enough time to enjoy it and benefit from it. For us a work-life balance is not a nice thing to have, it’s an absolute requirement to deliver quality work.

We also learned that those who make the best Tonicians are also those who are the most independent, the most adult. We tailored our package to their profile.

For 4 years now, we have a very unique set of HR policies. It allows our staff to control their work-life balance. They enjoy self-managed holidays, flexible hours, and evolving part time. All these ensure our staff can balance their work in Tonic with their life outside.
Almost half of employees believe that their current working environment does not have a positive impact on their happiness and wellbeing. That’s a big problem for the individuals and, for corporate Britain. Er, light bulb moment; there’s a direct correlation between an employee’s emotional experience at work and the quality of their work.

“Light bulb moment; there’s a direct correlation between an employee’s emotional experience and the quality of their work.”

Perhaps you’ve heard about the current movement towards ‘employee experience?’ Empowering your team, allowing them to be their true selves, keeping them healthy and happy means that they work better for you. Everyone wins. Happy team, happy clients, happy MD.

In 2018, the employee is the customer and the job is the product. Think about it, this has widespread implications for how agencies are run and for every interaction point with your people. How many agency leaders have you heard say ‘we are a people-centric organisation’? How many of their team would concur?

Until Easter of 2018, I had spent 15 glorious years at creative PR/digital agency, Golin. In 2010 I moved from a senior client service role into a hybrid role overseeing the marketing and talent functions. I was returning from my first maternity leave and wanted something different from work. Since then, I had a four-month career break to get around some childcare challenges and changed my job design more times than I care to remember. And? I was the most effusive and loyal ambassador for the brand and I continue to be so even now though I’m on the outside.

“How many agency leaders have you heard say ‘we are a people-centric organisation’? How many of their team would concur?”

Over my gulp, nearly 20-year career, I’ve been blown away by the impact that ‘doing the right thing’ has on an employer brand. For example, enlightened benefits packages, unlimited leave, flexible working and generous family-related policies I’ve seen have a significant impact even on entry-level applicants. I’ve seen initiatives around gender equality, social equality and well-being have an exponentially positive effect on speculative interest from would-be employees and hey presto, deliver a lasting halo effect on an employer brand.

But listen up, agency leaders! What has also intrigued me over time, is the relationship between an agency’s employer brand and its clients. So many of clients, of course, face similar challenges finding and retaining the best talent, especially in growth sectors like technology or healthcare. So, if an agency has a cutting-edge talent function, that represents a huge opportunity to add value, helping with candidate searches or offering another strategic HR counsel. The smartest agencies are starting to monetise this support as a further step towards a more consultancy-based offering.

I had the privilege of working on a ‘return to work’ programme for the media and marketing sector over the last three years – the Back2business ship – (props to co-founders Liz Nottingham of R/GA and Amanda Fone of f1 Recruitment). This was a glorious example of major clients, prospects, contacts, agency friends keen to offer support for such a powerful initiative and, to align with an agency-led gender diversity programme.

I am confused and incensed in equal measure, however, when I continue to read about major brands like Diageo having to ‘force’ agencies on its roster to fall into line and field diverse teams. HP and Unilever made similar declarations a year or more ago so why are brands still leading agencies on the people agenda, not the other way around? More weight to the argument comes via heavily procured, global client opportunities demanding to see diversity and related metrics of agencies under consideration. Given my experience at Golin and more widely now as a consultant, an exemplary, trail-blazing employer brand makes business sense on so many levels. So, where do you stand?

…

Jane Fordham is Founder of Jane Fordham Consulting in London, UK.

www.thenetworkone.com