

Culture isn't enough | SmartBrief

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It's not news that culture is vitally important to your organization. Employee satisfaction and engagement are powerful antidotes to the unprecedented threats that most organizations like yours face today.

Some of you might be struggling with employees who are among the 70% of unengaged workers that the Gallup organization recently [uncovered](#). Improving your culture certainly helps increase their productivity and likelihood to stay with you. Or you might operate in a sector where a war for talent rages and ratings on sites like LinkedIn and Glassdoor greatly influence prospective employees' perceptions of your companies.

Happy, engaged employees do indeed produce better results. [Data](#) from the Great Place to Work organization shows that great workplaces benefit from stronger financial performance, reduced turnover and better customer satisfaction than their peers. Given the frequency with which toxic cultures are blamed for corporate downfalls, it's clear that you need to attend to the culture of your organization.

But if you want to do more than survive and avoid failure --- if you want to increase your competitiveness, to create real value for your customers and employees, to future-proof your business -- having a good, generic culture isn't enough. You should cultivate a culture that is aligned and integrated with your brand. After all, a culture that's not directed toward developing valuable relationships between your brand and customers will produce, at best, incremental improvements in business results. And it can actually hold you back from achieving your aspirations.

You must develop an interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between what your organization does on the inside and how it is perceived and experienced on the outside. Cultivate a distinctive corporate culture that:

- expresses your unique brand purpose and values
- develops the mindsets and behaviors that enable your people to deliver on-brand customer experiences, and
- orients everyone to the unique challenges and opportunities your business faces.

Ultimately, you want to integrate your culture and your brand so inextricably that together they give your company inimitable and sustainable power.

Here are three starting points for achieving strong culture/brand alignment and integration:

1. Adopt a single brand purpose to inspire, focus, and guide everything your organization does. Instead of using a corporate mission statement to describe your business scope and/or goals -- which is distinct from a brand essence statement, which articulates what your brand stands for -- identify a single brand purpose that explains why your organization exists.

In today's cluttered, uber-competitive, choice-overload world, your company must have a clear, meaningful reason for being. You need to play an invaluable, irreplaceable role in people's lives. A brand purpose expresses the cause or belief that inspires you to do what you do, so it resonates with today's customers *and* employees, because both groups make decisions based on the motivations behind the companies they associate themselves with.

A definitive brand purpose also helps establish and maintain a singular focus for all your efforts. Your business goals should relate clearly and directly to the brand identity you want to build, so instead of confusing people with separate messages about each, integrate them into a single brand purpose.

2. Articulate one set of core values and use them to shape what you do inside your organization and out. Many

companies have a list of internal workplace values that are intended to guide employees' behaviors and decisions. And, separately, they determine desired brand attributes that describe the way they want their brand to be perceived by customers. The former is usually filled with generic, vapid platitudes such as integrity, respect and teamwork. The latter tends to be either so abstract that most employees don't understand what it has to do with them or so aspirational that employees don't believe it.

Bridge the gulf between these by using one set of core values to describe the unique way you do things both as an organization and as a brand. It really makes no sense to use values to engage your employees if those aren't linked to the way they want them to engage your customers.

But clear, distinctive, impactful values that resonate with both groups achieves congruence -- the extent to which a company behaves consistently with its external image. Incongruence confuses employees who want to understand how what they do makes a difference. And it alienates today's customers who want to do business with authentic, transparent companies.

A single, central values set produces the alignment and integrity that's necessary in today's business context.

3. Assess the existing alignment and integration of brand and culture at your organization. To help you identify the values that your organization should embrace to achieve your desired brand type and to determine the gaps between brand and culture at your company, [take this free online assessment](#).

To lead your field and to fuel your growth, you should engage in culture-building strategies and tactics that aim to produce more than employee happiness and satisfaction. Identify the distinct cultural dynamics that enable you to achieve your brand vision, and then deliberately and actively cultivate them.

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