Overcome the trust crisis with authenticity

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According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, the world is undergoing a trust crisis. People have lost faith in institutions and no longer trust most leaders. How can business leaders regain people's trust? By ensuring brand authenticity.

Brand authenticity requires the alignment and integration of external brand identity and internal organizational culture. Brand and culture must be fused. To achieve brand-culture fusion:

- Conduct a culture audit of your organization and close the gaps between your current culture and the one you need to have to reach your brand aspirations
- Use a single set of core values to guide everything your company does inside and out
- Cultivate employee brand engagement so everyone makes decisions that enable you to deliver on your brand promise

Learn more about these actions in this video – and learn the entire playbook for brand-culture fusion in my new LinkedIn Learning Course, Brand Leadership: Integrating Brand and Culture.

To book Denise Lee Yohn to speak to your organization, see her website and YouTube channel.

Transcript

We're having a trust crisis. The Edelman Trust Barometer reports a growing trust gap and declines in trust of NGOs, companies, government and media worldwide. For businesses, trust is the key to customer loyalty and stakeholder engagement. So, this is the first in a three-part series on how to overcome the trust crisis. In the future, I'll show you how to use consistency and responsibility to inspire trust, but today, I want to focus on authenticity and specifically brand authenticity.

One dictionary definition says authenticity means representing one's true nature or beliefs; being true to oneself. For a business, that means you actually operate the way you claim to and you are true to your brand.

To achieve brand authenticity, you must align your external brand identity – that is, how your business is understood by customers and other stakeholders -- and your internal organizational culture -- the way the people in your organization behave and the attitudes and beliefs that inform those behaviors. Your brand and culture must be fused – tightly integrated, seamlessly connected.

Here are three ways to produce brand-culture fusion:

One, conduct a culture audit. Do an anthropology-style investigation of your culture:

- Look at how employees interact with each other and their environment
- Examine the communications, materials and touchpoints that they use, see and hear
- Note the rituals and artifacts that comprise daily work life

See if there are gaps between how employees currently think and behave and how they should if your company is to achieve your brand aspiration – and then identify ways to close those gaps.

Second, fuse your brand and culture by using a single set of values to guide everything your company does. You don't want to develop a list of internal organizational values that apply to employees, then separately come up with brand values that describe the way you want your brand to be perceived externally. Develop one set of core values to describe the unique way you do things on the inside and out – and make sure everyone knows, embraces and uses it.

And finally, cultivate employee brand engagement. Everything everyone does in your organization has the power to enhance or undermine perceptions of your brand. Every touchpoint communicates, every interaction matters. So, you need to ensure everyone in your organization:

- Knows what you want your brand to stand for and how you plan to achieve that
- They need to feel personally and emotionally inspired by your brand
- They should know how to use, interpret and reinforce your brand in their role even if they don't work in marketing

This isn't simply about everyone using the correct logo; it's about everyone making decisions that enable you to deliver on your brand promise. Employee brand engagement like this doesn't just happen -- you have to cultivate it through hands-on experiences, internal communications and brand tools such as a brand-culture guide. It's a leadership responsibility.

Brand-culture fusion is the antidote to the trust crisis we face. You earn people's trust when you are on the inside what you say on the outside.