

How personal leadership branding can empower teams to thrive

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An economic downturn, with the mounting pressures to reduce costs, downsize and restructure can mean that training and development is put on the back burner while the key issues are tackled. During this time, the atmosphere within an organisation can change overnight. Staff can become disengaged and performance levels will drop as a consequence. Some employees may work harder to try and secure their positions, while others will put their heads down and try to wait for the storm to blow over. Those who are left the task of managing an organisation where survivor syndrome has taken hold, have a tough job on their hands.

It is a mistake to underestimate the impact of disengaged employees during a recession. In reality, this is the time when you want to create advocates for your organisation; where staff are committed and 'go the extra mile'. Successful organisations will be those that focus on employee engagement as a business issue; introducing initiatives to enhance employee engagement levels, which in turn contributes to the development of a strong employer brand which can support a 'positive psychological contract between employer and employees' (CIPD, 2009; HDA, 2009).

In our experience a key strategy which can be employed to enhance employee engagement, is to encourage employees to take ownership of their own career by enabling them to identify their core attributes, passions and values which in turn contributes to the well-being of the organisation as a whole. Through an understanding of Personal Leadership Branding it is possible to help an individual drive their own performance and become responsible for their own success.

What is a personal leadership brand?

In the book Leadership Brand, Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood wrote:

"Simply stated, leadership brand is the identity of the leaders throughout an organization that bridges customer expectations and employee and organizational behaviour."

However, it can go beyond this definition. At its core, personal leadership branding is developed through a deep understanding of who you are, what you do, and how it can add value to others. It is also important to have a desire to lead for the right reasons and not simply for money, power or prestige. A strong, lasting personal brand comprises integrity which is linked to strong values.

When we use the term leadership this does not mean it is just aimed at people at the top, it can be present at all levels of the organisation as long as the individual has the correct motivation. I recently worked with a very hardworking, capable engineer, I'll call her Sarah. Her success within the organisation had long been based upon her technical ability, which made her a very valuable asset within her sector.

However after her first couple of years she felt frustrated by the lack of opportunities available. She had explained to her managers that she wanted to pursue other opportunities and develop her career but her requests were ignored. Sarah really liked the organisation and did not want to leave; however, she became disengaged and resentful of her position. When she was referred to us, her situation had worsened because of a round of redundancies that had taken place. As a result, of her unique skills she survived the redundancies, but it was due to these circumstances she came to the realization she could no longer carry on waiting for the opportunities to come to her. She knew that it was now even more important to put herself in the driving seat and make things happen for her career.

Through our work together she devised a simple but effective strategy to help her develop a leadership brand. We worked through a simple four step process, I created, to help build strong personal brands:

First step - Discover; where she worked on her values and passions, she also analysed her skills and experience. By the end of this process she understood what her USP was.

Second step - Communicate; this is where she gained feedback from her colleagues and managers on how she was exuding her brand, and worked whether the way she was perceived was in line with what she wanted.

Third step – Define; at this stage Sarah identified how she currently contributed to the organisation, and how with her newly understood values and attributes she could add more value to the organisation, team, clients and her network.

Fourth step – Create; she worked on a strategic plan where she could combine her personal strengths, passions and values to give maximum value inside and out of her organisation.

The outcome for Sarah was that she rediscovered her passion for sustainability. It was not only her passion; it was an area that her organisation also wanted to promote. She began to become involved in this area and was quickly seen as an advocate for green issues; whereby she was invited to become a member of some very high profile committees. This in turn helped her to open doors for the business and raise not only her organisation's profile but also her own, which in turn enabled Sarah to obtain exposure within other areas of the organization. The result is that she is now known, not only as a technical expert, but also an expert in the area of sustainability expanding the range of projects she can work on. Feeling confident about this she utilized her network to identify opportunities for the organisation within this field which allowed the organisation to pitch for work that was previously unobtainable.



Sarah could have just side-stepped the development of her own personal brand. However, she became aware that creating a leadership brand, that supported both the organisational values and her personal values, would be far more beneficial both for her career and for her self-development. For more information on our empowering your team to thrive and not just survive challenging times please click here - <http://www.hda.co.uk/corporate/hda-overview/InhousePersonalBranding.asp>

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