Eight Essentials to Emotionally Connect Your Employees to Your Business

Brand From the Inside

Libby Sartain  Mark Schumann
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Libby Sartain
Mark Schumann

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Contents

Introduction v

PART ONE: GET SMART!
1 Essential #1: Discover 3
2 Essential #2: Commit 21

PART TWO: GET READY!
3 Essential #3: Diagnose 63
4 Essential #4: Prepare 92

PART THREE: GET IT DONE!
5 Essential #5: Create 119
6 Essential #6: Apply 158
7 Essential #7: Market 195
8 Essential #8: Nurture 218

PART FOUR: WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
9 You and Employer Brand 241

Notes 244
Acknowledgments 249
The Authors 251
Index 253
For our spouses,
David Sartain and Leann Schumann,
for living with our work for all these years
and living their own “best brands”
of nurturing and support
Introduction

If it doesn’t happen inside, it can’t happen outside.

If the brand doesn’t live on the inside, it can’t thrive on the outside.

And if the brand isn’t built from the inside, few may believe it on the outside.

That’s why we wrote this book.

To show you, as a leader in business—whether in human resources or corporate communications or marketing or some other area—how to create an emotional connection with employees on the inside of your business so that they, in turn, deliver to your customers on the outside.

*If you don’t bring it to life on the inside, it can’t live on the outside.*

You may be thinking *That’s a nice idea, but is it essential?*

Fact is, businesses in every corner of the world look for a “secret sauce” to accomplish many things. How to outsmart competitors. How to stay out of trouble. How to make more money and increase shareholder value. A lot of what businesses need to do boils down, simply, to how to engage employees. How to recruit, retain, and motivate the right employees in the right jobs, to do the right things at the right time, to deliver what customers expect. And that boils down to how to emotionally connect employees to the business so that, as a result, the business succeeds.

At the same time, in every corner of the world, businesses look for new ways to clearly and directly address issues related to talent, to people. To skip through the presentations to get to the core of what needs to happen so the business succeeds.

And in every corner of the world, businesses look for solutions to the ever-growing problems of silo thinking and working. Wanting to break through the internal barriers so well-intentioned people can connect the dots rather than work in isolation. So the business succeeds.
The essentials to these and other critical issues for business can be found in the brand a business takes to its publics, outside and inside. And that’s what this book is all about.

For over twenty-five years, we have found ourselves in the middle of businesses struggling with formidable people issues. Along the way we have learned how so many issues boil down to the emotional connection a business builds with employees so that they in turn commit to the business as a place to buy and a place to work, deliver what the business promises to customers, and nurture what the business promises to employees. Our work—through trial and error, success and miss, enlightened efforts and less enlightened ones—has shown us what may be the secret sauce that business seeks.

We call it employer brand: how a business builds and packages its identity, from its origins and values, what it promises to deliver to emotionally connect employees so that they in turn deliver what the business promises to customers.

Building the employer brand from inside the business—with a consistent substance, voice, and authenticity throughout the employment relationship—may be the most powerful tool a business can use to emotionally engage employees.

That’s what employer brand is all about. And why we wrote this book.

Brand is a language and a process of thought that is, ultimately, simple. Business, in every corner of the world, begs for simplicity.

At every business, the issues can be so complex, solutions so involved, and working teams so spread out that it’s easy to lose sight of what it takes to get something done.

Based on our years of doing this work, we believe employer brand may be the secret to simplifying how business can approach many issues.

Now, you may say, “Oh, I’ve heard of that employer brand stuff, and it’s only an HR thing” or “Yes, I went to a seminar on that employer brand stuff, and it’s a communication thing.”

Wrong.

Even though we are from HR and communication, our point of view extends beyond these immediate worlds to how to solve business issues.

We see, every day, that well-intentioned people in business can easily get mired in silos and complexity and, as a result, let themselves be less than completely effective.
We believe that, by using employer brand as a framework, you can cut through what gets in the way of your business getting things done. Because brands are, at their core, simple.

And business begs for simplicity.

We share parallel passions about what employees can contribute when emotionally connected to a business. Libby has worked the internal hallways of human resources; Mark has worked as a consultant in corporate, employee, and HR communications. We joined forces, as client and consultant, to help build employer brands at two legendary businesses: Southwest Airlines and Yahoo!

When we started working together, at Southwest in the late 1980s, we first collaborated to communicate a new flexible benefits plan. We quickly realized this could be a prime opportunity to deepen the sense of relationship between the business and its people. Rather than produce conventional benefit communications, we got to the heart of the emotional connection through a multimedia campaign that could have emerged from an advertising agency to promote a product to customers—using every creative way we could imagine to market the plan and the company. We discovered that to get people to pay attention, we had to approach them emotionally, to connect with them emotionally. And motivate them to connect the dots to discover why benefits, in addition to being personally important, symbolized their relationship with the company. Little did we know this would be the start of what is now considered a legendary employer brand at Southwest.

Then we communicated another benefits program. And another. We moved into other topics and, within a few years, had created a total picture of the work experience at Southwest that reached out to prospective, new, current, and departing employees. With every opportunity we contributed to a fabric that would later be articulated as the Southwest employer brand. With every opportunity we planted seeds that, when nurtured, would become the emotional connection between the company and its employees and customers. We did it with common sense, hard work, and a desire to do the smart thing for the business and the right thing for people each step of the way. When all the pieces came together, we had created a marvelous employer brand that the business has successfully sustained. And along the way we coined a few lasting phrases, such as “color outside the lines” and “we are serious about having fun.”

A few years ago, Libby began applying the lessons of Southwest to a business just starting to address its employer brand: a new,
vibrant business fully committed to connecting its customer and employer brands in a seamless way. The Yahoo! experience reveals what a business can accomplish inside when it leverages the magic it creates outside.

We approach employer brand from two perspectives. Libby works in the world of human resources, with deep experience in building programs that define a place to work. Mark’s world of communications is all about articulating the employee experience. Libby sees employer brand through the lens of HR, in which the best programs are built on an authentic foundation of corporate identity and values. Mark sees employer brand from the employee perspective of how real people think about where they work.

We learned most of our lessons together. Even when we worked on separate efforts, we constantly shared ideas and experiences. And although we never viewed our collaboration as unique, we certainly see what a difference HR and communications people can make when working together rather than pursuing isolated strategies. In workplaces, whereas HR often focuses on strategies and processes, Corporate Communications frequently takes on internal and external messaging, and Marketing focuses on a brand that must be delivered outside. The three never seem to meet—or worse, they compete.

Building a great brand from the inside of a business takes more than one corporate function. It can’t be done by Marketing alone or HR alone or Corporate Communications alone. Though each well-meaning silo may create its own programs to build a brand, reinforce a culture, or communicate a message, such programmatic efforts cannot change the way people think and act. Only when people work together, seamlessly, can there be hope for authenticity in the employer brand. This book provides a way for these groups to work together, and the methodology we suggest transcends the traditional work of Marketing, Corporate Communications, or HR. Focusing on the employer brand can help your business overcome the common stumbling blocks of bureaucracy, egos, territorialism, fiefdoms, matrix structures, and misaligned goals.

That’s why we call employer brand the secret sauce that, when properly prepared, can create real results for business. And we’re among the first to tell this story. Although many books talk about brands and customers, few focus on how to build a legendary employer brand from within. This may in fact be the first book to
focus on what must happen inside a business for an employer brand to create not only positive buzz about a business as a place to work but also a commitment from people that produces extraordinary results.

That, in a nutshell, is what we’ve learned along the road to employer brand. What it can accomplish for a business. What it can mean to an employee. Why it’s critical to any business strategy. And how it should connect what happens inside a business to the customer experience on the outside. We’ve learned what works and what doesn’t. What succeeds and what bombs. How the best intentions can get trapped in silos within a business. How some brands understand who they are, offering a real essence and spirit, while others remain hollow.

The key to attracting, retaining, and engaging employees is the creative, holistic use of what the business believes from its core, as articulated in its employer brand. It’s securing the right people with the right skills in the right jobs and, once in place, establishing a relationship of trust that engages them to deliver the right behaviors so that, ultimately, the business executes on strategy and delivers its promise to customers. And it all begins inside. Just as a brand makes promises to customers on the outside, that business makes promises to its employees on the inside. And for that internal experience to be authentic, it must build what it is and what it believes from inside the business. So that leaders in the business deliver on the promise to the employees, who deliver on the promise to customers. So the business captures a share of the heart of the employee, who in turn captures a share of the heart of customers, which ultimately results in success for the business. The essence of this emotional connection is the same core of a business that is at the core of the brand the business takes to its public.

Any business, in any corner of the world, must create an experience to engage its employees before it can expect those employees to deliver the brand to customers. The key to employer brand is tapping the emotional essence of the company and its brand and using that emotional essence to frame and articulate the employee experience. It takes a collaboration of many in a company to nurture the employer brand that will make a difference.

This book is your guidebook on an important journey for your business: to create this connection. Although the lessons we have learned frame our point of view, this is essentially a how-to guide
for any business leader who wants to engage people. And wants to find the essential ingredients of the secret sauce.

We share the shortcuts we wish we had taken. Material we used that may be helpful. Questions we asked (and wish we had asked). And things we hope you remember that we hope we never forget. Practical tips and methods rooted in business fundamentals and common sense to ensure that every employee understands what it takes, each day from each person, for a business to become a great place to work and a great brand to buy.

For years we have planned to write this book. We have discussed it over lunch, over drinks, on the golf course, when preparing and delivering presentations, and after our most productive business meetings. The pace of business evolution compels us to write it now. Business leaders have long known the need to differentiate products and services. Today it’s critical for business to differentiate the strategy for people—to get the right people in the right jobs at the right time and to emotionally connect employees to the business so they commit to what the business promises to customers.

This book describes, in detail, the eight essentials for you to build your employer brand for your business—from the inside—to create the emotional connection with employees.

Our goal is to inspire you to champion brand transformation from within your business, working together instead of in silos, to create a seamless, consistent, authentic experience for employees and customers.

We believe in the power of employer brand.

Thanks for joining us.

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LIBBY SARTAIN
MARK SCHUMANN
Part One

Get Smart!
Essential #1: Discover

We, the authors, are brand dependent.
And we admit it. We love to discover brands.

We each begin each day sipping or gulping a certain brand of coffee, showering with a specific brand of soap, eating a particular brand of yogurt topped with a selected brand of naturally healthy cereal. Nothing gets between us and our brands.

We are emotionally connected to our brands. And we come by this brand dependence naturally.

Our childhood memories are filled with brand images. The smiling face of a cold pitcher of Kool-Aid. The roar of Tony the Tiger. Our sadness at learning that Trix are for kids, not for rabbits. Mark running down a suburban street wearing Keds and a Davy Crockett coonskin cap. Libby playing with a Barbie doll.

Our mothers were classic brand consumers of the 1950s and 1960s. Mark’s mother would serve only vegetables by Del Monte, catsup by Heinz, and soft drinks by Coca-Cola. Libby’s mother would emerge for the day with makeup by Frances Denney, a permanent by Toni, and nail polish by Revlon. Our fathers got into the brand act, too. Mark’s family only drove Chevrolets; Libby’s family, only her father’s Oldsmobile.

We were lucky to grow up in an era of great brands that instantly commanded respect and passion. Imagining the grand images of air travel of Pan Am and TWA. Trusting the family car to the men who wore the Texaco star. Watching a fatherly Walt Disney on television (before cable) introducing his Wonderful World of Color and telling us about the latest rides at Disneyland.