



Lesley Everett

CORPORATE BRAND PERSONALITY

Re-focus Your Organization's Culture to
Build **Trust**, **Respect** and **Authenticity**



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Leadership 'off-brand' behaviours

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There is no doubt that your leadership team are responsible for and represent one of the most powerful influences on your corporate brand and reputation today, over and above all other aspects. Their style and behaviours are a catalyst for the employee brand you create due to the standards they set, the employer brand that is projected, and the culture ultimately maintained. This is a responsibility that merits a high and constant level of assessment, measurement and adjustment. We are in a business world where this simply has to be at the very core of your brand strategy if you are to compete effectively and achieve the goals you set yourselves as an organization.

We are going to focus in this chapter on bringing leadership brand to the fore of your thinking and covering ways in which to address and adjust by looking at:

- how the culture is influenced by leadership style and behaviours;
- top-down and bottom-up cultures;
- CEO brand;
- the narcissistic leader;
- humour in the office;
- the effect line managers have on your brand;
- leadership brand and executive presence.

What is authentic leadership?

What your employees look for in your leaders today is a high degree of honesty, integrity and fairness and a feeling that they are genuine and not

trying to be somebody they are not. Your customers are also looking for something similar. Authentic leadership means being aware of your strengths, limitations and emotions and behaving in a way that demonstrates this self-awareness. When leaders appear to put on 'an act' it will dramatically dilute the levels of trust their teams have in them and therefore their effectiveness in taking people with them. The follow-on effects of this are obvious.

In his book, *Authentic Leadership* (2004), Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic looked at what makes today's successful leaders successful. The thread that runs through the book is that they are first crystal clear about their values and what they stand for. Secondly, they are transparent with those values so others around them know what they stand for. They are therefore more effective at taking people with them and exerting influence. Thirdly, they don't compromise on those strong values. That is the toughest piece of course. Sometimes we are challenged on our values and have to do things that aren't necessarily in total alignment with our value set. However, we can probably live with it once or twice. If compromise is required regularly in our roles, then it's time to consider moving on.

You cannot lead productively today if your teams don't know who you are. They need a clear direction from a leader who is self-aware, genuine, is clear about what he stands for and is prepared to stand up for this. A level of vulnerability is also essential and this can only be achieved if you as a leader are totally comfortable with yourself.

I recently spoke in Europe at a conference for a large financial organization, focused on building confidence among their talent and female leadership in particular. In preparation for this event I was part of a planning forum to discuss the objectives and other elements of the conference. One session was to be a panel of senior-level leaders who were to share how they had got to where they are now and the mistakes and challenges along the way. The two questions they struggled with most were: 'Can you tell us about a time when you misjudged a situation and made a wrong decision, and how you recovered?'; and 'Tell us about a situation where you felt out of your comfort zone in terms of your abilities to achieve success.' Of course, both of these were asking them to expose their vulnerability with the result of showing the audience that it's ok to make mistakes because you can still get to where you want to be, and that as a senior leader you do not always get it right first time. They truly struggled with this exposure as they saw it, and in my view we never got to the true person behind the leader. Therefore the objective of the panel session, which was to help build confidence in their future leaders by showing that being out of your comfort zone is necessary to grow, was never met.

You cannot be authentic by trying to imitate someone else. You can learn from others' experiences, but you can't be successful if you are trying to be just like them. People trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not a replica of someone else. Former Amgen CEO Kevin Sharer, who worked as Jack Welch's assistant in the 1980s, saw the downside of this. 'Everyone wanted to be like Jack,' he said. 'Leadership has many voices. You need to be who you are, not try to emulate somebody else' (George, Sims, McLean and Mayer, 2007).

So the first step in great leadership is to establish who you are as a leader and how you want to be perceived, clarifying your own brand and value set. We will cover more on this in Chapter 5, Getting back on-message.

The CEO and corporate reputation

According to research by Burson-Marsteller in the United States, a CEO's reputation accounts for 50 per cent of a company's reputation (Jensen, 2014). In Germany, it counts for 63 per cent. Just like a product or service brand, a CEO's brand is a collection of powerful and clear ideas that people have of that brand. To be successful, the CEO needs to project a brand that is consistent with and in alignment with his or her value set. They need to be known for what they are great at and the uniqueness of their brand. It is this that will make them stand out and be successful – by being unique and different.

The CEO brand is not just an external face of the company – people see the CEO as a representative of the corporate brand on the outside but the face of the culture on the inside, thereby also impacting on the employer brand and the reputation of the company. The CEO brand can also very effectively inspire employees to do the best job they can for the company.

CEO brand impact

Whatever the personality of the CEO, we can be sure that it will have some level of impact on the brand perceptions of the company. This can be a good thing of course as what the CEO says and does can have as much impact on sales as TV advertising or marketing campaigns. Interestingly, according to the CEO Reputation Premium and Weber Shandwick's research, 50 per cent of executives say that their CEO's reputation impacted their decision to accept a position, and 58 per cent say it keeps them at their company (Weber Shandwick, 2015).

However, this can go badly wrong too – remember Tony Hayward of BP after the catastrophic oil spill and those famous words 'I want my life back'. He also previously stated that the amount of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico is 'relatively tiny' compared with the 'very big ocean'. The share price of BP slumped after this, as did his and BP's reputation. Mr Hayward's response also tainted the brand image of the whole industry so that huge efforts had to be applied to regaining their collective reputation.

On the other hand Richard Branson rarely makes public appearances, as he knows he's not great at it and not the best person to do it. However, after the Virgin Rail crash in 2007 he decided to speak to the press. Although the interview was hesitant and not slick, he came across as authentic and empathic saying the right things at the right times, without blame. This was yet another reinforcement of the strong Virgin brand via its chairman – worth more than any advertisement. Consumers can relate to him as the personification of the brand.

In a more recent example in 2015, the CEO of Merlin Entertainments, Nick Varney was interviewed after a serious accident involving one of their UK theme park roller coasters. In one particular instance, Mr Varney was interviewed by a TV presenter, after which a petition was signed demanding her sacking because of the harshness and persistency of her questioning. Mr Varney remained calm and composed yet empathic and professional. He gained much praise for his handling of this interview and as a result his brand has grown positively. He has become known for his professionalism and grace and, despite this being a tragic accident, the company has retained its dignity and brand, and its loss of share price is likely to recover fairly quickly.

There is often a misconception that brand management is in the hands of a company's communications and marketing team, particularly when a crisis happens. However, it's the CEO who holds the future of a brand in their hands. It is how they initially handle the situation personally in the face of the media that will recover the brand or not. It is also their opportunity to add a personal and human element to the brand that is much needed at these times.

How a leader responds to the challenge of taking responsibility can influence public feelings on a particular event. CEOs handling bad news ineffectively can have a detrimental impact on share price and reputation, and add to the list of damage already in place for a business. This happened recently when Peter Fankhauser, CEO of Thomas Cook, took too long to respond personally to the tragic incident of a family of two children who were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning in a Corfu hotel in 2006. He eventually apologized 'for all they have been through'. It was not the heartfelt response to such a tragedy that the public and the family involved quite reasonably had expected.

Whether we like it or not, the CEO brand projects what the company stands for, in the eyes of customers and shareholders. Business leaders are emerging from a period in which traditionally CEOs kept a low profile, except in times of crisis. This is rapidly changing and we're now in an era of social media and the ability for consumers to quickly spread a dilution of the corporate brand with comments about its leaders. We have also come to expect a rapid and human response.

In addition, employees can be inspired to do the best job by the brand the CEO projects. Feeling proud of the company you work for is a key element of employee engagement and feeling pride in senior management is a part of this. The CEO's brand adds the much-needed personality to the brand, in a way that no other means of marketing can do to the same extent. However, this brand needs to be defined, nurtured and exposed wherever possible and appropriate, and the brand story told – we will cover more on this in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Of course this goes further, it is the brand of the whole executive team that shapes the brand of the organization. This needs to be congruent with the values of the company and each personal brand within the team needs to dovetail with and be in synergy with the others. You also need to be cognizant of the need for the leadership team to complement the brand of the CEO, rather than contradict it. This is not to suggest, that all personal brands of the leadership team need to be the same or even similar, they just need to be in alignment and fully understood by each other, and consistently projected. In my experience, leadership team brands are often unclear, incoherent and nowhere near enough time and focus is applied to this aspect of corporate branding. Now is the time to address that.

If your employees are proud of, aspire to be like and talk positively about the leadership team this creates a powerful employee engagement element that is seen as critical in some organizations. Employees want to be proud of the leaders in their company when they see them interviewed on TV or quoted in a press article.

When it comes to training programmes to embed the values of the new brand throughout the organization, the leadership and executive teams can at times be deemed internally as exempt from needing this. Or perhaps they themselves see it as 'going through the motions', as they have of course been immersed in the re-brand process and there is the assumption that this training is 'just for their teams'. This is potentially a dangerous trap to fall into.

The executive team must not be exempt from brand behaviour training

Bottom-up or top-down culture

A culture cannot be created purely via a top-down approach. It has to be encouraged to emerge naturally from within an organization, and then reflected, supported and reinforced by the leadership team and senior management. Yes standards need to be set and inspiration provided from the leadership, however it will always be at the heart of the workforce that the culture is created and ultimately adjusted where necessary.

We could say that the culture of an organization is built from the bottom and shaped from the top. Or on occasions, tainted and diluted at and from the top. I have experienced many situations where a company is re-branding and wanting to embed the values and brand messages throughout the organization, but where I'm told from several angles that the leadership teams, or some individuals within the teams need to work on this too. It seems that at times, senior leaders are either lacking in self-awareness or deem themselves exempt from needing to modify behaviours in the way they expect their staff to. Executives are no different from everybody else – nobody admits to bad behaviours and everybody thinks they are better than the average. Similar to how most people think they are better than the average driver! So a good starting point is to acknowledge the fact that you may not be getting it right yourself all of the time and raise your level of self-awareness. Then you need to demonstrate that you are willing to admit that you can learn and improve by attending programmes yourself.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable? Could this be you?

Old style 'command and control' leadership has of course no place in today's corporate world. In any event, it was never effective in creating an environment or culture that was healthy for any company to maximize people effectiveness. It stifled creativity and innovation, and restricted individuals in being authentic in their behaviours. This was very much a top-down culture and today we need to recognize that the corporate behaviours and culture that exist in an organization are created from within, at the heart of the workforce. We need therefore to turn things on their head and look at them, not so much from a bottom-up approach, but from an organic growth from within the workforce that diffused throughout, all the way to the top, and down again. Of course the executive team and all senior leadership need to embrace and reflect the desired behaviours in all that they do internally and externally. Without this reinforcement, leakage will occur and result in confused and unclear employer brand messages, and ultimately the desired corporate brand message is not fortified.

The influence and impact of the leadership team

Your company, no doubt, has management development, talent and leadership training programmes and initiatives in place, or at least you are starting to create a framework for such a programme. In fact, with those of our clients who have a limited training budget, training is almost always concentrated at senior leadership or talent communities. You may also have induction programmes for new starters, and training courses for those aspiring to management positions of course. These may all have varying degrees of content and focus on your corporate values, what the organization stands for and what is expected of individuals. So let me ask you, what do you have in place for your executive leadership team that ensures that every one of you consistently reflects and reinforces the corporate values via your internal and external behaviours? What measures are in place for feedback on how you come across and what your personal brands stand for? My guess is that you, as a leadership team, neglect this area for yourselves and it's also an unwritten assumption that 'of course the leadership team represent the corporate values at all times – why wouldn't we?' In addition, how much do you encourage and allow, I mean *really* invite and allow, feedback for yourselves, and then act on it?

When I asked Sarah Dickins, executive people director at Friends Provident about how they ensure that the leadership are also 'on-message' with the brand messaging in their behaviours, she told me that in this last year alone they have spent £1 million on leadership training and this includes their board and their direct reports, amounting to 1,200 employees. 'Every member of the Executive Team has gone through this training. We've learned a lot about ourselves and each other by putting ourselves in challenging situations, and making ourselves a little vulnerable,' she says.

First, there is little time for you as a team to focus on this and secondly it's often considered a no-go area for heads of learning and development to question the behaviours of the leadership team, let alone provide a coaching or training programme that addresses this subject for them too. I am frequently told when developing personal branding programmes with learning and development managers, 'we're not sure yet how we're going to get the leadership team to take part in this too. They think the rest of

the company need it but see themselves as exempt'. Of course, my reaction is, if you are really serious about getting the results and total buy-in to this programme then the leadership team have to take part. They not only need to be seen to embrace the concepts and live them, but quite possibly also really need the training and coaching themselves too. Is this the case in your organization?

Non-verbal leadership influence

It is often the non-verbal behaviours that have the greatest amount of influence on others. Generally, these are subconscious and present a lack of self-awareness.

A female board director I worked with, from a large global organization, was sent to me for coaching specifically because the way she presented herself was not congruent with the expectations of the company at that level. She was well-liked and professionally brilliant, however when she turned up at company events her interpretation of 'appropriate dress' was, I was told, not at the level expected by a board director. 'Leggings that were so old you could see through them, blouses that would often have a mark or stain on, and hair that needed a good brush through', were the descriptions used. This was truly getting in the way of her aspiration of becoming a non-executive director and in gaining extra exposure as an ambassador of the company. It was a very sensitive area to address as you can imagine. However, the point is, are you seeking the coaching and advice needed in this type of blind-spot area?

So having got this sensitive area on the table, let's look at what you could be doing to establish what's needed and then assess what has to be implemented. It makes sense that if you as a leadership team consistently represent and reinforce the corporate values authentically in the way you behave, then this will filter down to your management teams and thereafter their people, reinforcing the whole desired culture. As mentioned, the leadership team do not shape the culture, but they do infect and colour it with influential behaviours, creating a diluted and weakened culture, or if we get it right, a heightened and strengthened cultural environment that creates and encourages their teams to operate consistently and effectively in all that they do and to be the best they can be. The Water Tank Theory illustrates this:

FIGURE 4.1 The water tank theory

If you put a coloured dye in at the top of the tank of water, it will slowly but convincingly and permanently colour, taint or dilute the rest of the water in the tank. You simply cannot afford for this effect to happen with negative behaviours. In a positive sense, it will influence culture and behaviours throughout the organization, keeping them intact in a way that you need in order to stay competitive, stand out and remain relevant in your sector. You cannot hope to create the ultimate sustainable culture without paying close attention to the way you behave and therefore influence as a leadership team.

It is essential to role-model the behaviours you want to see in others throughout the company. For example:

- You want your teams to take control of their careers, personal development and attend training sessions? Then attend them yourself and be fully present (no sloping off early to go to urgent meetings or answer e-mails).
- You want people to turn up to meetings on time and fully prepared? Then do this yourself too with no exceptions.
- You advocate that you want people to get a better life balance? Then demonstrate this yourself by not being in the office all hours or answering e-mails in the middle of the night.

As soon as you stop exhibiting the behaviours you want to see in them, you give others the perfect excuse to stop too.

Consistently emulate the behaviours you want to see in others

As Fred Astaire said, 'The hardest job kids face today is learning good manners without seeing any.' The same applies to leadership.

CASE STUDY

I was asked by an HR director to work with a CEO of a large finance organization in the United Kingdom, who needed help with the way he came across to employees and the media. I was told in the brief that people didn't really 'know' him; he never made time for anybody or spoke to employees in the office, and sat in his plush glass office on the top floor not really interacting at all unless he had to.

When I started working with him, I first of all discovered he was shy and introverted and also that he disliked interacting with people for the sake of it with no real agenda. I gathered some feedback from people from various levels in the company and yes, sure enough, they were feeling like they were invisible to him and that he had no interest in them as individuals. This was causing them to feel irrelevant and undervalued.

Of course we had to work on this as it was negatively affecting his brand internally and externally, and ultimately the brand of the company and how his employees felt about working there. It had a danger of leaking out too with potential negative effect on the business and employer brand.

Starting with his authentic brand, and how he wanted to be perceived, we worked on many areas of the way he communicated and represented his brand. Among other things, I suggested that instead of calling down from his office to the person he needed information from, he actually walk down there to see them, have a two-minute chat and request the information he needed. He liked this idea, as he said it had a purpose and it's not just small talk and wandering through the office for effect.

A few weeks later, however, I discovered that he had been going down to see the relevant person, but walking past many others to get there without even making eye contact. So it was back to the drawing board to address this too. We got there in the end and eventually people started to talk about him in a more positive way, without realizing that he had specifically worked on this aspect of his brand behaviours.

This alone was a huge lesson for my client. He realized that his brand was on show all the time and that people judged him, and to a degree the company, on how he projected himself.

At the end of the coaching programme, he stated that it had enabled him to put himself on a conscious track, and every decision he now makes and every communication he has is more in alignment with his brand and values and therefore those of the organization. In other words, he became more self-aware and more consistent in the projection of his personal brand because he'd found a way to be authentic and true to himself, as well as being more effective in the eyes of his team and wider employee base.

He said afterwards that a re-framing took place from which all his actions and behaviours could flow. As CEO he recognized that he demonstrated leadership behaviours in the choices he made, subconsciously, every minute of every day, whether they related to the way he presented himself, dealt with people or interacted with clients or employees.

The narcissistic leader

With the example above, the CEO was unaware of the impact he was having on the employees and ultimately on the internal culture, but was open to the feedback and able to embrace it and fix it. As a leader you need to have this level of self-awareness, the ability and willingness to listen to feedback and adjust behaviours where necessary, if you are to create and support a culture of trust, respect and transparency.

As we've seen earlier, the internal culture of an organization will spill out to the outside world at some point. This impacts employer brand and as a result the overall corporate brand. Narcissists have an exaggerated sense of their own self-importance, an increased need for others' admiration and a general lack of empathy. This is a common trait among CEOs to varying degrees, and in fact according to a research study by Illinois professor of psychology Emily Grijalva, the most effective leaders have a moderate level of narcissism (Grijalva, 2015).

A moderate level of narcissism is needed for effective leadership

The consideration here is at what point the level of narcissism has a negative impact on the behaviours of employees, thereby creating an employer brand that is out of alignment with the desired corporate brand. Emily Grijalva's study showed that although narcissists are more likely to emerge as group leaders, after a certain point, too much narcissism is likely to undermine a person's effectiveness as a leader.

The study's co-author Peter Harms, a professor of management in the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska, said those with moderate levels of narcissism have achieved 'a nice balance between having sufficient levels of self-confidence, but do not manifest the negative, antisocial aspects of narcissism that involve putting others down to feel good about themselves' (Reed, 2014).

Of course, some employees will relate to narcissistic leaders differently and more positively than others. However, the important point here is that those who emerge as leaders in an organization have a degree of narcissism – it is the management of this to appropriate levels that will ensure that it does not adversely affect relationships with employees and influence bad behaviours and employee brand.

Remember, self-confidence and optimism are healthy; arrogance and megalomania are not. Make sure you get the balance right.

Nothing is off the record

Much as when talking to a journalist nothing is ever off the record, the small actions and supposedly casual comments of the CEO or senior leaders aren't either. Eyes are always on you. When you're feeling under pressure or down because of some business adversity, you simply cannot show this. The ripple effect among your immediate leadership team, employees and even the media in the worst case, cannot be underestimated. So how do you balance this with remaining authentic? One answer is to be confident in yourself. Whatever happens is beyond your control but you can control how you deal with it and react to it. If you look back on your past, there are sure to be major challenges you have encountered. At the time these appeared to be massive challenges, but the chances are looking back they weren't so bad and you managed through them. This kind of mindset will help you to project an authentic confidence rather than a false one, keep your brand intact and avoid unnecessary turbulence in the company. How you personally manage through adversity is critical to keeping the company brand on track.

The power of line managers

Line managers can be your biggest area of concern (and opportunity) and create the most significant gap for leakage of brand messaging. This is often a middle management position that we regularly find does not receive the level of management training required in order to lead a team effectively. Quite often, line managers are promoted into their role organically without necessarily being totally ready for or qualified for the role. It is a role that is often filled by those who have been in the team the longest, understand the technical aspects, have been moved from another department, but have little or no training on how to authentically lead a team. I find from our work with organizations that often line managers do not reinforce the importance of adhering to a set of expected behaviours or ‘live the brand’ in a way that encourages and invites their team members to do the same. When delivering our programmes, we experience situations where we’re told that an individual cannot attend a pre-organized coaching session or a training module due to being called out by their line manager. It even occasionally happens during coaching sessions – imagine the impact of this in terms of valuing and respecting the individual’s personal development. Inexperienced line managers are more likely to migrate to and adopt a conscious or unconscious ‘command and control’ style of leadership rather than a coaching style of management that is more conducive to keeping the team on-board and feeling valued and respected. This can be due to lack of training and mentoring in how to lead effectively and is therefore a natural result of not having the basics of good leadership and influencing style in place. As we saw in Chapter 3, creating a strong team brand can help bridge this gap and provide your middle managers with the tools they need.

In Chapter 3 we looked at the Asda model for employee engagement. They recognize that challenges with employee engagement can be localized at line management level so they closely monitor and manage this with their employee engagement surveys.

Hayley Tatum, senior vice president of people and stores at Asda says that line managers are measured not just on their last three stock results (as is usually the case in retail), or in other words how controlled and accountable their retail routine is, but they are also measured on how engaging their leadership is. A leadership index is created for them so they can clearly see how they perform overall against the four pledges they have for employee engagement, against their peer group and the average for their grade. The line managers are keen to see these results from the surveys, and therefore

they have a greater incentive to encourage their teams to complete the survey. They give them time in work hours to do this.

Hayley and her team can also clearly see from the surveys, although anonymous, if there is generally low performance in a particular area and can then work out which line manager needs to be focused on. Alternatively, of course, they can identify where celebration of achievement is deserved. It also enables her to focus their training and development efforts in the right areas and make investment where it is most needed, creating bespoke programmes, rather than making huge assumptions of what training is needed and in which areas.

Personal branding should start in the boardroom

The brand of your leadership team is now a significant element of your corporate brand messaging. Your employees look for a strong connection between your leadership brand and style, and the messaging of the company. Some 55 per cent of global executives who see their CEO as almost exclusively focused on the bottom line, see them also as having a weak reputation internally (Weber Shandwick, 2015). Employees need to see a strong personal brand from their leaders focusing on ethics, visibility and authenticity as well as profit margins.

With Generation Y and Generation Z coming into your organizations in force, you will find this will increasingly become the case as the next few years unfold. A common trait and perhaps expectation of Generation Y is to see people as equal. They dislike and won't work well under any indication of old-style command and control leadership styles. They will not automatically respect authority or leadership, just because of hierarchy, because they feel respect is personally earned. Senior leadership will therefore in their eyes not be exempt from the behaviours expected of the rest of the employee base. They come from a place of fairness and equality and if this is not demonstrated they will ultimately decide your company is not for them.

Leaders who make a personal connection with employees and show interest in their personal and career aspirations, inspire the highest levels of achievement among their teams. If people are valued, their productivity increases. If they are supported by a leader who they feel truly cares for them as an individual, then they have an ability to do more, achieve more

and be more successful. These are all elements of your leadership brand that you need to take on-board to encourage a greater degree of employee engagement and ultimately influence a great employer brand and culture.

We need leaders with strong personal brands

We are starting to see a greater level of desire for recruiting leaders who have a strong personal brand already and who are known for their expertise in their specific field. Some forward-thinking companies now encourage their leaders to be more visible externally, including on social media, as they see it as a benefit to not just the leader themselves but the company also. I interviewed Andrew Grill, global managing partner at IBM Social Consulting, and he said his already strong personal brand in the marketplace in which he is known enabled him to put a price on what he was worth to IBM during the final interview stage. Andrew said that IBM sees a direct benefit to the business with him being ‘out there and visible’ and being considered a thought-leader in his own right. Andrew now recruits leaders into his team that have strong personal brands, as he’s seen first-hand the benefits this brings to the business.

The benefits that can be expected from recruiting leaders with strong personal brands, and helping others to develop theirs are:

- more opportunities to get the corporate brand messaging out externally via a human interface;
- enhancement of employer brand and in particular in attracting Generation Y talent;
- increase in trust of the company (as the leader is willing to put himself on a stage and personally talk about the company and its value set);
- increase in authenticity and respect.

Here are some thoughts on how you might internally build your leadership brand and informally engage with your employees on a more personal level, along with the more formal elements of appraisals, performance reviews and rewards:

- modelling desired behaviours;
- meaningful connections and follow-through with actions and promises;
- adopting a coaching culture;

- creating forums and discussion groups for new ideas or to find solutions to challenges;
- gaining their input to the physical office environment;
- creating communities for topics and areas of interest, outside of the immediate scope of the business;
- relevant and meaningful team-building events that go beyond go-karting and paint-balling, and meet the needs of all team members, rather than alienating some of them;
- sharing your own stories of career development, adversity or challenge.

You can also ask yourself these questions to ascertain the effectiveness of your leadership brand. Wherever possible, you should also get feedback from others, as this may differ from your own perceptions and evaluations.

- Am I open and flexible to the different personalities and opinions of my team?
- Do I always provide honest, helpful and considered feedback to help develop my team members?
- Do I effectively give time to coach my team members to help their career development?
- When I look at myself in the mirror, do I feel a deep level of contentment with my leadership style and abilities?
- Have I given a high visibility project to a team member?
- Do I consistently recognize great performance?
- Do I fully understand the strengths and talents of all my team members and manage them accordingly?

A change in culture will take a great deal of time and effort to realize, of course. However, I hear a lot of talk about this in some of the companies I work with and those I'd like to, but in reality there are few companies and leadership teams that actually have the energy or capacity to make it happen. The CEO and executive team will often make the statement or create the strategy for the change required and believe the middle managers are behind them. The true picture is often that they are very far behind them and they do not have the buy-in they thought they had. An extremely visionary leadership is required in order to make big change and this is based on transparency and inclusion. Don't just assume that all your managers are in alignment with your thinking without putting in the effort to create this.

When I asked UK CEO of Handelsbanken, Anders Bouvin, what he believes his role is at Handelsbanken, he replied, ‘My role is one of coach and supporter. I ensure that it is made as easy as possible within our branches for them to serve their customers in the way they believe is appropriate.’ This demonstrates leadership at its best – create the values and the vision, ensure that local managers are clear on it via coaching and an open door, and then give them the power at the local level to run with it in their teams. Simple really, but the difficult part is putting in the energy to effect it.

Putting humour into the personality of the brand

We know that many of the most successful brands have humour or fun at their heart, for example Southwest Airlines and Virgin Atlantic. Herb Kelleher, co-founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines said, ‘What we are looking for, first and foremost, is a sense of humour. We hire attitudes.’

This is of course not a requirement to be successful, but it is certainly an asset for a brand to have a sense of humour associated with it. We can see that in recent years, fun and humour has become an integral part of TV advertising – Specsavers have made a whole brand out of their entertaining and funny advertisements. This has been achieved to such a level that the ‘Should have gone to Specsavers’ tagline has become a widely recognized punchline for everyday situations, certainly in the United Kingdom. Generation Y are known to be more attracted to brands that have humorous advertising so it’s a sensible route to go down.

You may be thinking, ‘That’s fine for *those* companies, but that could never work here because our brand is very high class and we cater to a very professional and serious clientele.’

Fair enough, and we know the key to effective branding is to be congruent with the values you have created. But this doesn’t mean there isn’t room for any humour, especially since all we’re really talking about is adding a human voice to your branding efforts and making a human connection with people. Mike Kerr, president of Humour at Work and author of *The Humour Advantage*, says ‘No matter how serious your business or how serious you think your customers are, there’s *always* a little room for some safe humour’ (Kerr, 2015).

The use of humour can also help businesses brand themselves as attractive places to work and do business. Companies such as Zappos, the online shoes and clothing retailer, attract new employees in numbers far exceeding

their competitors because they've branded themselves as a fun and positive place to work. On listening to Jenn Lim, CEO and chief happiness officer at Delivering Happiness and a Zappos consultant, speak at a conference recently I heard how they have created a 'Happiness Framework' that serves to create a culture that all employees at Zappos clearly understand and follow. In fact, it is grounds for firing if employees are not contributing to the culture. The Happiness Framework consists of:

- perceived control;
- perceived progress;
- connectedness;
- vision/meaning (being part of something bigger than yourself).

Other companies use humour to attract customers and turn those customers into raving, passionate fans for their business. Humour works so effectively as a branding tool because it helps make any business more likeable; it humanizes even large, conservative companies. Humour also builds goodwill capital that companies can draw upon when things go off the rails.

Paul E ter Wal, engagement and accountability expert from the Netherlands says, 'Happiness has a direct relationship with work engagement. Happy people have more personal energy and when they also work in a stimulating environment with more responsibility, more resources, feedback etc, they will get more energy from their work as well. So, there will be an increased employee engagement. Higher work engagement will have a significant impact on productivity and profitability of an organization.'

Phil Jones, managing director of Brother UK uses 'Alacrity – a happy state of readiness', to describe the business culture he tries to create at Brother UK. He says, 'It's what a modern workplace needs to be. Alacrity addresses the human conditions and resiliency needed to be responsive in a disruptive world, which ultimately then leads to business agility.'

Humour or fun is increasingly being recognized as a core business value that both drives success and reflects success. Beyond the obvious benefits of humour in the workplace as a tool for boosting morale, strengthening relationships and managing stress, we know from numerous studies that humour also improves trust in the workplace, facilitates better communication, increases productivity, lowers employee absenteeism, and it's a huge catalyst for creativity and innovation.

Of course, the humour you use as a company needs to be congruent with your brand. If you have a classy brand, then your humour, for the most part, should be classy. If you want to be known as an edgy company, then use

edgy humour. Make sure the fun aspects contribute to and reflect the brand image you want to project, both personally and as a company.

Top leaders, starting at the CEO level, set the tone for any organization and if humour or fun is a core value for you, then it's imperative that senior leaders lead by example and demonstrate a willingness to laugh at themselves. Embracing a sense of humour is one of the most effective ways to make a leader more genuine and more human, and it's a key way to build trust. Because humour helps leaders become more likeable and therefore more approachable, it's also a principal way to build a culture of open and honest communication.

Appropriate humour is a great way to build trust

This doesn't mean the CEO has to adopt a habit of wearing Mickey Mouse socks or morph into Jerry Seinfeld or Joan Rivers during their next business presentation. Nor does it mean they have to be an extrovert or exude fake enthusiasm. Many CEOs in organizations that embrace a sense of fun and humour are in fact introverts. Embracing a sense of humour is rarely about being funny – it's about demonstrating that you are human and able to laugh at your own mishaps.

Mike Kerr provides these simple top tips for senior leaders to use to demonstrate a healthy sense of humour:

- First and foremost, don't squash the natural humour and fun that happens organically in most organizations.
- Admit when you mess up and show that you're willing to laugh at yourself. Share personal anecdotes that will help employees see the person behind the job title.
- Participate in team-building events, wacky theme days, employee skit nights, or funny video montages to demonstrate your willingness to 'go along' and poke a bit of fun at your own expense.
- Have an employee, or if you're really game, a child, interview you on video in a relaxed context that allows you to share some personal, fun insights about yourself.
- Whenever you address the troops don't try too hard to be funny (it can backfire painfully if this isn't natural for you), but do bring your openness and personality along for the ride.

- Share your early bloopers and blunders. Bloopers and even embarrassing stories are natural conduits for humour and sharing these kinds of stories will go a long way towards helping you build trust and come across as more genuine and human.

When it comes to humour, it's all about authenticity. The brands that make humour work are authentic; they know their persona and they run with it. Some companies sell mundane products, but using humour in their marketing has transformed the way consumers perceive them. For you as CEO or a senior leader in your company, you need to work on ways to add humour and fun in an appropriate way into your daily lives, team meetings, presentations, interviews and external events.

Here are just three ideas that provide a basis for some creative thought around introducing more fun into your environment:

- Start a team humour file or book where you collect funny customer questions and humorous, work-related material. A humour file reminds everyone to sharpen their humour saw and it serves as a repository for material that you can share during meetings, on your intranet site, or on a humour bulletin board.
- Encourage managers to create alternative job titles for their team that celebrate the true nature of their work. For example, 'Queen of fun and laughter' or 'Director of first impressions'. Even consider having these printed on the back of business cards. It's a fun talking point.
- Humour drives creativity, so make sure your meetings are fun. Add a humour break to the middle of a long meeting or kick off your meetings with a fun tradition.

Whatever methods you use to bring more fun and humour into your workplace, they need to be congruent with your personal brand as a senior leader. Remember you set the scene or level for others. If you're unsure how to approach this, select a group of people to discuss some ideas, or bring in a humorist like Mike Kerr to assist. It's such an important element of getting personality into your brand today, that you really don't want to overlook it.

Executive presence

This is often a term bandied about in business and a 'state' coveted by learning and development managers from their leaders. But what does it actually mean and why is it important? In my view it's about how people feel about

you as soon as you enter a room or start a meeting or presentation and the confidence they have in you, the credibility you exude from your non-verbal communication and then your content and delivery. It's about your ability to inspire others to contribute to their fullest potential, and to be valued in what they bring to the table. Leaders with great executive presence have the ability to access their intuition and trust it, be agile and remain open to others' views and ideas, and to learning.

You can improve your executive presence by:

- using your senses more and assessing how others are feeling or where they stand before you respond;
- being authentic and true to your values;
- being as self-aware as possible and actively seeking ways to do this;
- communicating clearly.

When we look at building your personal brand in Chapter 5, you will see other ways of improving your executive presence while remaining true to yourself.

Assess your leadership brand

There are many ways in which to influence a culture shift and we know it can take a while. However, your brand and behaviours at leadership level are crucial for providing guidance and the inspiration to the entire employee base for them to emulate in their own individual way. Be careful about aligning your own behaviours closely with what you are trying to achieve at corporate brand level and encourage a strong feedback culture to ensure you are keeping on-message and not deviating without realizing it. This is the only way you can effectively manage your brand as a leader.

As an action point, ask a selected cross-section of your managers and employees the following questions of your leadership brand:

- What is most inspirational about our leadership here?
- What are the three things that need to change in order for us to fully represent and reinforce the corporate brand at leadership level?

In summary, be under no illusion that your personal brand as a leader is not pivotal to the brand of your company. Treat it with the enthusiastic focus and importance you and your company deserve.

It is important to act on the feedback you gather above, and we'll be covering more on how to map this and other feedback over your authentic personal brand in Chapter 5, Getting back on-message.

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