

# McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

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## **The Three Cs of Employer Branding: Culture, Commitment and Communication**

Branding. It's a word most people associate with marketing sneakers or selling soda. But when applied to an organization, it means much more. An employer brand can define a company's identity for both current and potential employees. Your employer brand isn't just a tagline or human resources policy – it's what team members experience in your company on a daily basis. It's the way in which the true character and purpose of your organization is communicated. It's the total image of your company, from the inside out. Your employer brand is, in short, the key to attracting – and retaining – talented people in your workplace.

An excellent employer brand signifies a strong company – an organization committed to its people and its bottom line results. Your employer brand has a significant relationship with outcomes of job satisfaction, commitment, and employee intent to stay – which all reinforce the perception that your Company is a great place to work.

So, how does a company build a strong brand? We call on the “Three Cs”: Culture, Commitment, and Communication.

Culture is based on the actual atmosphere in which an employee works – the vernacular, the dress code, the work ethic, the career pathing. Strong employer brands translate into employee “fit”: that is, the ability for an employee to work well within the construct of the organization. Facets of job fit include the need for achievement, level of work challenge, detail orientation, social energy, and more. Since employee incompatibility accounts for most job turnover, assessing job fit as it relates to corporate culture is a great way to build your employer brand.

The second “C” is Commitment. This is best defined by a focus on the needs of current employees. The most successful companies realize that they are in the recruiting business – not just for new talent, but for the talent they already have on staff. They are committed to delivering a culture that is consistent with that promised during the recruitment process. Companies with strong employer brands seek to understand their employees' motivations and skill sets, and provide challenging opportunities to succeed. One such example is Starbucks, a company well known for its strong employer brand. Its CEO, Howard Schultz, stated in his book *Pour Your Heart into It*, “if you treat your employees as interchangeable cogs in a wheel, they will view you with the same affection.” Starbucks provides benefits and services well beyond the industry standard, and its employees respond with hard work and longevity.

The third “C” is Communication. The employer brand must permeate every fiber of an organization's communication strategy. And to continue the alliteration, the communication should be constant, consistent, and creative. Just as McDonald's breaks through advertising clutter with an imaginative and repeated message, companies can break through the workload with constant interactions that stimulate, inspire, and engage the team. Each message should be clear and concise – and not just what you think your employees want to hear. An effective employer branding campaign will integrate all aspects of communication, from meetings to memos. A consistent message will yield a consistent experience – and bolster your employer brand.

The payoff of a strong brand is greater than just employee acquisition and retention. Companies with strong employer brands enjoy greater productivity, results, and profits. Lowe's is one example of a company that has focused on its employer brand through consistent messages, recruiting strategies, and motivational tools. And the results speak for themselves – it is one of the fastest growing consumer companies in America.

So, how do you build your employer brand? Nike didn't "just do it" overnight – brands take time to catch on and adhere.

- **Determine your current employer brand.** Conduct an anonymous survey or focus group to determine what your employees are currently experiencing. Review exit interviews for patterns and information. Be prepared to accept your baseline – your perception may be very different than your employees' reality. It's not about who you want to be, but who you actually are as an employer.
- **Look at your most successful employees.** What do they have in common? Why do you deem them to be the most thriving? How do you define achievement at your organization? Create a success profile of these competencies and share them to motivate others and anchor your employer brand. Utilize this profile when you interview prospective employees – and look for the qualities that you find in your most successful team members.
- **Think like a marketer.** Successful marketing executives create a "unique selling proposition," or USP, that clearly defines how their products are different, and better. Create a unique selling proposition for your Company – how are you unique and superior to other employers?
- **Create a strategy to implement it.** Once you have established your baseline and your USP, The most effective way to execute an employer brand is to engage your employees in the process. Who better to spread the word than the people who will be living the brand each day? Coca-Cola tests its new sodas at grocery stores, not annual meetings. Employers should test the brand in the break room, not the board room.
- **Develop your flag-bearers.** Use those most loyal to your employer brand as champions of your message. They have the credibility to promote your brand to others throughout your organization.

In today's market, there is a strong, positive correlation between those firms who are deemed the "employer of choice" and those firms who are financially and fiscally sound. A strong employer brand can position you as the employer of choice – and make you the company that takes the lead.

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McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations' life cycle. MKS&H's organizational consulting division, Tandem Partners, specializes in people strategies that drive business results. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please contact Margaret Wilson at 410-296-6200 or via email: [margaret@mksh.com](mailto:margaret@mksh.com).

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