

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

Employees are Your Best Ambassadors-at-Large

Have you ever wondered what your employees say when someone asks them the question, “Where do you work?” Like it or not, employees are the ambassadors-at-large for your organization. They may be in your employ 40 hours a week, but the rest of the time they are living their lives and interacting in the local community. So what do your employees say about their workplace when asked?

There are three ways they might answer:

1. They might answer with the simple fact: “I work at ABC Company.”
2. They might answer with a negative spin: “I work at the ‘salt mines’ sometimes referred to as ABC Company,” or something along those lines.
3. Or, they might answer in a positive way: “I work for the greatest company in town – ABC Company, and I’ll tell you why they’re so great ...”

Given the choice, you’d probably rather hear the third answer than the first two!

So how do you get your employees to say complimentary things about your company – to be a champion for the company in the community?

While the answer can be complex, there are a few things that can make a big difference.

- If your employees feel good about your company, encourage them to be champions for the business. Invite your employees to learn more about the company so they can speak about it with confidence.
- Help your employees understand how their positive comments can boost the company’s reputation and how that translates into opportunity for all.
- Sponsor a campaign to promote the company in your community. Have an open house to show the community what you do and how you improve the quality of life for employees and others. Get your employees involved in planning the event!

Remember, employees want to be proud of their workplace. Community pride and company pride can go hand in hand. What kind of community citizen is your company? Does the company give back through contributions, school programs, internships or community service days?

If so, do your employees know what you do to help the community and why you do it? Do you give your employees the opportunity to be involved, maybe by providing time to volunteer in the schools? Employees want to feel they are making worthwhile contributions. Do your employees understand how your products or services are used? Do they see the benefits your products provide or how they improve the standard of living?

If your company makes a consumer product or provides healthcare, the connection may be easy. If you manufacture a component of larger products, your employees may lose the connection. Take, for example, one company that makes boilers for large agribusiness entities. Most of the employees have never seen a completed boiler, nor do they understand that the canned foods they buy every day wouldn’t exist without the technology they help to provide.

Putting the work in a context that will give the employees more of a connection around how they contribute to the whole, will help them explain to others what they do for a living. They will finally have a story to tell.

Employees want to be recognized for their efforts. It doesn't take great sums of money or large prizes to make an impact. If employees see that your company helps them succeed and rewards success, they'll be more inclined to say positive things about their workplace. If your employees rarely get a "thank you," they'll feel disconnected and unappreciated, and that's the story they'll tell to others.

Think about interesting things your company has to offer. Do your employees know the company's history? Do they understand the company's mission? Do they feel connected to it, or are they simply another cog in the wheel?

If you're not sure employees are saying great things about your company, you need to start working to change that. If you're serious about it, you might start with an employee survey, preferably administered by a third party.

The survey can help you gather information about what is important to your employees, what they'd like to be able to say about the company, and what they know and don't know about your company's business. If you ask the questions, be prepared to act promptly on the information. Don't make the mistake of asking and then not acting on the information you receive. It's better not to ask at all, than to ask and ignore.

Each person in your company can be an ambassador for your business! If your employees feel connected and valued, they'll treat their jobs and the company's reputation with care.

Ask yourself truthfully, do your employees enjoy working for your company? If you were in their shoes, would you? If not, some changes may need to be made so they feel good about the company. Either way, the word will spread.

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 Melissa McDaniel at 301-662-2400 or via email: melissa@mksh.com.

© 2006 Tandem Partners. Permission to use, copy and distribute this document and related graphics is hereby granted, provided that the above copyright notice appears in all copies and both the copyright notice and permission notice appear. All other rights reserved.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

11311 McCormick Road, Suite 100
Hunt Valley, MD 21031
410.296.6200

www.mksh.com

70 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 100
Frederick, MD 21702
301.662.2400