Employee engagement and transformational change

By Daniel Munslow

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CHICAGO, USA: Irene Lewis, president and CEO of SAIT Polytechnic in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) started out as a rural school teacher has always focused on the people around her. She realised from early days that companies can make all the promises they want. Without engaged employee who can deliver, they will achieve little.

Turning a single vision into reality



Irene Lewis, president and CEO of SAIT Polytechnic

Lewis' warmth, care for employees, students and supporters have made her an effective and much-respected leader. Irene is the 2012 recipient of the coveted IABC Excel Award, bestowed upon a leading business professional who demonstrated exceptional leadership communication skills.

Lewis shared her approach - from strategies to tools and tactics - that rallied 2 300 employees to translate a single vision into reality. She has been responsible for a billion dollar campus construction, significant increases in revenue, huge gains in employee satisfaction, and a new focus on applied research and innovation. A visionary in her field, she is a CEO who leads from the front, but guides and supports from behind. She called on other business leaders to share her vision and passion for employees to be "part of the journey".

Facing EVP challenges

Kathryn Yates, Towers Watson's communication and change management practice leader, shared her insights into the genuine challenges companies face with their EVPs (employee value propositions). Every company has one, and even though everybody agrees with its insightful statements, it's often a challenge to ensure that it will live up to its promises.

Yates highlighted the close connection between employee communication and the role of human capital in driving the employer brand internally to inspire employees to want to engage with the business. Vision clarity is also critical in an organisation's path to success - which is communicated beyond a wall poster and a mention in the employee magazine. It's about triggering real change.

Building a high-performance organisation

Corporate communicators around the world share a single objective - building a high-performance organisation through engaged employees. Easy? Not at all! Building a high-performing organisation was described by Michael Schroeder, CEO of TNS Employee Insights in New York, as both a sprint and a marathon. The challenge communicators face is to move quickly in line with the dynamics shared by many federated businesses, while sustaining a long-term focus that achieves real change and financial ROI.

Common to all high-performing organisations is the ability to communicate effectively by creating and delivering a compelling brand promise to their employees and ensuring their leaders live it.

Internal communication is indeed the tool of influence that connects employees to their companies' strategy and brand promise. The combination is a winning culture. Schroeder presented the findings of TNS global research collected over the past ten years from millions of employees from more than 100 countries and hundreds of organisations.

Focusing on strategic internal communication

Closing the conference on Day 2, I did a presentation focusing on the establishment of a strategic internal communication capability to ensure the correct tactical chain is followed in delivering bottom-line benefits to any business.

In order to secure top-level buy-in for the role of internal communication and employee engagement, it is critical to build the right capability, with the right skills, mechanisms, platform, leadership communication and, most important, the right strategic foundation.

The presentation drew on a year-long case study about how one organisation established an in-house internal communication capability from the ground up-using best-practice techniques, new approaches and leadership training; as well as detailed research Talk2us conducted in South Africa among top business communicators and executive level management.

Internal communication - a key focus

Internal communication has become a key focus for many organisations. It's a strategic driver for the release of discretionary effort, improved productivity, employee engagement, staff retention, and retaining of IP, among others.

To deliver these business returns and prove ROI, communicators are under pressure to strategically position their role and function, as well as establish the right policies and procedures, measurement strategies and demonstrate business alignment.

The session unpacked how communication professionals can go about setting up a strategic 'Centre of Communication Excellence' to deliver internal communication tactics that produce real business benefits and impact in the organisation.

I had close of 400 delegates attending the session, which received positive feedback from a global audience of our senior peers and great interaction from around the world.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

Daniel Munslow is the owner and founder of MCC Consulting and former director on the International Association of Business Communicators' International Executive Board. He has 16 years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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