

Employee Re-branding

Is the answer to value-based HR challenges

By Mwangi Wanjumbi

Focus on training brings to mind a recent lunchtime experience. A request by two 'seasoned fish eaters' distracted my enjoyment of a meal of traditional delicacies, served at a popular eating place.

"What is the source of your fish before we can place an order?" one of the two gentlemen enquired from the waitress, with a heavy Western Kenya accent.

"I am not sure unless you allow me to find out," said the waitress.

Taken aback, I looked up at the men, who were right opposite me.

"Hey guys, I thought fish is just fish irrespective of the source," I volunteered, smiling.

"No, please. 'Veteran fish eaters' like us will distinguish between fish from Lake Victoria, Naivasha, Sagana pods or even the Indian Ocean. They all taste different, therefore our enquiry," came the answer, as we all broke into hearty laughter.

Later, I could not help comparing the branding process with this lunchtime experience. Indeed, connection with brands is driven by tastes, looks, character and product features. Even services or solutions to people's challenges need to be branded likewise, as a way of

distinguishing them from those of others in the market place.

But, the most remarkable branding process is that of human beings, especially in the workplace. In yet another experience, I was put to attention by a discussion with a long-time university lecturer friend. This don was at a loss how human beings can be branded, just the same way as products. He was particularly curious about my advocacy of the same, in some articles published elsewhere, as well as some training solutions developed uniquely for this. So, what is this people branding process all about?

Apparently, the implementation of Chapter 6 of the new Constitution could give us a clearer picture. The chapter dwells on national ethics and leadership principles, which were never recognized in our previous constitutional order. More still, we can borrow a leaf from our very prayerful national anthem, which has all our hidden national values. Undoubtedly, the values could bring new paradigm shifts, if extracted and embraced in our organizations as well as the national situation.

Notably, national anthems anywhere constitute and are intended to be the thread that binds nationals of one country together.

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Indeed, there is need for all to adopt and practice similar guiding principles. Incidentally, many organizations have their own anthems as well. This seemingly borrows from Kaizen, the Japanese quality entrenchment programme. How then can our organizations embrace and reap benefits from this paradigm shift of people branding?

According to the Directorate of Industrial Training, only 20 percent of the organizations operating in Kenya adopt and implement staff training as an organizational development strategy. It is difficult to imagine how the remaining 80 percent achieve their growth needs. It is even inconceivable how they actually address continuing challenges presented by dynamic change factors, such as



technology and competition.

Perhaps, we can learn from Tom Holden who says in his book on training needs analysis that there is need for training organizational employees whenever the operating environment changes. Ideally, training becomes absolutely necessary during economic hardships. This enables employees to acquire skills of identifying opportunities, and addressing threats at the same time. In reality, however, the training budget is the first to be discarded in majority of organizations, whenever economic fortunes seem threatened.

Conversely, socio-cultural evolution is one of the most challenging factors that affect organizations today. Regrettably, it directly affects the human resource in whatever occupations; yet, this is the driver of all other resources. The challenges are even more pronounced as a result of global influences, especially from television, internet, religion, work demands and many more.

Internet and TV particularly, have brought about the meltdown of our earlier well defined cultural values, which were grounded on our societal origins. This has resulted to entrenchment of well known negative values, which have persistently impacted negatively on the workplace. This brings to mind the experiences of a major security firm which is now more synonymous with its failure to deliver on its mission. Could the firm be a victim of its own strategy?

Most probably, the firm has concentrated on technological advancement strategy as a means of making more and more money, with little or no effort in the branding of the human resource. Naturally, failure to brand the human resource exposes a company to poor performance, poor commitment, fraud and other vices directly attributable to poor organizational and human resource strategy. More specifically, the challenges result from activities of poor employee brands.

Moreover, organizations are legal persons with rights and obligations like all of us. The only difference is that we have to act on their behalf. How then can we act on behalf of organizations with full commitment, whereas we have not internalized the relationship and become their trusted agents?

Consequently, any organization wishing to achieve structured developmen

must essentially embrace the culture of professionally conducted training. The same not only improves skills and attitudes but also moderates behaviour. In fact, our consulting firm's experience has shown that organizations that develop focused and internalized formal missions, visions, values, goals and objectives continually achieve their desires. People branding starts with attitude change, which is followed by evident organizational transformation within 3-6 months.

However, this only happens when structured training is embraced and implemented as a process of influencing employees in identifying and associating with the desired organizational brand. Like the earlier mentioned fish, it becomes easy for various stakeholders to link employee behavior, dress code, character and other attributes with respective employment brands. Subsequently, the employee brand acquires a progressive brand identity.

The situation is even more rewarding when a learning culture coupled with persistent improvement as well as entrenchment of the performance, plus productivity drivers of mission, vision and values amongst others become the norm. Needless to emphasize, it is imperative to join the 20 percent organizations which have adopted and continually implement training as a process of fast-tracking structured and value-driven organizational development.

Mwangi Wanjumbi is a Management Consultant/Trainer and CEO of Newtimes Business Solutions. He is also a Founder and Board Member of Professional Trainers Association of Kenya (PTAK).

Contacts:

info@newtimesconsultants.com

www.newtimesconsultants.com