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How to Get Employees to Buy into Your Mission

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How to Get Employees to Buy into Your Mission

Use internal marketing

YOU'VE LANDED THE nightmare assignment: selling the new mission statement to your company's employees. "Make it real," the CEO said, as he patted you on the back and pushed you out the door. Was that derisive laughter you heard as the door was closing? What you need to do is treat your employees as if they were customers. That way, you'll turn this nightmare job into a communications dream come true. Here's a seven-step process to get you there.

Understand the status quo. Ask questions via surveys or focus groups to determine the ideal vs. the reality. If the mission statement emphasizes quality, for example, how do your employees see your current level of quality? If your goal is to move from number two to number one in a certain market, how do your employees see the company relative to whoever is number one now? Find out early on what obstacles there may be to their buying in.

Determine the appropriate form of communication. Do you just need to create awareness, or do you need a major mind shift? Changing employees' attitudes may require time and a variety of approaches, from peer involvement to incentives. The ultimate goal, of course, is action taken to support and implement the mission, both internally and with customers and the public. Use a combination of employee empowerment, recognition, and rewards to increase motivation.

Design the message. In an engineering company or law firm, rational appeals may be all that are needed. In many other situations, however, emotional and even moral appeals may come into play. Making appeals to safety, espe-

cially child safety, works very well for auto manufacturers such as Volvo and tiremakers such as Michelin. You need to consider how your mission may appeal to pride, love, or even humor.

Appeals to moral values can be very powerful. If your mission will make products safer or help the environment or contribute to fair treatment for minorities, you have a strong moral appeal going for you. Make it different. Try contrasting your communication with the usual corporate look or style. Use different colors. Try humor.

Select the communication channel. One strategy is to work through community influentials. These may not necessarily be the most senior or most powerful people in the corporate hierarchy. Look for communication skills, leadership in team activities, and respect from peers. The company newsletter is always an option, but there are other ways to get the message across. Perhaps a billboard in the parking lot or a video playing in the cafeteria will have more influence. Try creating tapes for the ride to or from work.

Establish the budget. Proper staffing of the internal marketing effort is critical to its success. Another consideration is "promotions," incentives for employees to make a positive contribution to implementing the mission. You may want to institute recognition programs with individual rewards ranging from plaques to vacations. Bonuses might also be tied to achievements that are linked directly to the mission. Create a strategic plan for internal communications with realistic budgets, staffing, and timelines. Monitor progress and make adjustments as needed.

Decide on the promotion mix. Should you use advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, personal selling, or direct marketing? Consider the impact of external public relations on the internal audience. Press releases touting the company's commitment to quality or safety or the environment can be very helpful in motivating employees. In the area of direct selling, your sales force may be drawn from managers who are trained in communicating the value of the mission to the company and to the employees. Personal selling involves careful "cultivation," and it requires significant time and effort in staff meetings and other venues to get the right response. Make good use of your personal relationships and those of the others on your team. Getting a few key people to buy into the mission can be the ticket to success.

Measure the promotion's results. Knowing how far you've come is both motivation to continue and a reality check about how far there is left to go. Find out who's in and who's out and why. Then design an approach to reach the outsiders.

Finally, make sure you coordinate among different departments. Human resources and training, planning, finance, marketing, public relations, and managers at all levels should be involved. Make good use of strategies for building teams that work across departments, including project teams, task forces, and committees. And give it time. Four to six months is the minimum for an effective internal marketing campaign. Depending on the size of the company and number of employees, it may take twice as long.

— WILLEM T. O'REILLY, PH.D. *is a freelance writer based in Skillman, N.J.*

Further Reading:

Marketing Management: Millennium Edition by Philip Kotler (2000, Prentice Hall, 751 pp., \$96.00, available through local and online bookstores)