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## How culture creates your brand – wise leaders start with people

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**Brand is more than makeup – it's the underlying subconscious notion of your organisation. Karen Gately argues that leaders should be doing more to integrate brand into their workplace culture.**

If you search online for the definition of brand, you're likely to come up with something like this one from entrepreneur.com: "The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products."

In a highly-competitive world, with the pressure on many organisations to lift their game intensifying, leaders are wise to define brand more broadly as the reputation that underpins consumer confidence and inspires buying decisions.

Leader in the field Richard Mosley wrote in the *Journal of Brand Management*, "The discipline of employer brand management takes a more holistic approach to shaping the culture of the organisation, by seeking to ensure that every people-management touch point is aligned with the brand ethos of the organisation."



Mosley goes on to argue that “in providing a robust mechanism for aligning employees’ brand experience with the desired customer brand experience, and a common platform for marketing and HR, employer brand management represents a significant evolution in the quest for corporate brand integrity.”

You don’t have to look too far or wide to find examples of organisations that have failed spectacularly in maintaining customer trust in their brand. As a risk and compliance professional, you’ve no doubt seen for yourself what happens to an organisation’s brand and subsequently profits when trust is lost. Findings from the Royal Commission into misconduct in the banking, superannuation and financial services industry provides endless examples of a lack of integrity and poor behaviour. It’s not difficult to see the challenging road ahead for these organisations as they work to rebuild their brands and earn trust.

As ACCC commissioner Kenneth Hayne commented, “Very often, the conduct has broken the law. And if it has not broken the law, the conduct has fallen short of the kind of behaviour the community not only expects of financial services entities, but is also entitled to expect of them.”

Reflecting on behaviours identified by the Banking Royal Commission, it’s evident that the issues exposed were far from isolated incidents of poor decision making or selfish actions on the part of random individuals. What was revealed is that in pursuit of profits and personal gain, people across the industry have behaved in ways that are abhorrent to most decent-minded people. In many instances these behaviours were instructed, encouraged and rewarded by the organisations they worked for.

Contemplate for a moment on what it’s like to do business with you, your team, your business. Do your customers experience a level of service that earns their trust and inspires them to keep coming back? Do internal customers feel respected and supported? Do people who are on the receiving end of what you do trust that you are operating on a spirit of good will and positive intention? What influence do your collective attitudes and behaviours have on the satisfaction and loyalty your customers?

Creating a powerful brand through people starts with being clear about what is expected and needed. Leaders are wise to invest in ensuring every person on the team understands what successful behaviours look like. In other words, ensure a clear line of sight between how people go about their jobs and the influence that has on brand reputation.

Build understanding of the touch points between your customers and business, and the opportunities people have to influence trust and loyalty. Create awareness of the ways in which behaviour influences not only what people think, but also their subconscious reactions to your brand in the future.

Reflect on when you have held an opinion about an organisation’s brand but have struggled to identify exactly why you feel the way you do. Sometimes people don’t even bother to work out the answer – they simply move on to a brand they feel better about.

Creating a great culture is unquestionably influenced by the quality of hiring practices. Getting it right from the start requires a disciplined and uncompromising approach to selecting people who are aligned with the organisation’s values. From there, what matters most is that people are held accountable for the standard of behaviour they bring, and the influence they have on your organisation’s brand. Reward and recognise brand ambassadors and take decisive steps to address the attitudes and behaviours of those who are not.

*Karen Gately is founder of Corporate Dojo*