

ARE YOU A BUSINESS STAFF ARE PROUD TO WORK FOR?

by Glenn Williams



It's often only in hindsight that leaders recognize their organizational culture was a major contributing factor to serious failures. This was the case when international pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk risked violating US FDA regulations in the early 2010's. Such was the seriousness of the case, its insulin was almost banned from the country¹. In what was labelled by the FDA as a pattern of violations, the root issues weren't mere operational errors per se, but a culture that enabled this pattern to emerge.

Brand and culture are two sides of the same coin— both speak to a person's experience of engaging with your organization. Your brand is what consumers and customers experience from interacting with you, and your culture is what staff and stakeholders experience working with you. It is also your point of difference; what distinguishes your business and leadership from others.

Both your company's brand and culture are who you are beyond what you sell. It doesn't matter what values constitute your brand – Amazon has a demanding, fast-paced culture that doesn't suit everyone.² However, for those staff who share those principles, it's a perfect fit and both the employee and the company benefit through shared meaning. The key question is - are the values that you profess to have evident in everything you do? The answer to this question determines the strength of your brand. Without a strong identifiable brand, businesses miss out on connecting with their staff and customers on an emotional level through shared values and purpose.

Investing in the culture of your business is a priority

The creation and stewardship of an organization's culture and brand - their DNA - lies with the CEO and core leadership team. They are responsible for setting, and holding themselves and staff accountable to the vision, values, operating principles, and ethics that represent how they want to be perceived and experienced. Often there is a correlation between the degree of commitment to the brand from the leadership team and employee engagement and customer loyalty.

The key to establishing a strong purpose for your business and its core values is constantly communicating them and evaluating how they are being expressed (living them out!) in such a way as to inspire strong engagement from both staff and customers. Values that are espoused but not reflected in the daily conduct of the business creates misalignment and disconnection that naturally arises from posturing and hypocrisy. Take WeWork as an example – their meteoric rise and fall can be attributed to staff, customers and investors buying into a vision, brand and culture that was mischaracterized and ultimately unsustainable³.

A business that can't be trusted by its own staff is a brand that others won't champion.

A brand that is disingenuous can result in losing great talent and difficulty recruiting new talent. This has obvious consequences for all businesses.

On the other hand, organizations whose values and core purpose for existing are reflected in the daily operation of the business – policies, strategy, decision-making, the building of a collaborative culture where relationships can flourish – is a business that fosters employee engagement and customer loyalty. Why? Because it is a brand (and culture) that can be trusted.

A culture of commitment

The power of an organization's authentic DNA should not be underestimated.

What a business unapologetically stands for will attract like-minded talent, and when a company connects with people on that meaning-making level, the alignment of shared values is the internal driver which results in highly engaged, motivated, and committed employees⁴. This has a clear impact to the bottom-line.

More than this, an organization with a clear DNA has a higher chance of weathering the instability that inevitably results from significant leadership transitions³. The challenge for the incoming leader is how to uphold the core values that have led to the company's strong brand reputation and performance, rather than make changes that can sometimes inadvertently damage the legacy that was inherited.

A powerful example of this is the All Blacks rugby team. Each new player in any given position is responsible and accountable for upholding the legacy of the jersey and to improve upon it. This is their team culture - their DNA - that flows from the purpose and values set and modelled by the leadership team and those that have gone before them.

What's the bottom line?

The type of culture that leads to long-term success for a business does not happen organically. It is intentionally cultivated and fiercely protected from the top down. What an organization stands for internally will be what they become known for externally.

References

¹U.S. Department of Justice. (2017). Novo Nordisk Agrees to Pay \$58 Million for Failure to Comply with FDA-Mandated Risk Program .

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/novo-nordisk-agrees-pay-58-million-failure-comply-fda-mandated-risk-program>

²Yohn, L. D. (2018). Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies. Nicholas Brealey.

³Wiedeman, R. (2019, June 10). The I in We. *Intelligencer*. Retrieved 2022, from <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/06/wework-adam-neumann.html>

⁴Baron, J. N., & Hannan, M. T. (2002). Organizational Blueprints for Success in High-Tech Start-Ups: Lessons from the Stanford Project on Emerging Companies. *California Management Review*, 44(3), 8–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41166130>