

TELLING YOUR STORY - THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BEING HUMAN #3

Effective communication with your audiences is even more important than it has been in the past, given the volume of information we are consuming on all our different devices and various platforms. It's all about 'cutting through' and being relevant to get messages across.

This is something marketers have been doing for years, but today customers, potential clients, business partners, and employees place great importance on being able to trust the messages we see. As consumers, we are not only searching for the information we need, we are looking for reassurance. Whether we are researching something we are going to buy, who we vote for, or information to inform our beliefs and opinions we need to trust information that's communicated by companies and its credibility.

Organisations invest heavily in building and protecting their brand to ensure it's trusted to grow their business. How can potential customers trust your brand if your employees don't?

Developing an employer brand to communicate what the company is about, its values and ways of working is one of the strategies companies are using to attract talent. With sites like Glassdoor, LinkedIn, Instagram etc it's very easy for potential employees to do their own research to see if what is being *said* is being *lived*. Employees play a crucial role as brand ambassadors. With most organisations going through some type of transformation thanks to the digital revolution and the fact that as many as five generations are now working together how and what organisations communicate is even more critical to the success of any organisation transformation.

This is why I believe 'telling your story' is one of the five characteristics of a 'Being Human' culture, where everyone can do their best work and we can make the world a better place to work in. It isn't enough to just write a page on your website, or tell your story in one meeting with employees. Effectively telling your story means being sympathetic to your varied audiences and finding different ways to communicate your ideas.

As leaders, what do we need to think about when thinking about telling our stories? Below are practical ideas to put into action.

Be authentic! Leaders need to be trusted and be inspiring to be followed. Leaders need to communicate in their own style, not a textbook and certainly not by reading out corporate messages. Employees need to feel leaders are supportive of change by putting it into their own words. This helps make it relatable and believable.

Make it easy and simple. We now have lots to read and as humans we have a small attention span and we only have so much time. Written communications must be punchy, have a clear subject line, and clearly define what action is needed, if any.

The audience experience. Traditionally technology leads the way with how we did and experienced things. Most organisations are now building their technology and processes through the lens of the consumer and more recently organisations are taking this principle and applying this to the employee experience. Think about your employee experience when developing your communication plan and messages. How do they want to hear the messages? What do they want to know? What will be on their minds? Put yourself in their shoes.

Communicate widely. We are moving to a world of personalisation. We are being asked by organisations, delivery companies and even doctor's surgeries 'How would you prefer to be reached?' and given the option of email, text message etc. We all have our preferred mediums of communication, so it is best to use multiple channels when you're communicating to employees, to cover all the bases.

Employees are ambassadors, treat them that way. Before announcing a company change engage with your employees first, so they can spread the word. Where messages are under embargo and sensitive, this can be challenging, but a crucial 30 minute window separating internal and external messages, supported and planned with trusted leaders who are able to convey messages to their teams can work wonders, if planned thoughtfully and sympathetically.

Be part of the conversation. Communication does not only mean broadcasting messages through the organisation. It's about engaging everyone in a dialogue. This helps the organisation to all get on board with the change if they have had time to debate, reflect on the change, and buy into it. The new ideas and perspectives that will come from these discussions will improve on the original idea, I guarantee it.

Finally, communication does not stand alone. It is one of a number of components, alongside your purpose, well-developed strategy, and how you work with each other. These elements all work together to drive results and build your successful brand and culture from the inside out.