




Creative
Bubble



HOW TO CREATE AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE
THAT DELIVERS A GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



EMPLOYEES ARE THE KEY TO DELIVERING BETTER CUSTOMER AND BRAND EXPERIENCES. FOR EMPLOYERS, THAT MEANS DELIVERING A FIRST-CLASS EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE.

IN THIS PAPER WE EXPLORE WHAT EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE MEANS, ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND HOW TO IMPROVE IT IN YOUR ORGANISATION.



BRAND CONSISTENCY



As an employer, you have two sets of customers: your external customers who are your paying customers and your internal customers who are your employees. And just as you need to give paying customers a great experience, so do you need to give your employed customers a great experience. Why? Because happy employees make for happy customers, as we all know.

The link between the employee experience and customer experience is pretty much indisputable. What employees experience while at work has to reflect the experience they are expected to give. Brand consistency, in terms of how both your sets of customers experience your brand, is key to achieving a good experience all round.

So, for example, if your external brand (customer experience) is one of being friendly, approachable and ready to help, the same needs to be true of your internal brand (employee experience). Employees need to know and feel that you, as their employer, are friendly, approachable and ready to help.

Increasing numbers of companies are making this link between the employee experience and the customer experience, recognising the importance of overall brand consistency.

It's something that the high street retailer River Island has been working on recently. It wants to make every customer's interaction with the company as smooth and easy as possible and it's the same for employees. Mike Collins, senior people experience specialist at River Island, explains: "We've focused on what the customer experience is, focusing on how to ensure it's as seamless and frictionless as possible – such as, how do you make returns as simple as possible?"

In the pursuit of brand consistency, the retailer has also worked on the employee experience. "It's all about how we want people to feel when they work for River Island," says Collins. "So we want a seamless onboarding experience, for example. We are leveraging the people experience perspective to influence our employee proposition from recruitment and onboarding and induction, all the way through learning and development to when someone leaves the organisation. It has to work right across the business and be as positive and frictionless as possible."

The HR team came up with a list of 'moments that matter' – key points in the employee journey that need to be as seamless, frictionless and positive as possible, such as when people receive their offer of employment letter, their first review meeting and so on. Because, as Collins says: "If you get the people bit right, that translates into good customer service, both online and face to face, and customers will respond to that."

In order to achieve this level of brand consistency, there are various elements that need to be in place – culture, recruitment, training, opportunities, satisfaction and recognition, management and leadership, and communications...Let's talk a little bit about each of those now.



CULTURE

As always, it starts with culture. Get the culture right and the rest falls into place much more easily. Employers who are serious about forging that strong link between employee experience and customer experience need to look carefully at the culture of their business. How do employees experience your brand? Is it a friendly environment? Supportive? Do employees have a voice? Good employee and customer experiences happen when the right culture exists consistently throughout an organisation – front of house, in stores, at head office, in operations, in distribution, in IT, in marketing, senior management...

When the culture is right, then the experience is genuine, both in terms of employees and customers. How can you set the right culture? By treating employees as you want them to treat customers, says Tom Ross, operations director at Home Grown Hotels, parent company of the The Pig Hotels. "At The Pig, we often talk about the extra 5% for guests. But what about the extra 5% for staff? So when a new member of staff starts, we ensure there is a food bag for them. We want staff to experience our product and understand it, so as part of their induction they get to eat in the restaurant. And they get the opportunity to stay in a hotel for free. They also get 35% off food and beverage."

Staff are expected to treat guests with the 'spirit of generosity', so Ross thinks it is vital that the same 'spirit of generosity' is extended to employees – ie. employees experience the same brand as customers. "So whenever there is a new dish, they get to try it. Recently, we opened a £150 bottle of champagne for the staff so that they could experience what the best of the best is like. And we got the chef to cook every type of steak for them so that they could learn about it and understand what food and drink is all about."

That 'spirit of generosity' is extended to training, but more about that in a bit.

RECRUITMENT

The employee experience of your brand starts at recruitment, so again, if your customer brand is one of being friendly, approachable and ready to help, then that is how candidates must experience your brand during the recruitment process.

Providing a positive employee experience does hinge on having the right staff. It doesn't matter how well you treat staff, if they are in the wrong job or the culture isn't one that suits them, they are not going to have a positive experience and nor will their customers. You have to recruit well in the first place.

River Island has tied its recruitment process into its customer brand. Last year, the company launched a campaign called 'Labels Are For Clothes' in conjunction with the anti bullying charity, Ditch the Label. Collins says the company's recruitment initiatives mirror this message of diversity and inclusion. "You can't have an outward facing brand and not have that in internal programmes as well."

It is so important to get recruitment right, which is why Collins thinks organisations have to be totally clear on what their culture is and what attributes they want employees to have. And this has to be communicated honestly to potential employees. "It is absolutely essential to recruit the right people," he says. "You can't tell fibs to get people through the door – it has to be what they were told it would be or they will decide it's not for them. If someone has a bad experience, they will leave and tell people and they will tell more people...." It's all about brand reputation and brand consistency.

TRAINING

A sure fire way to drive both employee experience and customer experience is to equip staff with the skills they need to do their job better. Yet, according to Lee Meyers, services manager for one of the big supermarket retailers, training is rarely a top priority. "There is always something more important to do in people's eyes. But training is an investment. If you don't invest in people, either they won't stay or they won't do as good a job and that will create a bad reputation for your business."

Ross says this is a problem in the hospitality sector too. "Yes, it's fairly easy to go to someone's table and take an order, but is there a way that you can make people feel empowered by doing it? Can they do it better than anyone else?" At The Pig, they take training very seriously. Training is split into three areas: craft skills, training on how to focus on guests and be hospitable, and cultural training.

So there is an induction and training programme for new staff covering statutory and cultural stuff. A waiter might have a two week training period, for example, plus there's lots of on the job training. Time is set aside at various points for new hires to catch up with their manager – 30 days in, then at 60 days and again at 90 days. "We make sure each employee gets these chats to discuss what's going well, what's working and what's not."

And in keeping with The Pig's 'spirit of generosity', employees are encouraged to hone their skills with new experiences and training. "When people want to learn something, we are keen for them to do it, whether it's to do with the Wine & Spirit Education Trust or working with butchers, cheese makers and chocolatiers, for example. We encourage sommeliers and bar staff to go to London for tasting and we pay their expenses."

All of this knowledge and experience and excitement of course feeds back into a good employee experience and a good customer experience.

OPPORTUNITIES

Just as employees want their employers to invest in their skills development, so do they want to know there are opportunities for progression. They will want to know that they have a personal development plan, that their career is going places within your organisation and that they are not just a cog in a wheel. Hence why Ross says it's important to encourage staff to broaden their skills and horizons. The Pig also runs a buddy entrepreneur scheme that identifies young people who have talent. Those people will go on a two year training programme with exposure to every department in the hotel. And they could go right to the top. "The revenue director is an ex-buddy entrepreneur," says Ross.

Collins says River Island is very focused on employee development, with a strong emphasis on peer-to-peer, community-based learning. Staff are encouraged to learn about other parts of the organisation and industry and move around. "What we try to get across to people is that we want to encourage progression and a learning culture. They are not just applying for a job, but for a career."

SATISFACTION AND RECOGNITION

People who have high levels of job satisfaction are those who know they are doing a good job and that their contribution is valued. They are doing the job that is right for them and if they are ambitious and keen to progress their career, they need to know that there is a clear career path for them in your organisation. It's all about having a positive vibe because it's a vibe that will really show.

When employees know their skills are useful and that those skills are being developed and will continue to be developed, that's when they are having a positive experience at work, an experience that they pass on to customers in their daily interactions.

Recognition is a key part of job satisfaction. Everyone likes to know that their contribution is noticed and recognised and simple acts of recognition can go a long way. River Island has a monthly award called PRIDE, which is linked to its values of:

WHAT YOU DO MATTERS WE KNOW WHAT WE ARE DOING
WE LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER WE ARE GOING PLACES
IT NEVER GETS BORING

Each month, employees are encouraged to nominate someone who is doing great work. Those nominations go to the CEO who goes through them all and chooses a winner and that winner is featured in the internal magazine. Then once a year, at the Christmas do, all the winners go on stage and have their photo taken, and an overall winner is chosen and given vouchers. Why does Collins think this is important? "People don't come to work to work in a building but to work as part of a team."

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The people who set an organisation's culture and determine what the employee experience and customer experience will look like are of course senior leaders. It starts at the top and filters down and it's managers who are in the position to reinforce those messages and behaviours.

Unfortunately, and this happens in every industry but it's very common in retail and hospitality because of constant time pressures and staffing pressures, all too often people are promoted to managerial positions and not given the appropriate training at the time that they need it –

ie. before they become a manager. Organisations have to promote people because they display the right skills, behaviours and attributes and not because they are strong on craft skills. And when people are promoted, they need to be trained. "People often fail around people management because they don't know how to run a team," says Ross. "The classic one is head chef – great chef but they keep losing the staff."

Leaders and managers have to be behind this concept of brand consistency – giving employees and customers the experience they want and need.

COMMUNICATIONS

Last but not least, communications. Employers that communicate clearly and effectively with staff tend to be successful. Openness and transparency are really important and it's vital that communication with staff is regular. Employees need to know that the lines of communication are always open should they want to voice an opinion, make a suggestion about how something could be done better or express concerns about an area of the business. Communication needs to be two way and there need to be mechanisms in place for following up on any issues raised.

And when organisations communicate well with staff, highlighting what opportunities to progress exist with the company, for example, employees feel a part of what's going on. River Island is a family-run business and Collins says it works hard to maintain the feeling of a family business. "Part of our people experience and employer brand is about the family feeling. Employees are part of the company."

All of these elements of providing a good employee experience are linked – good management means recognising the contribution that people make and developing their skills. It is very easy to get it right, with the correct thought and planning, and it's very easy to get it wrong. Get it right by providing a great employee experience and it will have a huge effect on the customer experience. Get it wrong... Brand consistency is key to being successful in today's world so no organisation can afford to ignore it.

HOW CAN CREATIVE BUBBLE LEARNING HELP?

At Creative Bubble, we specialise in bespoke learning interventions and consultancy for customer facing environments. Our passion is customer experience and we feel the best way to achieve great customer experience is through a great employee experience.

Some of the ways we may be able to help you:

- Running employee focus groups to uncover the current employee experience and mapping core employee touch points.
- Facilitating culture workshops (to identify current culture and help you map to a desired future culture).
- Designing (and delivering) bespoke customer focused training programmes for employees at all levels.
- Helping you review your current Learning & Development brand experience.

To find out more, drop us a line at hello@creativebubble.co.uk, give us a call on +44 203 883 8386 or get in touch through the website www.creativebubble.co.uk – either way, we'd love to hear from you.



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