Building a people focused contact centre – Part 1 of 3

Employee engagement - the secret to building a highly connected culture, one employee at a time

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This is the first of a 3 part series where we will look at building an engaged workforce culture from both a centre-wide and individual level. Part one focuses on strategies for attracting top talent.

In most organizations, culture is formed from the top down. The CEO/President strongly influences the type of culture and branding that exists in their company. They set the tone. Their words and actions re-enforce the values, behaviours and characteristics they want to see in the organization. This has a trickledown effect with the rest of the company. Managers tend to emulate the words and actions they see from their bosses and so on down the line.

A great example of culture and branding comes from the Lululemon website where they recently advertised for a new CEO. Here is a summary of the job description:

- You communicate powerfully, often through Sanskrit.
- You are disciplined, focused and can hold a headstand for at least 10 minutes.
- You're a long-term thinker. You already have a plan to bring yoga and luon to Mars by 2018.
- You break all the rules like getting your OM-on (loudly) whenever the urge arises.
- You elevate and cultivate the level of talent within the senior leadership team by holding *The Bachelor* lululemon. Only one successful SVP will get the final rose.
- Not only do you lead the organization to create components for people to live long, healthy and fun lives, you know the secret to how they got the caramel in the Caramilk bar.
- You wear The Mansy to lead our company-wide morning chant and kombucha ritual

The job description was somewhat tongue-in-cheek. But from reading these bullets, you get a pretty good idea as to the type of culture you might expect if you were to work for this company.

Any organization that wants to build a better culture to attract top talent needs to develop a positive internal brand. This is more than just holding Monday morning "Raw-Raw" sessions and wearing company logo pins. Building a strong internal brand involves understanding employees' deeper emotional and physical attachments to work, company, community and global impact. Organizations need to understand how employees personally feel about their workplace with regards to: company image/reputation; products & services, community involvement; innovation; financial stability and future direction to name a few.

Once an organization has a clear view of employee motivators, they need to align them to corporate strategic objectives. Now they can start to re-enforce an internal brand message that resonates with employees and encourages them to push past limitations. Employees need to be involved in crafting and communicating the message. The message needs to be real, honest, relatable and immediate. Having employees involved from the start will go a long way in helping them take ownership, develop pride and become more engaged overall.

A great example of the power of internal branding comes from a New York based company called arc90. They are a software development and design firm specializing in complex web applications. Their culture is based on creativity and innovation. A big part of their day to day consists of developers collaborating and sharing ideas. The challenge was that they needed to do it in a more consistent or expedient manner. To that end, they developed their own software to more effectively manage the flow of ideas, comments and conversations. This innovation management tool became so effective, that they started to introduce it to their clients and they loved it. The demand was so strong, arc90 set up a dedicated company to develop market and service their software on a global basis. The product is called Kindling and currently sells across North America and overseas. They are now one of the leaders in this very competitive market. If arc90 did not have such a strong internal support for their brand, they would not be where they are today and they would not be attracting the top talent that will keep them in the forefront of innovation.

When it comes to building a vibrant, people focused culture like ark90, you need to find out why people were attracted to your organization in the first place. I recently conducted a diagnostic review with a client going through their employer of choice assessment and discovered that most people were attracted to the organization due to positive experiences they had as a customer or through favourable conversations they had with friends and family. So before they were even hired, they were already highly attracted to the organization and advocates for the brand.

There are many methods of promoting a favourable culture to the general public but the bottom line is that you need engaged employees to make it stick. In order to create an engaged culture where people want to be involved and "go the extra mile", you need a high degree of trust and respect at all levels. This must be part of the leadership mantra. If employees feel that they will be supported, encouraged and recognized, they will be more motivated to contribute and become more connected. If they feel their opinions and actions don't count, they will tune out.

In the contact center environment, it is sometimes difficult to get people involved in special projects without adversely affecting productivity. But creative managers are introducing some interesting and unique opportunities for employees to be more involved. Two key areas companies are focusing on these days to drive employee engagement and attract top talent are community support and social innovation.

- Community Support – If managers want to create a close-knit, supportive, productive team, they need to be more proactive in creating opportunities for employees to connect outside of work. One manager at a large Canadian contact centre, invited her team out on a Saturday to volunteer with her favourite charity – Habitat for Humanity. Almost everyone on her team came out, put on a hard hat, picked up a hammer and spent the day building a house. They all had a lot of fun but more importantly, they developed a real sense of connectivity to their team, the company and the community. Helping a family achieve their dream of owning a home, instilled a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment in everyone.
- Social Innovation Management – organizations need innovation development/management systems that will stimulate employees to think of new ways of doing things. Employees must also be encouraged to submit their ideas anywhere, anytime. These systems need to capture and process ideas quickly so people can see the results of their efforts

immediately. Having an innovation system in place not only improves employee morale but also allows you to measure and manage the employee involvement process. Suggested reading on this topic: *Ideas Are Free* by Alan Robinson and Dean Schroeder.

Building and sustaining a people focused culture, for the purposes of attracting top talent is a no-brainer. But it's easier said than done. Strong, consistent leadership is critical to building and maintaining an engaged culture and therefore, having the right people in the right positions doing the right things are the key elements to success.

Look out into your contact center. How are your internal branding initiatives affecting your centre's ability to attract top talent? The secret is to develop an engaged workforce that wants to be involved. If you can do this, you are well on your way to developing an enthusiastic, supportive and connected contact centre culture.

It all comes down to you

Attracting and retaining top talent to your team depends a lot on your company's Recruitment and On-boarding processes.

Recruitment does not end at the time of hire and on-boarding does not start at the time of hire. Instead the two processes are intertwined and create your brand in the industry. How people are treated from the first step will influence their pride and engagement in the company. People are looking to work for an organization that they can belong to and feel a part of. There is a need for stability, appreciation, and fun in the workforce.

While increased use of technology to start the process is helpful, we must ensure that we do not lose the Human element which all people crave and ultimately work for. We as human beings have some common desires; the need to belong is right up there with oxygen!

Your brand as a company needs to be represented right from the beginning of the recruitment process, that is, from the initial job posting that your external Recruiter or internal HR department uses.

Have you ever wondered why after several interviews, background checks and new-hire training that "star" candidates quit and go somewhere else? Some may think it had to do with the Recruiter not exercising proper due-diligence, but have you ever wondered what may have gone wrong in the Recruitment/On boarding process?

Here are some points to consider when starting the recruitment and on-boarding process.

Think of the different personality blends

Have the personality blends/temperaments of the different candidates as well as that of your company brand been considered as you proceed through the Recruitment/on-boarding process?

Personality Traits	What is Important in the Recruitment/On-boarding Process
D Fast paced, Dominant, Drivers, Quick decision makers, Task oriented and typically Extroverted	› All relevant tasks should be completed quickly and efficiently › All interviews and training should start on time and be conducted in a professional manner › Expects RESPECT throughout the process
I Fast paced, Inspiring, Innovative, Enthusiastic, Life of the party, High energy promoters and typically Extroverted	› Welcome with energy, excitement and genuine enthusiasm › Welcoming e-mails, personal greeting and buddy system on First day › Looks for a feeling of FUN & CELEBRATION
S Steady, Stable, Secure, People Oriented and typically Reserved	› Appreciate kind gestures showing your level or care for them such as warm e-mails and pre-hire phone calls › Looks for BELONGING and APPRECIATION
C Cautious, Careful, Compliant, Task Oriented and typically Reserved	› Expect all training materials to be organized and in order › Proper completion of tasks is very important › All contracts should be error free › Training and first day logistics should be delivered in a logical manner, ensuring not to start late or waste time › Looks for efficient Standard Operating Procedures and a feeling of VALUE

Since many companies rely on external recruiters to assist in the recruitment process, here are some best practices that will encourage Recruiters to represent your brand in the best possible light.

How quick is the turn-around time? Once your company's internal or external Recruiter interviews the candidates, how quickly do you interview possible candidates? Typically the Recruiter (internal or external) should be able to get back to the candidate within 48 hours with an interview date and time. Remember, once someone starts looking for a job, they look aggressively.

If you use an external Recruiter, then it is imperative that the internal representative have seamless turnaround times i.e. 24 to 48 hours, as candidates can get frustrated with the poor communication and then look elsewhere. This lag in time can be the beginning of either a great corporate brand or a very poor corporate brand. If there is a lengthy delay then the candidate will not feel valued.

Enthusiasm for the organization will diminish as this experience was not welcoming or employee-centric. If you are recruiting agents, it is critical to deliver feedback quickly as the top-tiered agents will get hired quickly – maybe even by your competitor if you take too long. Typically, an agent should know either way within 72 hours.

Additional points to consider are:
- On the day of the interview at your respective organization, how are the candidates greeted?
- Are they treated with respect? Is each person being treated as if they are your valued customer?
- After the first interview, how are candidates left to feel? How quickly is the feedback given?
- Do you make candidates at the agent level come in for several interviews or do you show enough respect to have them come in once but meet with the respective managers and HR staff on the same day?
- On-boarding should be fully integrated into the Recruitment and Selection process.
- Process can be started online, with downloads and e-mails provided to the candidates ahead of the start date.
- Ensure that candidates are greeted with a warm welcome during the entire interview process.
- Ensure speedy and efficient communication throughout the process
- Badges, computer/phone logins etc. should be ready on first day of orientation
- Orientation should be Warm, Welcoming and a Fun experience.

All levels of Management should be involved in the Training process to start instilling the true corporate culture where Employees are valued and respected.

The success of the recruitment process comes down to how you treat the candidates throughout the process. An agent or any other candidate will deliver the service with which they are treated. How one is treated early on is a key piece in defining the corporate culture.

If you do not treat people properly in the Recruitment/On boarding stage – then giving a T-shirt or a Mug with "We Care about You" means nothing. It is just another piece of meaningless swag.

All aboard!

People matter (not just a catchy phrase). Showing that you care should never stop.

Remember, by investing in a proper Recruitment and On-boarding process – You will reduce attrition, reduce on-going recruitment and save training time and dollars!