



The team is your brand

Building a leadership brand with your team

By Ajit Kambil

WHEN I help a C-level executive transition to a new leadership role, I often need to remind her that her team represents both her brand and the organization's brand. Not giving your leadership team a clear idea of the brand you want to establish for your organization and the behaviors that manifest this brand can undermine your efforts and create confusion in your team.

It is striking how few leaders clearly articulate the critical brand attributes they want their organization to manifest. If the organization's brand is poor, fix it quickly; within six months to a year, the brand you inherit becomes yours. Every new CxO should, early during the transition, have conversations to define the go-forward brand, set the context with critical stakeholders, and drive behaviors and actions that make the brand a reality.

Define the brand

A first step to triangulating on a new brand is to interview existing stakeholders and customers and take an inventory of terms they would use to describe your existing organization. For instance, you may hear that finance is usually a naysayer to the business, it's unable to support critical investments, or it can't provide critical information or useful insights for critical decisions. Negative as well as positive descriptions offer opportunities to transform future interactions and reset the brand. In this instance, providing timely, insightful, and accurate information may become part of your desired brand.

A second approach is to consider your goals for the organization. For example, CFOs often tell me they want to make finance an effective partner to the business. This may be the overarching goal. But as the brand defines how you are perceived in the delivery of the goal, you next need to ask yourself what terms you are

likely to use in describing the delivery of this overarching goal. A CFO might say, “I want my finance folks to be trusted, confident, and insightful when being a partner to the business.” These descriptors are helpful in creating a brand statement.

A third approach is to brainstorm with your team on how to define critical brand attributes. This approach, most importantly, involves your team in the brand definition process, enabling it to take ownership of the result. Engaging the team to frame brand attributes also expands the set of descriptors for the brand. For example, members of the team may add the need to be perceived as a fair and objective organization.

Adding these descriptors, you could now frame the new desired brand: “The finance organization consistently delivers timely and accurate financial reports and insightful analyses to support business decision making and value creation. Finance is a confident and trusted partner to the business that is fair, objective, and transparent in its processes.”

Set the context to manifest the brand

A key responsibility of the new executive is to analyze and potentially reset the context of the brand in the company. This may require breaking prior patterns of the organization’s interactions with critical stakeholders and internal customers.

For example, as a new group CIO, if you find a business leader has created a shadow IT organization in the business unit leveraging the cloud and other technologies—neither involving nor ignoring your staff in these initiatives—it could prove a challenge for your team in achieving its brand aspirations. The solution is to explore renegotiating your staff’s participation in this business unit’s IT-related initiatives. If unsuccessful, you have to decide whether to escalate the issue or to temporarily dial down services to this business unit while exceptionally serving other businesses that are more cooperative and enable brand development. Either way, you will have to re negotiate the environment.

Drive behaviors to manifest the brand

The brand is not defined not by what you say but, rather, by what your organization’s key stakeholders observe. As you reset the context and receptivity of a new brand with key stakeholders, you will also need to ensure your team undertakes the behaviors and communications to manifest the new brand. They will also need to manage the behaviors that undermine the brand.

Once your team has taken ownership to manifest a new brand, you may need to tackle redefining the visuals, shifting rewards and incentives, and role modeling to achieve your branding goals.

In a business context, visual perception often trumps auditory and other perceptions. Computer support personnel dressed in business casual in a formal environment could convey the wrong impression. The casually dressed computer support guy may be brilliant at restoring a nonfunctioning computer, but when he arrives on the executive floor, he may contribute to the perception of a team without professional discipline. Similarly, logos, consistent visual identities, and formats of reports and presentations can all serve to emphasize professionalism and attention to detail.

Leaders will have to be role models for the desired behaviors. If the goal is to be responsive to customers, leaders themselves need to demonstrate this trait. If the team is to be perceived as insightful, leaders need to show that they value insights from their staff and perhaps even generate valuable insights for their clients.

Incentivize and reward

Incentives and rewards are essential to reinforce the desired behaviors that represent the brand you want to create. Rewards can be varied—from recognition in newsletters of a job well done to smaller monetary awards. Implementing incentives and rewards will also require measurements to validate the incentives. For example, if you want to improve the brand in terms of responsiveness as a CIO, it is important to track the times to satisfactory problem resolution and strive to bring down the time. Complementing incentives and rewards

with tangible measures of behaviors and desired outcomes enables you to track progress toward the consistent delivery of your organization's brand promise.

The takeaway: Your team becomes an expression of your brand—so explicitly express and co-create the brand you desire with your team. Triangulating from

multiple perspectives on key desired brand attributes, ensuring key stakeholders are receptive to a brand reset, and aligning rewards and incentives and role modeling critical behaviors to manifest the target brand can more systematically help change perceptions of your organization.

Dr. Ajit Kambil is the global research director for the CFO program and the creator of Deloitte's Executive Transition Labs.



Follow @DU_Press

Sign up for Deloitte University Press updates at DUPress.com.

About Deloitte University Press

Deloitte University Press publishes original articles, reports and periodicals that provide insights for businesses, the public sector and NGOs. Our goal is to draw upon research and experience from throughout our professional services organization, and that of coauthors in academia and business, to advance the conversation on a broad spectrum of topics of interest to executives and government leaders.

Deloitte University Press is an imprint of Deloitte Development LLC.

About this publication

This publication contains general information only, and none of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, its member firms, or their related entities (collectively the "Deloitte Network") is, by means of this publication, rendering professional advice or services. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your finances or your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser. No entity in the Deloitte Network shall be responsible for any loss whatsoever sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee ("DTTL"), its network of member firms, and their related entities. DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL (also referred to as "Deloitte Global") does not provide services to clients. Please see www.deloitte.com/about for a more detailed description of DTTL and its member firms.

Deloitte provides audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory services to public and private clients spanning multiple industries. With a globally connected network of member firms in more than 150 countries and territories, Deloitte brings world-class capabilities and high-quality service to clients, delivering the insights they need to address their most complex business challenges. Deloitte's more than 200,000 professionals are committed to becoming the standard of excellence.

© 2015. For information, contact Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited.