

## Employee Brand Promises: What's the Point?

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### Employee Brand Promises: What's the Point?

Most organizations have a customer or stakeholder brand promise. This is the promise you make externally to the type of experience (product or service quality) the customer or stakeholder will have in interacting with your organization. Organizations use a lot of resources (marketing, training, internal communication) to ensure that employees understand the promise and know how to execute on the promise externally. In n-gen's GAC (Generational Advisory Council) poll, 83% of Gen Ys felt that they knew how to demonstrate the customer brand promise. Interestingly, the results for Gen X and Baby Boomers were significantly less: 33% of Gen X and 56% of Baby Boomers said that they agreed with the statement "Employees at my workplace understand their role in demonstrating the external brand to customers." In contrast, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers agreed more (88% and 78% respectively) that they knew their organization's mission. This data may imply that we do a better job in educating the newest entrants in the workplace on execution of the brand than we do with the experienced generations because, typically, Gen Ys are more front-line customer facing. However, with the older generations, we focus more on the broader scope of the mission, but forget to educate how their role plays a significant part in delivering on the customer brand promise. Regardless of the role, all employees should be able to state the link between their role and your external brand promise delivery.

This newsletter starts with reporting on the results of delivering on the external brand, because n-gen strongly asserts that organizations cannot be successful in delivering on the external brand, unless they are also strong in delivering on the internal employee brand promise.

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Whether your organization has articulated it or not, your organization has an employee brand promise. We see the employee brand promise as being the values and the total rewards program of your organization. In the last 10-15 years, organizations have spent a lot of time defining and transferring into operational reality, the values of your organization, often with great success.

Our GAC participants overwhelmingly agreed with the statement "I can explain our organizational values." (Gen Y-100%, Gen X-75% and Baby Boomers-78%). Also, the majority of respondents understand your organization's total rewards package (Gen Y-67%, Gen X-92%, and Baby Boomers 78%).

## So What's the Problem?

The challenge is that while your employees might be able to state the values and the features of their reward package when asked directly, they do not realise that this is your employee brand promise. Only 66% of Gen Y, 50% of Gen X and 56% of Baby Boomers agreed that their organizations have articulated their employee brand promise. Because organizations are often poor at articulating the employee brand promise, a gap occurs between organizational reality and employee perception. The gap leaves room for doubt as to whether or not an employee believes s/he is experiencing the promise. At an organizational level, we need to ensure that every employee understands what your promise is - what s/he can and what s/he cannot expect by working at your organization. Secondly, organizations need to be able to execute on that promise consistently and constantly, and remind employees that the promise is being delivered.

## Challenges to Articulation

### *GAC Verbatim Comments*

"Our industry is down and we are made very aware that money is tight. I think there is some dishonesty with employees regarding what is/is not possible money-wise." (Gen Y)

"The challenge remains as communication. In answer to questions 2/3, the results are in fact mixed. as the company continues to grow, keeping [the same] culture, keeping [the same] values is difficult...and communicating this is the tough task." [sic] (Gen Y)

"Cost containment. External market conditions Ability to drive higher volumes of incoming business" (Gen X)  
"Budgetary constraints, 'political hires' versus true paths to internal career development" (Gen X)

The first challenge to creating an articulated brand is for senior leaders and HR to understand what your organization actually can and cannot offer, given your operational reality. From a generational perspective, it is important to recognize and evaluate what elements of total rewards the various generations in your workplace value. When asked: "What was the most important factor to taking your role at your current employer?", GAC recipients gave various responses. Gen Ys overwhelmingly said learning and development opportunities, Gen X were split between work environment (flexibility, physical space, employee 'perks') and salary and benefits, and Baby Boomers focused on salary and benefits. Your total reward offerings should be broad enough to really tap into the engagement drivers of each generational cohort.

During tough economic times, it may be the case that certain resource cut-backs have to happen. Your organization is, then in essence, changing the promise. In this circumstance, it is very important to be transparent with the changes and to arrive at innovative and creative work-arounds that are both cost-effective and achieve the objectives. Remember that your Gen X and Gen Y employees will give you a shorter grace period to demonstrate transparency and to renegotiate the promise. If the promise is broken, and the economy turns around, they will be the first out the door.

## Challenges to Execution

### *GAC Verbatim Comments*

"HR policies do not always correlate to the needs/wants of the business management - i.e. working from home allowed but mgmt does not want this widespread" (Gen X)

"There is a big difference between stated promises and reality. High pressure put on managers filters down to lower colleagues. Colleagues seem to mistrust management due to broken promises and lack of communication in the past." (Gen X)

"The changing goals of upper management results in the promises made, not being materialized." (Baby Boomer)

"Smaller company limits development options executives not walking the talk leaders" (Baby Boomer)

"It is a hierarchy built on seniority and union. Although unspoken there is an age barrier to promotion after a certain age unless you are already in upper management." (Baby Boomer)

There is no point in offering fundamental financial elements of total rewards (e.g. bonus structures that never pay out at the highest level) or non-financial components (on-site massage therapy, earlier summer hours or learning and development opportunities like secondments or job shadowing) if it is not possible to deliver. Here we have to delineate between the operational reality of being able to deliver on the rewards and the actual execution. It has been our experience that often the execution by managers toward their team becomes the greatest challenge. If you offer summer hours, but a manager of a team makes it impossible to leave early (either explicitly by assignment of last minute work, or implicitly by looking at his/her watch when an employee leaves) then the promise has been broken. If employees know that asking for a secondment, a stretch assignment on another team or a request for training will result in lowered performance scores or attribution of disloyalty to the team/manager, then the promise is broken.

Creating, articulating and executing an employee brand promise is not a simple task. In some organizations it's owned by marketing, in some organizations by HR - ideally it is a collaborative effort. However, for organizations that are successful in all three elements, the gap between what employees think is the promise and the experience of the promise is minimized. Having a clearly articulated and executed employee brand promise benefits all areas of the employee life-cycle - how you get, keep and grow all four generations.



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