How to Be a Positive Ambassador for Your Organization (and Teach Others to Do the Same)

Description

Most of us have experienced how powerful it can be when an employee manages up a company and its products. For example, when a server raves about how great the steak is, we're not only likely to order it, we'll feel good about our decision. What's more, we'll feel great about the restaurant, tell our friends about it, and most likely plan to come back again.

Now, imagine how amazing it would be if you and your employees represented the company this way all the time, 24/7. Whatever our role or leadership status, we need to think of ourselves as company ambassadors. When we "manage up" our company, the people who work there, and the customers who buy from us, great things happen.

Most obviously, we make more sales. But managing up also impacts employees. Not only does it help them feel good about working there, it gives them the language to manage up the organization to others. Positive ambassadorship also creates the kind of culture that attracts great talent. High performers want to work where it's obvious that employees are thriving and happy.

Finally, being positive about your company just feels better. People respond to positivity. It raises our energy, makes us happier and more pleasant to be around, draws others to us, improves our relationships, and opens the floodgates to greater creativity.

Here are some ways leaders can be a positive ambassador for your company and teach employees to do the same:

Be a world-class noticer. Look for things that are going well to manage up. Some opportunities to manage up are obvious, like when you get a new client or hit a key goal. But train yourself to look for little day-to-day moments as well: when a customer praises a staff member, when someone stays late to finish a project, when a project team hits a tight deadline. Don't pass up an opportunity to accentuate the positive. Others may notice and start doing it, too, but don't count on that: Make managing up part of your training. The idea is to get everyone in the habit so that it becomes a natural part of your culture.

Set the right example for employees. Ask yourself honestly: *Do I send positive messages about the company?* If not, vow to change that right now. Get in the habit of being your company's most vocal cheerleader. Frequently say how happy you are to be working there. Manage up coworkers and employees when you introduce them to others ("This is Michelle. She is the best accountant I've ever worked with!") and speak highly of them at all times. When you are consistently positive, employees will follow your lead.

Don't fake it. People can tell when you do. Instead, find authentic bright spots you can feel good about and focus on them. When I meet with a community or a business, I like to kick things off by asking them to focus on bright spots. What are the top three reasons they love their community? What are three reasons this is a great company to work for? They almost always come up with lots of

examples and it really shifts the mood. This exercise always raises the energy level in the room, and people immediately get in a creative and productive mindset.

Teach employees to avoid the "we/they" trap. We/theyism occurs when we position ourselves in a positive light by making someone else the "heavy." An employee might say, "Sorry, the people in that branch are always slow to respond. I'll handle it for you!" Explain to employees that this may make a customer feel better about you but it will make them feel worse about the company. Far better to cheerfully take ownership of the situation and help the customer, and maybe offer an apology, without any negative commentary about anyone else. We need to function as a unified organization, not a divided one.

Make sure everyone is well-trained in sending the right messages to customers. Employees may fall back on practices like we/they and other bad habits simply because they've never been taught the *right* way to interact with customers. Give them the right tools and they'll say the right things. For example, teach them to manage up coworkers—and provide key words and phrases to use as appropriate—and to narrate processes so the customer always knows what's going on. If you give them the words, they will be much more likely to use them.

For example: "When we take your dog into the grooming salon, we will give him a treat and allow him plenty of time to get acclimated. We use only safe, nontoxic shampoos and other products. Oh, and we always match each dog with a well-trained and professionally certified groomer experienced in working with that particular breed." Not only does all of this alleviate customer anxiety, it leaves the customer feeling good about your company.

Don't just *tell* employees to be good company ambassadors. Explain the *why*. Usually when people understand the *why,* they are far more likely to do what you're asking them to do. Help them connect the dots that when they speak positively about the company or manage up a coworker, customers will be more pleasant to serve…and they'll make more sales…and the company will make more money…and they will have a more secure job. Don't assume they already know this. They may not—and even if they do, we all need a reminder at times.

Reward and recognize those who practice positive ambassadorship. Just say publicly, "I'd like to thank Marcus for representing us so well. One of his regular customers, Mrs. Davidson, told me that she does business with us because he is always smiling and makes her feel like he and the company care about her as an individual." Recognized behavior gets repeated. Also, by drawing attention to high performers, you encourage others to watch and emulate them.

You might consider asking the CEO to recognize high performers and positive ambassadors as well. This is a way of managing up the CEO and the employee simultaneously. The CEO feels good about the employee, the employee feels good about the CEO, and they both feel good about you. It's a win-win-win.

Emphasize the importance of managing up the company while off the clock as well. Tell employees: "When you're out in the community, be positive about your company and its products. People will hear what you say and they will remember." The truth is, you never know who is at the next table and what their connection might be to the company, a leader or coworker, or a client. Employees need to think of themselves as representatives of the company and behave accordingly, 24/7.

Give them the tools to represent the company in public. For example, you might have tee shirts printed up with your company's name on them so employees can represent your brand outside of work. In fact, if you hold a competition where employees submit creative or funny designs, people will be more likely to want to wear them.

Make all employees unofficial salespeople. Encourage them to hand out business cards. You might also give them nice-looking promotional pieces to keep in their car "just in case," and you can help them develop a brief, positive elevator speech about what your company does. When you arm people with the tools they need to be positive ambassadors, they'll do it.

Teach employees to be very, very careful what they post on social media. Make it clear: Even worse than venting in a public place is venting about the company on Facebook or any other social media site. (Even veiled negative statements like "Some people need to learn to appreciate their employees!" can be destructive.) Not only might the boss see an online rant, so might a customer or potential customer who just happens to Google your name.

When you look for ways to focus on the positive and to manage up others, you will find them. And they will ripple outward, creating more opportunities. Get in the habit of thinking this way and help employees to do the same. If everyone in the company were to take just one small step toward being a positive ambassador, together we could make a huge difference in how our communities and customers see our company.

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