

managing your employer brand during a crisis.

During times of crisis, your employer brand becomes your brand.

Talent, employees, society, clients and customers will not forget and not forgive your authenticity today.

With so many business functions disrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic crisis, companies everywhere face an unprecedented number of challenges and uncertainties at the same time. While employer branding may not seem like a high priority to some, this is exactly the moment when organizations must take care to respect, protect and even elevate their reputation to internal and external audiences. Whether you need to hire quickly, face a reduction in force or anything in between, upholding your values and your promises, in a transparent and honest way, is key to managing your reputation.

Without doubt, the COVID-19 crisis is forcing many businesses to confront a new reality that puts their employer brand to the test. For some, the significant loss of business and accompanying disruptions will mean a reduction in force. On the other end of the spectrum, organizations with critical workforces such as healthcare, medical supplies, logistics and home goods manufacturers face enormous pressure to ramp up staffing quickly to support needs around the world. Regardless of where you are on the hiring spectrum, the importance of managing your employer brand can't be overstated.

Under these difficult circumstances, companies should examine how their employer brand strategy fits into their overall response to the COVID-19 crisis. Measures such as layoffs, furloughs and freezing benefits and raises all have an impact on both corporate and employer brands, but how these actions are perceived will depend on the way they are executed and communicated. Business leaders, more than ever, need to remember that their identity and their promises need to be kept despite the difficult decisions that need to be made. This is the moment in history when your true identity will emerge, and it will be easy to see if it matches who you said you were all along.

Staying authentic and threading existing messaging across new courses of action should be prioritized. In [this post appearing in the Harvard Business Review](#), the authors contend that companies can better connect

with talent if the brand focuses on delivering on its “total brand promise.” This is the moment for companies to shine and deliver.

As your company looks to enhance talent attraction in this difficult environment, you may want to rethink how the products or services you provide are truly important to the greater societal need and individuals. Being relevant and adapting to new circumstances are key to your brand power and to the overall reputation of your organization.

Indeed, many companies are seeking ways in which they can contribute towards economic and societal recovery in the months ahead, and your business may be conducting similar initiatives to help your customers, employees and communities get back on their feet. The philanthropic efforts your company undertakes today can reinforce your employer brand, while raising awareness about an issue that company leaders feel strongly about.

By demonstrating a commitment to a cause beyond revenue growth, your philanthropy sets an example and underscores the importance of corporate social responsibility within your business. If you said in the past it was important to you, this is the day you can demonstrate it. This can have a tremendous and immediate impact on your ability to attract talent and help you reinforce your identity and culture.

When layoffs are necessary

Staying true to your identity should also be the guiding principle when you are faced with the unenviable task of laying off employees. Across the globe, companies affected deeply and broadly by the economics of COVID-19 have already dismissed parts of their workforce. As of the end of March, the U.S. is facing huge unemployment claims. In Europe, workers are partially shielded from losing their jobs as governments in Denmark, the U.K. and the Netherlands are guaranteeing affected workers a majority of their pay. In Australia, job losses could amount to one million from COVID-19.

How much workforce redundancy your business can absorb will be determined by your business leaders. As a talent professional, however, you can help soften the impact on your employer brand and the workers affected. More than ever, you must adhere to the values and promises you consistently amplify with your employer brand; otherwise, you'll be seen as untrustworthy when times are challenging.

Lessening the impact on your workforce doesn't require significant budget outlays. What it does require is transparency – achieved with candid communication with your workforce. With many workers realizing the economic toll on your business, there is more sympathy reserved for downsizing. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean you should do so in an insensitive manner. If your identity is founded on innovation and you do not look for innovative solutions, no one will ever believe you again.

If people are at the core of your EVP, and you do not take care of them at least with honesty and compassion during this moment, they will not forget once you try to hire them again. Even among those who are retained, poor management of your workforce at this moment may lead employees to leave you when the world returns to a state of normalcy. So how can you prepare your workforce for bad news while simultaneously respecting your identity, your promises and your employer brand?

Be transparent about your business situation. Adopting a frank and clear communications plan will keep your workforce informed and reassured that you are being forthright. When employees are in the dark, your organization is subject to disruption, which can tarnish your employer brand. Clarity is of paramount importance in uncertain times.

Be clear about other opportunities. Your workers want to know you are identifying all possibilities to retain them through reskilling or have a support system in place if they are outplaced. You may already have a

learning and development program in place to quickly prepare employees for a new role so make sure to leverage these capabilities and promote it internally. On the other hand, consider using an external service to help outplaced talent seek opportunities in other organizations.

Provide emotional support to all. Workers being laid off are most in need of counseling or other support systems, but are you considering the needs of retained workers? Seeing colleagues let go could have a long-term impact on their performance and morale. Make sure you have a safety net in place to help those struggling to cope with downsizing in your organization.

Suffer together, be a leader. Business leaders should lead by example at this moment in time. It would be unethical to keep high bonuses for the top leadership while people are displaced. It would be dangerous for leaders to ask sacrifices from others while they do not walk the talk.

Use your EVP and employer brand values as your guiding light. Be consistent about your identity. Enhance your tone of voice, make your values visible in the way you communicate and help your people in these extraordinary times. Be like the friend you can count on in good and bad times.

Managing your employer brand during a crisis can be difficult, but adopting an authentic, consistent approach will help you better manage the expectations of your people and those of other stakeholders. The current situation is stressing every organization around the world. How well you react and plan for contingencies will have a lasting impact on your workforce and your employer brand. You will stay in people's memory tomorrow for your actions today.

Are you interested in your organizations' employer brand or your sector's employer branding in times of COVID-19, please visit [our website](#).

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