

Sure, you listen to your customers, but do you listen to your employees?

By [Johnny Johnson](#)

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Way back in the seventies, Peter Drucker said that business has only one purpose: to create a customer. That's where Marty Neumeier kicks off from in his recent book *The Brand Flip*.



The premise of the book is that because of the explosion of connectivity and the power it gives customers, a brand is not owned by the company but by customers who draw meaning from it. Your brand isn't what you say it is. It's what they say it is.

Neumeier presents a whole lot of ways you can get into a customer conversation that informs how you can keep your brand relevant.

But this explosion of connectivity is not limited to customers. It is just as true for employees. Add to this connectivity the fact that it's getting to the point that most of your workforce is made up of millennials and, as Rose Cartolari puts it in a recent article in [Forbes](#):

“ Millennials have entered the workforce and, through their influence, are changing the dynamics and meaning of work for many. This generation is seeking more than pure financial success; they are looking for personal growth and purpose both from the type of work as well as the people they are working with. ”

Don't make the mistake of thinking that this combination of connectivity and a desire for personal growth and purpose is limited to highly educated and sophisticated professionals – it is not. In recent focus groups at a call centre, an entry level job if ever there was one, one of the main themes was purposeful growth and a contribution to society.

And a theme that is a constant, no matter what group of employees you talk to, is that internal communication is not good enough.

Communication doesn't mean only telling, informing and ordering; it means listening. At the most basic listening to ensure understanding, but, just as important, especially for millennials, it means listening to get advice. For old-fashioned leaders getting advice from employees is not an easy concept.



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The fact that employees are connected helps communication. Get over trying to subdue connectivity in the workplace because you will be wasting your time. Rather use this connectivity to get messages out there, to get conversation going, ensuring understanding and ownership and to get good ideas.

Of course, this will create challenges, the main one being that once the conversation starts, it has to continue. It's no good saying 'I hear you', this has to extend to 'I hear you and here's what I'm going to do' and then to 'it's done'.

The benefit to the business isn't only more engaged employees, it's also better ways of doing things.

Also, in many if not most cases, the workforce is a sample of the customer, so you can get feedback about the customer from your employees. Given the cost of good market research, this is efficient even though it may not be sufficient – it's a starting point.

In the same way that customers draw meaning from the brand, the employee draws purpose. The flipside of the meaning promised externally is the purpose lived internally.

Start using employee engagement communication to help inform customer insight and you will not only have better brand ambassadors internally, but the added value is that you will be more relevant to your customer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johnny Johnson is a brand and communications strategist at TowerStone Leadership Centre, whose vision focuses on empowering leaders to build a values-driven culture for sustainable success. His role is to define their clients' brand promise and find ways of helping leaders engage with employees in such a way that they are committed brand ambassadors. Visit [www.towerstone-global.com]

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