

# Strategic communication with employees, stakeholders is key

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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TORONTO, CANADA: Day two of the IABC World Conference in Toronto, Canada, kicked off with a powerful speech by Kevin Warren, chairman of the board, president and CEO of Xerox Canada. For his role in leadership communication, he was awarded the 2010 IABC Excellence in Communication Leadership (EXCEL) Award, which honours company leaders who have demonstrated superb communication skills.

Warren was appointed to this position in December 2007 after beginning his career at Xerox in 1984 and has been an advocate of communication from his early days within the organisation. He has successfully navigated Xerox Canada through the recent economic turbulence and made clear that it is the relationships between employee communication and engagement that lead to ultimate business success.

The positive impact of his commitment has been far-reaching and extended beyond employees to all his constituencies. His enthusiasm and commitment to communication is evident and contagious, as his fellow senior leaders at Xerox have also recently expanded their communication's breadth and reach.

## Closing the engagement gap: five habits of truly effective organisations

Julie Gebauer, head of Towers Watson's Workforce Effectiveness Practice and MD of its organisational research business, said nine out of every 10 workers in the world want to take on challenges and are ready to put 'discretionary effort' into their jobs. In reality, only two employees in 10 actually do so.

Author of *Closing the Engagement Gap*, Gebauer explored the five essential habits of high-performing organisations and the central role communication plays in all of them. She advocates that employee engagement does matter, is not a soft issue, and high-performing organisations can all prove that they define, execute and measure their employee engagement programmes. Key to this model is sound involvement with leaders, as communication starts at the top.

In her presentation, she highlighted three key trends:

1. The recession marked the end of the traditional "deal" that once underpinned the employment relationship
2. There seems to be a growing divergence between what employees want and what employers deliver, and this engagement gap is becoming compounded by a relationship gap
3. Findings from Towers Watson research show enormous challenges for employers' efforts to sustain motivation and engagement, retain critical talent and enable individuals to operate successfully in the new world.

These three trends were coupled by three key drivers of engagement:

1. Know your workforce - analyse and break down your audience categories extensively
2. Enable your workforce - empower and share knowledge with all workforces
3. Customise the experience for your workforce - make sure you allow key leaders you have trained on communicating your messages to customise them and make them relevant to their market

### **Engaged employees out-perform the competition**

It is well-known that engaged employees are better brand ambassadors, provide higher degrees of recommendation to colleagues and customers, and are more likely to stay within the organisation. The result is higher brand value - both tangible and intangible.

Research has also shown that companies with engaged employees have higher market-to-book ratios than organisations with disengaged employees.

Gregg Lederman, managing partner of Brand Integrity in New York, suggests that engaged employees are strong brand ambassadors who will strengthen any work culture and delight customers. Brand Integrity's Achieving Brand Integrity process helps companies to uncover the proprietary behaviours and experiences that differentiate their brand (work culture) in the minds of customers, employees and the marketplace.

Lederman has identified five Brand Integrity Dimensions that serve as the foundation for building a visible and powerful brand for any organisation: culture and team; operational strength; product, knowledge and expertise; customer service; and leading by example. While these seem simple enough, without employee behaviours and practical implementation, they mean very little.

### **Knowing versus doing**

Similar to company values - without a behaviours guide to make the values tangible, they are nothing more than nice words on the wall. Lederman says the dimensions dramatically enhance the work culture and drive consistently good, more profitable customer experiences. The assessment of brand and company behaviour is not intended to measure individual performance, but rather the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation which impact on employee and customer experiences.

One such statement in the Brand Integrity questionnaire is "Employees examine current systems and processes to identify opportunities for improvement." This can largely be seen as the behaviour that could manifest the value of innovation. The challenge is to interrogate the organisation and establish whether people are 'living the values', and thereby delivering a customer experience that is in line with reputational priorities.

In other words, do employees know what is expected of them in order to deliver the external brand promise?

Another hot topic discussed yesterday, Monday, 7 June 2010, at the IABC Conference was that of change management. Jennifer Houston, SVP and global lead at WE Studio D of Waggener Edstrom Worldwide, suggested that today's ubiquitous digital access removes barriers and enables anyone to create influence, engage influencers and drive dialogue.

### **Challenge for change management**

The challenge for change management is to accept that as the sphere of influence evolves, so must the way communicators engage the influence space, communicate with stakeholders and share stories with audiences.

Houston said, "Combining the right analytics tool with human analytical expertise can provide deep and revealing insights

into your target audience, as well as actionable next steps for you to take".

She outlined a five-step guide to help design a focused measurement programme that will leverage raw data and human insight.

Conference day three will get underway on Tuesday morning with a keynote address by Craig Kielburger, co-founder of Free The Children, an international development and youth empowerment organisation that has built more than 500 schools in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

He will be sharing how companies can align their CSI initiatives internally to motivate and drive staff, which will ultimately show business benefits as well as social development. This is a hot topic globally, and South Africa is no exception as social responsibility features high on corporate agendas, not to mention corporate governance.

Webcasts and podcasts of selected interviews and discussions held in Toronto, Canada, at the 2010 IABC World Conference will be available on [www.talk2us.co.za](http://www.talk2us.co.za).

## ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

Daniel Munslow is the owner and founder of MDC Consulting and former director on the International Association of Business Communicators' International Executive Board. He has 16 years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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