

# How HR Departments Can Get Ahead In The War For Talent

Over the last decade or so, I have spoken at a number of HR events around the world, but I have always felt a bit like the odd one out – the customer-engagement guy amongst the employee-engagement experts. What I have found really interesting is that there seems to be a perception in some circles that there is a trade-off between doing what is best for employees and what is best for customers.

I actually think this is one of the biggest misconceptions in business. Studies have demonstrated that satisfied employees directly lead to satisfied customers – but the opposite relationship has never been proven.

But we all know the role of HR departments is not just keeping everybody happy. According to a study conducted by PwC, 58% of HR managers regard the recruitment and retention of human talent as their biggest challenge. Even at times of high unemployment some companies find that not even of the potential workforce have the modern skills they need, so it is perhaps even more worrying that 82% of companies said that even if they can find the right people, keeping them on board was a problem.

Companies will invest huge budgets into marketing and improving customer experience to win customers, but if we know that happy employees lead to satisfied customers, perhaps we should be investing more heavily and using what we know to improve the experience?

## The Offer You Can't Refuse For Employees

Dutch author Jos Burgers famously said that “Customers are just ordinary people,” and the same is true of any company's employees. This means that the elements that are important in the customer relationship are equally important for the company's relationship with its own staff, and the challenges of keeping them satisfied are looking increasingly similar too.

When I talk about customer engagement I often refer to how some brands are creating what I call “The Offer You Can't Refuse”. This is the standard marketing professionals should aim for to create a truly differentiating customer experience and a deeper

connection with customers, but the same approach can be applied in the war for talent.

There are four steps to creating The Offer You Can't Refuse. For customers, the bottom level of the model was the need for a good product and good service at a good price. For employees, this lowest level is the need for good job content and a good salary. These are minimum requirements, they are important, and we can all tick that box, right? But this will not be enough for an employer to differentiate a company. So what are the next stages?

## Ultimate Convenience

Simplification of the processes is an important starting point for improving employee experience. A study by Deloitte revealed that 74% of employees regard the processes in their company as being too complex, and complexity is a general problem in our professional lives.

Companies invest in three areas to offer greater convenience to their customers, and these same three dimensions can be used for employees:

- **Faster than real time:** if your employees have a problem, try to anticipate it. Making use of data that should be readily available will allow you to gain insight into your employees' levels of (dis)satisfaction and the reasons for them. This insight will help you to identify and proactively respond to particular needs or concerns
- **Hyperpersonalisation:** we all have our own particular way of working. Investigate how you can personalise your tools and communication in ways that will allow individual employees to make use of their preferred working methods. No two iPhones in the world have the same composition of apps on the home screen, so remember: people like to personalise, do your best to take this into account in all aspects of the employee experience
- **Convenience:** last but not least, the ease of use of your tools is crucial if you want to prevent unnecessary frustration. I have seen many contacts stop communicating via their work computer because it is so cumbersome, and have switched instead to their own private computer. If people have better and easier-to-use tools in their private lives than they do in their professional lives, this is seriously detrimental to an employee experience.

## Partner In Life And Career

A 'partner in life' strategy understands the concerns, dreams, fears and ambitions that people have for their own lives. This strategy is not about the company, but about each individual employee. Empathy for his or her hopes and worries is a basic requirement for taking the right steps to develop the necessary partnership. I have identified four elements that are important if you want to establish this dual partnership:

- **Meaningful work:** Recently, I had the pleasure of making a couple of visits to the SpaceX factory in Los Angeles. All the staff wear 'Colonize Mars' T-shirts. Everyone, from the most humble cleaner to the most senior engineer, has the feeling that they are working as part of a unique project. In 2011, Daniel Pink wrote his bestseller Drive, in which he argued convincingly that if you can offer people autonomy, mastery and purpose, they will be happy in their work. His research is now more than ten years old, but the basic principles remain the same
- **Continuous learning:** Many people see their job as part of a life-long career trajectory. By continuing to learn and develop throughout that career, they hope to keep their profile interesting for the labour market. But companies that invest in the training of their personnel often reap the rewards of their effort. Organisations with a strong learning culture have 92 per cent more chance of bringing innovative products and services to market; are 52 per cent more productive than others; have 56 per cent more chance of being first to market with products and services; and are 17 per cent more profitable than their competitors
- **Wellbeing:** Ann De Bisschop wrote an excellent book on this subject entitled Wellbeing = winst (Well-being = profit). She contends that companies that invest in the wellbeing of their workforce achieve better results across the board, and that wellbeing at work is the should combine satisfaction in the work in question with good physical and mental health. A study by LinkedIn has shown that 49 per cent of employees have a preference for benefits linked to health and well-being above all other benefits
- **Continuous feedback:** The classic evaluation procedure focuses on the assessment of past behaviour and then

rewards or punishes people via financial incentives. But if you want to be a partner in the life and career of your people, you need to look to the long-term future and plan it together through a process of constant dialogue.

**Saving The World, Together With Your Employees**

More and more people are opting to work for employers with positive, ethical and sustainable values. Studies show some 64% of young people would no longer accept a job with a company that does not have socially beneficial and sustainable objectives – and by 2025, 75% of the working population will be millennials.

In some ways, the 'save the world' idea is a much more important factor for employees than it is for customers. 70% of the working population wants to work for an employer with a strong and positive climate policy, and 50% are even prepared to work for slightly lower pay for an employer with positive societal objectives and values.

So why are more and more people opting for companies that have a 'save the world' plan? In my opinion, there are three key motives. Firstly, there is a sense of pride for employees when their company exceeds the societal norm. During the 2020 lockdowns, Panera Bread continued making salads and

sandwiches, and not only adapted to sell to customers via home deliveries and street pick-ups, but also donated thousands of its meals to poor children who rely upon free school meals. This is the kind of action that makes employees proud, because it goes beyond the norm of what society expects. And the more the employees can be actively involved in these inspiring actions, the greater their impact will be.

The second motive is a derivative conclusion drawn from the very existence of a 'save the world' strategy. Future employees assume that a company that wants to take care of society will also do a pretty good job of taking care of its own people.

Lastly, projects with a societal added value often strike a chord with the employee's own values. A good fit between personal values and the company's values is one of the most important drivers for intrinsic motivation.

**Start To Build An Offer Employees Can't Refuse**

Ask yourself how well your company scores on the dimensions of this model. Perhaps you already have a fantastic 'save the world' project in your company, but are still aware of frustrations within your workforce? If so, this will probably have something to do with the lower levels of the model. Maybe it simply isn't 'convenient' enough to work in your company.

As far as customers are concerned, there is slightly more room for manoeuvre in which aspects of the model you apply and how, but with your employees you do not have this luxury. You have to score well with every element of the model. You have no choice. Every step in your Offer You Can't Refuse strategy is crucial for determining the satisfaction, pride and loyalty of both your present and future employees.



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Steven van Belleghem is one of the world's leading thought-leaders, speakers and authors on customer engagement. His new book, *The Offer You Can't Refuse*, out now. See [www.stevenvanbelleghem.com](http://www.stevenvanbelleghem.com)

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