

Branding Your Company from the Top Down
Tip of the Week from WMPKG

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Branding Your Company from the Top Down By JoAnn R. Hines, The Chief People Packager

Do you ever stop and wonder why women are leaving your company? Are you unsure how to stem the tide of women leaving corporate America? The simple fact behind the answer is senior management and employees are not on the same wave length. The appropriate policies are in place and every one uses the politically correct rhetoric yet the implementation of policies never seems to trickle down to those who are affected the most. The women employees know that policies, for the most part, are a joke and not taken seriously by the employer. There is a serious discrepancy in getting the "true" message to the right people. Here are some reasons why.

1) Lack of legitimate support for women at work

The Party Line: The company has developed a strong platform of supporting women in the workforce.

The Reality: Women have not attained parity with in the organization.

The Solution: The company needs more than rhetoric. A legitimate plan of understanding the real issues and implementation of

solutions needs to be devised.

Start by assembling a team that is representative of the women within the company. Collect a good balance between the most senior women executives (if there are any), those who are on a management track and women who are considered 9-5 employees (not serious career plans) yet are an integral component of the companies success.

This task force should address the following: What are the real issues that concern the women within the company? These issues should go beyond the obvious equal pay problems. Prioritize the list and understand that this is not a quick fix program. If the company has more than one location, representatives from different facilities should be included. This is not just a corporate headquarters problem.

The task force should also look outside the organization for examples of companies that have what are considered "best practices" in supporting women within the workforce. It's important for the team to understand that this is not a finger pointing exercise but an opportunity to establish parameters for what policies they would like to see implemented within their organization. Seeing examples of other companies' policies in action and the successful outcomes will go a long way toward establishing a benchmark for beginning a program Outside experts and resources should be called in to share their experiences and progress in implementing similar programs

2) Employees are a resource.

The Party Line: Our employees are our best asset.

The Reality: The employees come last in a series of current economic issues. This reflects the belief that employees can be easily replaced or are overlooked while other financial issues are addressed. This is so commonplace that companies feel like they can resolve the employee issue at a later date. The reality is their reputation is already damaged. Women simply don't want to work for them no matter how attractive the job offer.

The Solution: Invest in employees as an asset vs. a revolving door policy. Do that by supporting continuing education and training. Note: This does not mean telling every woman who wants to go into management that they need to go back to school to get a MBA (an all too prevalent practice as an excuse for not

bringing women into the managerial pipeline).

Encourage active participation in professional associations.

Paying dues, supporting meeting attendance and training programs should be carried out. I find many women end up paying their own expenses to industry events just to keep their skill sets

current. Provide external development opportunities where women can be among peers and role models outside their industry, i.e.,

leadership conferences, training. Encourage women to expand their skill sets such as writing articles and professional speaking.

Have a mentoring program within the organization where women can learn from each other and help younger women grow within the

organization.

3) The Company reputation

The Party Line: Parading glowing reports and statements in the annual report and literature about happy employees and so forth.

Trotting out the "poster child" a senior woman at the top

(usually there is only one) that is supposed to be representative of the entire female workforce.

The Reality: The company can't get talented women to come to work for it or stay employed by it.

The Solution: Once a reputation is damaged it's very difficult for a company to overcome.

It's a process that needs to be attacked on many fronts. Just

offering jobs to women is not enough. You need to be where the women are and advertise in the appropriate women's publications,

sponsor the appropriate conferences, use job boards that target

and seek out women applicants endorsing women's organization that are affiliated with the industry.

Word travels fast and women will tell other women about female

unfriendly policies. One of the tips I always suggest before

considering any company is to go to the website and using the

search button. Type the words women, diversity, leadership, etc.

The results will give you the real picture of how supportive the

company is toward these issues. Chances are you won't get a

single response to any query. This tells you very quickly how

important this issue really is to the company philosophy.

If you do get a "hit," read the article thoroughly. Ascertain if

it's legitimate information or pure fluff. Check though all

the corporate officers, executive committee and board of

directors too. See how many women are represented. This will give

you an insight into the "real" company beliefs and how supportive the company is of women at senior levels.

4) The company in action.

The Party Line: We actively seek and recruit women and minorities.

The Reality: The company places a few ads and advertises once or twice. When they don't get hordes of women knocking at their door they give up entirely.

The Solution: It takes time to change a corporate culture. One of the worst tribulations in the transition is management hierarchy. One CEO may be very supportive, but his successor couldn't care less. "Succession planning" is imperative to continue the message. This means that plans and policies that have been implemented by one leader are so firmly entrenched in the company philosophy that efforts to support and encourage women in the workforce continue unabated regardless who is at the helm.

Regards,

JoAnn

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