

Are doona days enough?

WILLIAM AND SANGEETA LEACH ARGUE THAT, WHEN IT COMES TO ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT, THE POWER OF A MAGNETIC BRAND IS MORE COMPELLING THAN DOONA DAYS.

Doona days, massages, gym memberships, free breakfast (with good coffee), yoga, pilates, birthday holidays – the list goes on.

In the days of talent drought, fickle Gen Ys and rising staff costs, these are the quick-draw weapons in the arsenal of most agencies that want to retain staff, provide a good working environment and be known as good employers. Nothing wrong with that and more power to the agencies that provide these little luxuries.

They show the management leaders of the agency care about the wellbeing of their people and offer an antidote to the stresses of the day job.

However, they can also have the opposite effect in some cases. In a troubled agency, doona days and massages are perceived to be management feel-goods in an attempt to divert from the real issues of pay rise freezes, lack of training and development and a work ethic that requires the candle to burn at both ends continuously.

In most agencies though, they have simply become hygiene factors and people now seem to expect most agencies to throw in some of those little luxuries as a matter of course. “Culture of entitlement,” we hear some of you say resignedly and you can almost hear the “back in my day” movie rolling in others heads.

Whichever way you look at it, let’s agree doona days are good. But are they enough? Not by a long shot. We believe there is a stronger, more sustainable way of attracting and retaining the best talent, inspiring peak performance and creating strong, passionate advocates for your agency. The answer lies in creating an agency brand that is compelling and magnetic.

We create brands, build brands, strengthen brands and extend brands every day in our agency life, but, the most important brand of all – our own brand – is usually the most neglected.

There are many facets to making your agency a brand in demand, but

for the purposes of this article, let’s focus on the people aspects.

Just as a brand needs to provide intrinsic value, real or perceived to its community of users, so does an agency. A couple of good promotions or a few freebies just don’t make a brand. It’s the same with agencies. The agencies that have strong brands are not complaining of talent drought, they seem to have no trouble keeping their stars, attracting good clients and there’s a good buzz and vibe about them.

Here are three fundamental things we believe a good agency brand is founded on:

1. Clarity of purpose

Brand loyalty, as we know, is more about faith than it is about rationality. Faith is a rallying cry. And faith is a result of belief and passion.

A strong agency brand has clarity of purpose. Something people can believe in – a common uniting goal. Something they can get passionate

about and talk about with pride. Having the big picture clearly spelt out is not only inspiring, but it stops the focus on the little stuff.

2. Inspiring leadership

A good agency brand usually has a good captain with a firm hand on the tiller. Just as children mirror their parents, the agency brand and its internal and external manifestation is a mirror of its leadership. The internal role of the agency leaders is to provide clarity of purpose, make the values of the agency clear, hire the right people and then get out of their way.

3. A winning culture

A great culture is all about creating multiple virtuous cycles and breaking vicious cycles decisively and quickly.

Nothing succeeds like success and everyone likes to be part of a winning team. Pitch wins, and awards are the obvious wins, but there are countless others, like

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getting an innovative idea through, achieving sales results, developing a new piece of thinking, launching a new website, blitzing the buzz metrics on a new campaign etc.

Agencies that have a winning culture recognise and celebrate all of these wins (no need for a flash party each time, thanks!). That makes people feel valued and shown they are valued, which inspires them to push the boundaries again. Virtuous cycle one.

An open, collaborative culture fosters a sense of ownership in the agency. If people feel their ideas are heard and acted upon, they take more and more global responsibility and don't feel they have to just deliver "their bit".

They initiate little and big things that improve the sense of wellbeing in the agency and these, in turn, grow organically, resulting in an increased sense of belonging. Virtuous cycle two.

And so it goes.

A closing thought. Legendary brands have a vault of myths and legends, for example the story about Rolls Royce once sending a mechanic to repair a breakdown somewhere in the sticks. A few months later the customer queried the lack of a bill, and Rolls Royce said: "Rolls Royces don't break down sir!" True or false? Don't know. Doesn't matter.

Good agency brands have (and encourage) myths and legends that are founded in the history and origins of the business; others are stories about more recent events.

These stories are told, retold, embellished and, in time, become the building blocks of what makes some agencies into "legendary stuff".

Now throw in a few good doona days with all of that and you've got yourself the foundations of a magnetic agency brand. <

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