



GET PEOPLE TALKING BEHIND YOUR BACK!

Marketing convention has long suggested there are three fundamental paths to brand distinction:

- **Price:** Your product or service makes transactional business sense.
- **Quality:** Your product or service is objectively superior.
- **Service:** Your company delivers its products or services in a manner that is perceived as unique.

More conventional wisdom:

- While there will always be a certain market for “cheap,” if “price” is the primary appeal of your brand, the prospect of a lower-cost alternative emerging is a formidable and ever-present risk.
- Likewise with quality: While there will always be a window of opportunity for the objectively superior, maintaining that status has never been more difficult; quality is essentially pervasive.
- The value proposition of a service strategy relies upon the interdependent, real-time decision-making of employees and managers and the impact of those decisions on customer loyalty.

With that as background, consider there is much the field of leadership development can learn from this discussion of brand identity. For example, how would you say your personal brand as a leader could be categorized? Are you the kind of leader who:

- Relies upon the legitimacy of your position as the force to drive the exchanges you have with those that report to you?

- Leverages the information you have access to, in combination with the expertise you have accumulated, to direct or facilitate the behavior of others?
- Trains people to make good decisions, then trusts them when it is decision time?

Wisdom (that is quickly becoming conventional):

- The hierarchy, which has governed leadership decision-making and responsiveness for decades, is dying. In many organizations, it has already passed. Nevertheless, transactional leadership that emanates from positional power will probably always be around in one form or another, but it is a personal leadership brand fraught with career risk.
- Much the same is true for a leadership brand that depends upon the leader being the smartest person in the room. There are very few barriers these days to accessing information and developing or enhancing expertise. The “leader as expert” is rapidly giving way to the leader who is a catalyst for others to develop or enhance their own expertise.
- A “train them, then trust them” personal leadership brand is defined by employee commitment and loyalty. And that is a trust-based, intangible and frequently difficult-to-describe bond that positively impacts employee engagement, retention and productivity.

So, how do leaders form these magical bonds of trust? In essence, they consistently exceed the expectations of their employees, in key moments of truth. A moment of truth is any

opportunity an employee has to form an impression of their manager. Things like team meetings, one-on-ones, reaction to success/positive news, reaction to failure/setbacks, performance feedback (planned or unplanned), etc.

Now, there are only three outcomes that can ever emerge from any moment of truth:

1. **No story:** Expectations are met. People get what they were expecting — no more, no less.
2. **Negative story:** Expectations are not met. People get less than they were expecting. They are disappointed, frustrated or insulted (and usually can't wait to tell others about it).
3. **Positive story:** Expectations are exceeded. People (usually in some small way) get more than they were expecting. They feel listened to, or like someone really cares about them. They might also feel empowered or like they know what's going on.

So, if you aspire to build a “train, then trust” personal leadership brand, your path forward seems clear. You need to behave in a manner that gets people talking behind your back ... in a good way! 🙌

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Marshall Goldsmith is the world authority in helping successful leaders get even better. Sam Shriver is the executive vice president at The Center for Leadership Studies. Email Marshall and Sam.