



Marketing Messages

MARY CHARLESON

Principles important to successful marketing strategy

Your company's values, what you stand for and what your people believe in are crucial to your competitive success. But are your company values reflected in your marketing strategy? You've likely addressed the 4P's of product, price, place and promotion, but what about the 5th P, that of PRINCIPLES? In a world of fallen business icons, both employees and customers harbour distrust. Customers are seeking comfort and connection. Employees want their workplace to be a reflection of who they are. Where there is conflict, poor communication or a lack of leadership with principles, it reflects outwardly to customers. Leading companies have leveraged their position in the marketplace by capitalizing on their values in their marketing strategy. The key is, they must be authentic.

Ann Coombs, President of Coombs Consulting Ltd., and author of *The Living Workplace*, believes there are a few CEO's and visionaries who succeed in putting values and soul into the workplace. "These individuals understand human behaviour, maintain a position of overall corporate well-being and balance the integrity of employees with the need to make profits", she says. Coombs Consulting, founded in 1980, studies consumer trends, provides strategies and conducts think tank and change management programs. Ann has become increasingly disturbed at the prevalence of what she calls the 'toxic workplace'. "A toxic corporation is focused exclusively on short-term productivity and profits without equal concern for the hearts and souls of its workers", she explains. "As we enter the 21st century, we are carrying an attitude towards an employee as a disposable replaceable tool rather than a human being with soul, spirit and heart". She believes the toxic environment is becoming the standard rather than the exception. It is with the publication of her book, *The Living Workplace* (www.livingworkplace.com), her international speaking engagements and consulting practice on this very topic that she has truly found her own passion and purpose. She has worked with local companies Envision Credit Union, the Pan Pacific Hotel and Rocky Mountaineer Railtours all whom she considers to have made putting values in the workplace a priority.

Envision Credit Union, Canada's 3rd largest credit union with branches throughout the Lower Mainland, and the Fraser Valley was ranked among the 50 best companies to work for in Canada by **The Globe and Mail's ROB Magazine**. The results were based on evaluations by staff on things such as leadership, value of staff opinions, career development and employee benefits. **Gord Huston, CEO** notes, "this is an affirmation that we believe in people first". A philosophy of exceptional member service, a desirable work environment and commitment to community involvement is at the foundation of their success. Employees participate regularly in community events sponsored by Envision and the company supports many local and regional non-profit organizations. They contribute over 1/2 million dollars a year to communities in which they operate. Clearly, there is marketing leverage in their positioning. They have aligned stakeholder interests with company interests. They strive for leadership with integrity. They are focused on customer's interests. They value employees as team members, and they are part of their community. This positioning has value because it is authentic. Notes Gord Huston, CEO, "It was interesting to see bottom line CEO's open up about their values during a recent Coombs ideas lab for our board. We are flexible and adaptable towards innovation and value input from our people. I expect one new idea will net us \$2 million/year". Wow. Now that's getting value from your values!

Kimberly Locicero, Director of Innovation, at the **Pan Pacific Hotel** had Ann Coombs work with her leadership team. "The travel industry has faced so many external challenges such as Sars and terrorism, that we realized our staff was under a lot of pressure. We did not want our core values to become threatened and reflect outwardly to customers. Keeping an inward focus on our principles has become an extension of our outward marketing strategy. We practice 6 core values: caring, respecting, and empowering our people, uplifting communities, achieving business excellence and balancing local and global markets. Ann helped us open up and communicate our concerns, so we could truly practice our values", Kimberly notes.

Rocky Mountaineer Railtours, founded in 1990, is the largest privately owned passenger rail service in North America. They feature daylight rail tours of scenic BC and Alberta from April to October with seasonal departures in December and January. With 70,000 guests per year they are one of the top rail trips in the world. **Graham Gilly, VP Marketing** notes they offer a truly international product with 85% of guests coming from outside Canada. "Our vision is to provide the most spectacular experience in the world, to guests, employees, suppliers and partners", says Graham. They analyze consumer data from the 30,000 comment cards received annually and know that 98% of guests felt their expectations had been met or exceeded. They recognize that consistent staff structure and training is the key to delivering superior guest services. "We aspire to be a preferred place to work and structure our environment and values to attract and retain the best employees", notes Graham. The 95% return rate on seasonal positions gives them consistency and continuity and is a testament to their success at putting values and soul in their workplace.

Ann Coombs says that what sets these companies apart from others in their pursuit of success is the authenticity and intent in incorporating values in the workplace. They also strive to keep their business models and marketing strategies open to adaptability and flexibility.

Are authentic values and principles worth pursuing in business? You betcha. Can they be leveraged to position you well in the marketplace? Absolutely. Putting the "P" for principles in your marketing strategy will benefit your business, your staff and your customers. Plus, it's simply the right thing to do.

Mary Charleson, MBA is president of Charleson Communications, a company specializing in market research, strategy and advertising development. She writes monthly and can be reached at mary@charleson.ca