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The whole bunch of carrots: what is an employee value proposition?

Posted by Dr Anton Franckeiss in [Strategies](#), [Recruitment](#), [Managing people](#), [Pay & benefits](#) on Wed, 02/12/2009 - 15:55

A strong 'EVP' is about delivering on both employment and psychological contracts
Metaphorically, it's one carrot - or even better, a whole bunch

A strong EVP can enhance employee engagement, attract the right new talent, and improve your external company image, but building it takes time and care



Dr Anton Franckeiss explains Employment Value Proposition, how to strengthen yours and why you should always keep your promises.

An Employment Value Proposition (EVP) defines what an employee receives from their employer in return for the effort and performance they give. In a nutshell, the EVP is the 'what's in it for me?' as far as the employee is concerned. Metaphorically, it's one carrot - or even better, a whole bunch.

Organisations that become known as great places to work develop a strong 'employer brand': former, current and potential employees all know and rate the organisation for its employment practices, career opportunities and the overall employee experience.

Organisations with well-developed employer brands have strong EVPs, communicated in both actions and behaviours, that give current and prospective employees emotive benefits ('feel good factors') about working for them and rational benefits ('this is an organisation that cares about my career development'). A strong EVP is about delivering on both employment and psychological contracts - demonstrating commitment to employees to gain theirs in return.

But don't confuse your EVP with your company brand. Your EVP's target audience is not the people who might buy your products or services; it's the people you employ - or want to employ in the future. It's not just about recruitment (although that's obviously important) - an excellent recruitment process that promises much will be quickly undermined by a

working reality that fails to live up to the initial charm.

There are two important caveats: firstly make sure that your actions and behaviours – especially in recruitment – really do travel in parallel with your words. Your EVP reflects the image you want to portray to the recruitment market, your promise to people with no exposure to the reality of working for you. Don't say you take every opportunity to nurture employees and then send obviously standard email responses – or none at all – or conduct interviews to a boilerplate template.

The second caveat is also about 'reputation'. Just as you will discuss candidates and use social networks to find them, they will talk about you (especially when they find you more wanting than wanted): word-of-mouth is now digital, global and instant. Your EVP is the reputation you aspire to have – and your actions, behaviours, company policies, procedures, customs and practices are what maintain (or destroy) it.

Strengthening your EVP

A strong EVP can enhance employee engagement, attract the right new talent, and improve your external company image, but building it takes time and care.

1. Don't assume you know your real SPs and USPs – ask the people who work for you, and allow them to speak freely. Use 'neutral' facilitators if necessary: the point is not to punish or be flattered, but to learn – what your staff really appreciate about working for you may not be what you think
2. Accept that you cannot be all things to all people – develop a signature EVP that attracts those who will thrive in your company and fit well with (and strengthen) its culture
3. Start from where you are – don't throw out your values, mission and vision: build on them and align your EVP to them
4. Involve key stakeholders – just as existing staff can help you define your EVP, HR and senior management have a vital role in promoting – and demonstrating – it internally and externally as consistently as possible.

Defining your EVP starts in closely observing and experiencing employee life. Supported with traditional qualitative and quantitative research (desk research, focus groups, interviews and surveys across the business – analysed against employee life cycle, and exploring variations across divisions and staff levels), this will identify aspects of organisational culture, policy, practice and custom that employees value – and flag areas where attitudes and satisfaction levels could be improved.

Working with the senior management team and representative cross-sections of employees, HR can develop recommendations that build on existing values. These can then be refined through workshops with staff from across the organisation to distil them into key messages. Remember that EVPs are not just about 'hard' perks like health cover or gym membership. Effective, supportive and enjoyable working relationships are one of the pleasures of working, and employees – now that the era of the 'job for life' has passed – are increasingly looking for attractive working cultures and valuing elements such as commitment to protecting work/life balance and providing opportunities for learning and development.

Now you can communicate the working experience to employees and potential recruits. Review your recruitment literature and campaigns to ensure that the USPs of your EVP are clearly communicated, and describe it unambiguously. Some organisational cultures are formal, some bohemian, some value teamwork, while others place high value on individual working and performance – the contrasts are as varied as there are employers. But these are aspects that, communicated clearly, will enable potential applicants to self-select and to identify their potential match to your organisation far more effectively than simple role descriptions and salary ranges. Recruitment is about building an organisation, not just finding key talents: your staff must work together effectively, and within your culture rather

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than against its grain.

Who owns the EVP?

If an EVP is to have the best chance of becoming truly integrated with all the policies, practices and communications across the business, its development must involve a representative cross-section of stakeholders. While ownership of EVP development and communication should start with HR, it is especially important to have the senior management team, marketing, internal and external communications on board from the start.

Your EVP must be aligned with existing organisational and brand values. Having an EVP that sits in opposition to existing values with which employees, customers and suppliers are already familiar can only lead to confused brand perception. To be authentic, however, it is not just the organisational values that you need to align with your employer brand and EVP: it must be reflected in all HR policies and practices. Remember, an EVP is a promise: the point about promises is to keep them.

Dr Anton Franckeiss is Practice Director at ASK.

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EVP is merely a sub-set of the Brand Proposition

It's a very 20th C construct to see employee propositions as a matter of carrots – but employees are as sophisticated as your customers (strange as it may seem) and implicit in that particular 'contract' psychologically is the fact there is a (hidden) stick in the proposition. In fact, it is even worse (or stupid) to pretend that the employee won't get that implication. And therefore, that says a lot about the Belief System of that company and it's brand (whether you choose to link them or not). i.e. that approach seeks to manipulate or control the behaviour of its employees – rather than empower or entrust them to deliver the brand proposition on the same wave length and belief system as the customer. So, it's retrogressive thinking – not progressive. Ultimately, the EVP is merely a sub-set of the Brand Proposition – not a separate thing. Evidence of that is that many corporations espouse various aspects about their brand (and/or EVP) but the reality of the experience of working in that environment / culture does not live up to hype. Take the example of the guy who got fired from CNN for having a Blog – but yet the EVP states they are an empowered knowledge organisation.....what's that going to do for the brand? In all these matters authenticity is what prevails – and you can't fake that.

Posted by [ebaltnative](#) on Thu, 03/12/2009 - 17:27

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Steaming carrots?

You seem to have got very steamed up about carrots – a very C21st, healthy way of consuming them, but metaphors don't make a complete balanced diet. You also seem to have grasped line 4, but not some of the later points. We'd agree entirely that authenticity is what matters: if there's a gaping chasm between the rhetoric of the employee experience and the reality, it's not just the rhetoric that the company needs to change.

Looking at your other post here at HR Zone, we're also not sure that manipulation has entirely fallen from favour. We appreciate Seth Godin is an established figure, and that 'brand tribalism' is a topic du jour, but a linked website that starts with "An organisational and management model designed to help leaders intervene and shape ..." makes us wonder if the 'manufacturing consent' approach (is having read Chomsky too old hat? are we showing our age?) is lingering rather longer in life than some people would have us think. Isn't wanting me to feel like I belong to a 'tribe' a little patronising too? As you say, customers are also sophisticated: we all live on a diet of mediated messages and modern PR. Just because I choose, say, a certain MP3 player with iconic white headphones doesn't mean I'm deliberately joining a tribe: I might have chosen it for its functionality, quality or ergonomics. I might be aware of its 'imagery', but I could be being ironic about that: others may congratulate themselves on recruiting me to their kind/cause/tribe, while I actually feel no such thing. (Is it the buyers that want to magic the 'tribe' into being, or the company?) As employees, people consume the EVP/Brand - and they're sophisticated enough to 'fake it' or deploy irony too. Empowering and entrusting are powerful factors in any organisation, but we suspect there's less of both of them about than some people's marketing might encourage – or want - us to think. (Yes, some organisations *do* run on pure creativity, but they're usually small ones, no matter how dynamic. Even Apple and Amazon have armies of 'drones' stacking shelves and driving forklifts, although they don't often appear in the advertising.) By the time an organisation is large enough to have an HR function, it has an infrastructure that is focused in parts on things other than positioning the company as 'funky' or 'tribal' – and we get the impression most employees understand that too. Business is still business, regardless of its wardrobe choices, and few employees will lose sight of the traditional stick at first glimpse of the Emperor's New Carrots. Empowering and entrusting us – letting us have a say in how the carrots get served up, if you like - are no more 'magic bullets' than anything else: it's the sum of the employee experience that matters.

Posted by [dontcompromise](#) on Thu, 10/12/2009 - 11:01

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