



Team Member Marketing

by Evan Mills

Pat Kirwan is a former NFL executive and an analyst for both Sirius NFL Radio and NFL.com, in addition to being the co-author of the popular novel, *Take Your Eye Off the Ball: How to Watch Football by Knowing Where to Look*. But even after years of success, he maintains a down-to-earth, approachable demeanor that solidifies himself as a favorite with fans, players and coaches alike.

Kirwan's bestselling book points out that millions of NFL viewers naturally focus on the obvious (i.e., the ball). But for an even greater appreciation of this complex sport, understanding personnel matchups, countless configurations and ever-evolving strategies takes looking a little deeper than most casual observers.

Similarly, a great deal of focus and millions upon millions are spent by countless industry professionals on one prevalent piece of the puzzle, external marketing. One more guest. One more trip. One more way to give away the same old monthly \$100k or two. However, a grossly disproportionate amount of time, energy and money is spent on growing another vital aspect (a.k.a. the abilities, knowledge and advocacy of team members).

But, if for no other reason, justification for investing more into the three back-of-house categories mentioned above can be made in financial terms alone. For example, Abilities: New Voice Media reports that U.S. companies lose an estimated \$62 billion due to poor guest service annually. Knowledge: American Express reports that the key to a positive service experience relied on a company representative's knowledge or resourcefulness 62% of the time. Advocacy: MSL Group reports that brand messages reached 561% further when shared by staff versus messages just sent via official social channels for the brand. Collectively: Temkin Group reports that even a "moderate increase in the guest experience" generates an average of \$823 million over three years for a company with \$1 billion in annual revenues, an increase of over 27% per year.

In essence, strategic investment into this atypical area can bolster front-of-house profitability, much like external marketing. However, since the first two desired team member traits could relate to the quality of an organization's hiring and training processes as well, let's shift focus to a few specific methods to help increase internal advocacy:

Metrics - If not measured by the organization already, generating an annual survey to gauge internal sentiment and increases year-over-year is an important first step. If staff is feeling overworked and underpaid, void of recognition and opportunity to advance, proactively addressing their concerns over time sets the stage for future success. Thankfully, both the survey and the process itself can be fairly simple. However,

shifting historical practices takes a conscious decision to embrace the data as reality and change course, which is often a challenge for those comfortable maintaining the status quo.

Tools/Support/Environment - Author Jack Canfield (*Chicken Soup for the Soul*) noted statistics from a management study stating that under-appreciation accounts for 46% of people leaving a company; bosses don't place importance in them as people 61% of the time; and an astounding 88% aren't even acknowledged for their work. So if turnover is prevalent within a company, major factors could include management's inability to deliver the key factors needed to ensure retention and the company's understanding of the related costs to help justify the additional emphasis.

Communication - Another opportunity at most organizations is increasing the depth and frequency of disseminated information. Knowing what's going on, and most importantly the "why" behind it, indicates the company recognizes the value of inclusion. In addition, building internal advocacy often requires opening avenues for two-way communication such as encouraging pre-shift huddles and regular solicitation of feedback. Doing so can create an even stronger bond between team member and their employer, particularly when their insights are acted upon.

Clarity - In human resource terms, there is often a disconnect between organizational goals, job descriptions designed to help reach them, and management maintaining firm but fair accountability. Typically, problems occur when major duties are set aside for day-to-day needs, lines begin to blur and staff begins stepping on each other's toes. With increased clarity, problems magically diminish over time and accomplishments are realized much sooner. However, maintaining both accountability and motivation pays dividends, if these often elusive skills are continually developed – and then, applied liberally.

As Kirwan suggests, there's a lot more going on beyond the obvious that deserves our attention. And for anyone looking to build a dynasty, the four brief examples mentioned above require much more than just casual observation but continuous study, engagement, and above all, caring to truly reach their full potential. But thankfully, it's also in the organization's best interest to expand "marketing" into new, untapped areas back-of-house to reap even larger rewards. ♣

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