

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

EARNING THE RIGHT TO LEAD THE MANAGEMENT

Within PepsiCo for many years there were two—and only two—overarching practices demanded, without exception, of its marketers: exhibiting Thought Leadership and Personal Leadership. Without both of these constantly at work, everyone knew that neither the exceedingly high business growth rates nor the (commonly expected) speed of one’s career advancement would happen. Brand Managers were well aware of the specific kinds of strategic and tactical thinking, as well as the management behaviors that fell underneath these two demands. They also knew each would be examined regularly by their management and quite rigorously at annual personnel review time.

Honestly, we don’t know if these two practices are as highly valued and demanded at PepsiCo today as they were a good while ago. But one thing we do know is that, across the many industries and product categories we have worked, we have almost never heard our marketer-clients say that their management demands the same of them. To be blunt, it’s long been our considered opinion that, within most marketing organizations today, there is an absence of leadership...very little to no *expectation of leadership* from its Marketing Function by the company’s senior management. Having both been brought up in a company where in brand management you either led or were “led out” rather quickly, this non-expectation baffles us. But then we recalled the most fundamental of leadership principles: an organization, a function, even a person has to *earn* the right to lead.

We’ve found no better expression of earning this right than in a memo written by Chuck Leppe in 1980 at Procter & Gamble. At the time Chuck was Ad Manager of the Paper Division, a somewhat misleading title because he was actually the equivalent of Brand Management VP. Subsequently he became a senior executive within P&G. For this week’s DISPATCHES (and we earnestly hope for genuine insight and inspiration), we would like to present some excerpts from Chuck’s memo, entitled “Leading the Management”...as follows:

“I think we have an opportunity to provide our Brand Managers with better perspective on their responsibilities for leading Management—as well as leading their Brand, Agency, and staff groups.

While we are accustomed to thinking of Brand Managers leading our Agency and staff groups, we may overlook the opportunities we all have for leading and influencing Corporate Management thinking as to appropriate direction for an individual brand's activities. If we fail to take advantage of this opportunity, we will inevitably incur difficulties in two areas:

--First, if Management does not sense strong, well-directed leadership of the Brand, they are inclined to fill this void by providing that leadership themselves. This is an unfortunate situation because, regardless of their experience and perspective, Company Management simply does not have the detailed facts and understanding of the business which we associate with the Brand Manager—and are thus at a disadvantage in their capacity to fulfill this role. Also, this leads to a loss of initiative within the Brand Group itself, which is detrimental to the development and job satisfaction of our people.

--Separately, we can't realistically expect prompt understanding of our proposals if we don't provide a clear sense of direction as a framework for Management's thinking. Effective leadership provides both a sense of momentum and direction which greatly facilitates Management's understanding as to how each of our proposals fits into the broad scheme of things.

If we are to effectively lead Management, I believe we have to pay particular attention to three areas:

- 1. Establishing the Right to Lead**—The right to lead any group cannot be granted, delegated, or assigned. Rather, we must all **earn** our right to lead through demonstrating the kind of proficiency in our jobs that commands the respect of others and instills sufficient confidence to follow.

Within the above context, our Brand Managers must earn the right to lead the Management by clearly demonstrating their technical proficiency, knowledge of the business, and sound, principled approach toward proprietorship. Our Brand Managers must be thoroughly versed in every aspect of the brand, as though their weekly paycheck would vary according to the efficiency of their Agency, Manufacturing, Buying Departments—all of those groups that impact on their brand's profitability.

Their knowledge of the business should be unsurpassed, and they should be "one step ahead" of others less knowledgeable in terms of thinking and direction. They should feel as if they have control of the brand and are willing to assume appropriate risks to ensure its long-term vitality. It is these qualities, combined with fundamental leadership skills, which represent **the source of power in the Brand Manager's job.**

2. **Establishing Credibility**—Beyond our basic skills and proficiency, we must establish our credibility by ensuring that our proposals are thorough, precise, and objective. We must recognize the risks along with the potential for success—and share equally for Management’s consideration.
3. **Establishing a Continuing Line of Communication**—We must make Management a partner in our business, just as we do the Agency, the Sales Department, and our staff groups. In addition to providing functional support and advice, Management can provide valuable counsel born of long practical experience and unusual breadth of exposure to different and complex business situations.

If we are to fully tap this resource, we must keep Management advised of our direction and learning—whether it be encouraging or disappointing—on a continuing basis. This ensures that they have a continuing grasp as to the flow of our business and are able to participate in establishing longer-term directions. We should also stringently avoid “surprises”—whether they be successes or failures.

Net, we as managers must continually work toward earning our right to lead, while also reinforcing our credibility with those around us.”

Rereading Chuck’s words, now nearly 40 years later, we are struck by the timelessness of his fundamental advice: Earning the right to lead—a brand or anything for that matter—remains an on-going effort. It’s primary “parts” are twofold: (1) demonstrating again and again a superior proficiency in knowledge and thinking about the business; and (2) using that along with sound interpersonal skills to instill everyone’s confidence to follow. Not exactly the same words, but you know, pretty darn close to Thought Leadership and Personal Leadership!

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