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# How leaders can make or break a rebrand.

# Leadership and rebranding.

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Before we begin the rebranding process with a company, one of the first questions we ask is how leadership feels about it. Does the CEO believe the company is approaching a pivotal moment? Do they believe in using strategic rebranding to signal change? And, what will be their level of engagement throughout the process?

Without a doubt, leaders are the driver of change in an organization. If the CEO does not fully buy into the belief that corporate strategy and brand strategy need to align to propel your company to the future you desire, even the most brilliant rebrand will fall short. The following pages explore five risks of rebranding when leaders are not 100% invested in the work.

# Risk #1

## Watered-down vision and growing internal confusion.

**By failing to express your vision and show employees how they help you move toward it, CEOs risk their brand equity and possibly negatively impact employee retention.**

Whenever there is change occurring within a company, whether due to an acquisition, a shift in product offering or any other number reason, a leader's overall vision should be reaffirmed or evolved to guide the new direction. It's not uncommon for a CEO to believe they have a clear vision and assume their management team and employees know and understand it — only to find out later they don't. All too often what's in their head isn't relayed in a way that is meaningful to other members of management let alone the entire group of employees.

Each leader influences the vision of the company, regardless of how deliberate they are with their plans for the future. Even when a CEO has been with a company for several years prior to a rebrand, it's important that they express their vision with intention and invite dialogue to bring a layer of clarity to the organization well before a pivotal moment triggers a rebrand.

If leaders assume employees know their vision and do not communicate and express it with their management teams, in annual meetings or during other natural opportunities, they risk much more than confusion. Without a clear direction forward, employees are more likely to create their own version of the vision, possibly lose faith in management and lose energy in helping the organization achieve its goals. It's human nature to want to believe in something and know the value you provide to achieve something much bigger than yourself. Over time if employees do not have a clear picture of what success looks like in their work environment, they are more likely to leave the organization.

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## Risk #2

# Failing to correct the behaviors that are holding the company back.

**When leaders don't fully buy into the process for an effective rebrand, they miss the opportunity to see and hear the real values, challenges and opportunities of the company.**

When done well, the rebranding process brings clarity to the practices and behaviors that have potentially affected internal culture or that could prevent the company from realizing leadership's vision. These most often come to the surface when we explore rewarded behaviors, conduct one-on-one interviews and spend time with a client's Mars Team. As a refresher, your Mars Team consists of employees from across the company who understand your why, are considered influential among their peers and who can speak honestly about your brand, organizations as a whole and the direction they feel it needs to go. Simply put, this is the team of people you would send if you choose to open a location on Mars.

Most often values—which we describe as being the rewarded behaviors of an organization—are considered something holding a company back. The reason being is that the values posted on your office walls are not the values you reward. Employees want to believe in leadership and want to understand their place in the company. However, if they feel what leadership says and does are two different things, they're less likely to give as much in terms of time, effort and attitude. Transparency and action are critical in transforming employees into advocates for your brand.

While culture is often front and center to this area of the rebranding process, we have also identified structural hindrances in facilities, procedural weaknesses and other challenges that may not be easy for leaders to see or even hear. However, addressing these head-on is critical to successfully pivot from where you are to where you want to be.

When leaders don't fully buy into the process for an effective rebrand, they miss the opportunity to see and hear the real values, challenges and opportunities of the company. When this happens, they risk losing the ability to change behaviors and practices in a way that supports the new direction of the brand. One of the easiest ways leaders can approach behavioral change is to bring in an outside facilitator to ask questions, encourage collaboration and help guide the organization to the vision and brand it desires.

## Risk #3

# Losing employees as brand ambassadors.

**When leaders and management teams fail to understand how critical building internal brand ambassadors are, the risk of diminishing the brand and internal culture grows substantially.**

Whether intentional or not, leaders often become the face of the company. This is another reason it's so important to express your vision clearly and through action. Not only are customers and potential customers watching, so are employees. Most have an inherent desire to add value to the organization through their work and ideas. They want to feel proud about their place of employment and want to tell their friends and family about it, too.

Branding begins inside your organization and can be a powerful tool for strengthening your connection with your team, transforming them from employees to brand ambassadors. In this role they influence internal culture and external perception. By helping them feel informed and part of the bigger vision for the company, steering the organization in the right direction becomes easier.

When leaders and management teams fail to understand how critical building internal brand ambassadors are, the risk of diminishing the brand and internal culture grows substantially. This is especially true when you're approaching a pivotal moment. Careful consideration on how the process itself might affect employees is necessary, and inviting them to participate—even if only for a brand survey—can help keep them feeling positive about leadership, the future and their role in it. Without engaging employees, leaders risk losing their loyalty and positive reinforcement of the brand and company as a whole.

## Risk #4

# Limiting your brand to the status quo.

**Pivotal moments are an opportunity for leaders to plant a new flag, one that is bolder and more clear in its message.**

When we guide businesses through a rebrand, we often use the phrase: zig while all the others are zagging. What this really means is that pivotal moments are opportunities to put any personal ego aside and be courageous enough to move away from the status quo.

Through the rebranding process, our strategists walk leaders and their teams through personal bias, assumed perceptions and even ego. Through collaborative exercises we help everyone in the room become more vulnerable and honest about the change that's occurring as well as their hope for the future. It can be difficult for leaders to let down their guard and actively listen and consider thoughts, feelings and opinions from others in the room. But it's vital to moving forward.

Similarly, many of these conversations are around identifying what truly makes a company unique. We uncover the "safe" answers, which often feel good but carry very little in terms of meaningful differentiation. Digging deeper, teams often realize they want to veer away from the status quo but are hesitant to dive in and make meaningful change. Status quo is the equivalent to not rocking the boat, however that also means not being noticed. Pivotal moments are an opportunity for leaders to plant a new flag, one that is bolder and more clear in its message. And in a world lacking truly different options, there's never been a better time to zig. Doing so takes a certain level of humility and guts; not doing so creates the risk of rebranding without signaling meaningful change.

## Risk #5

# Not investing enough to successfully rebrand.

**Rebranding is an investment in solidifying the future you want for your business. It takes intention, a willingness to embrace the change occurring in your business or industry and a commitment to invest in both time and communications to nurture your new brand.**

Rebranding is an investment in solidifying the future you want for your business. It takes intention, a willingness to embrace the change occurring in your business or industry and a commitment to invest in both time and communications to nurture your new brand. Those leaders who are not fully engaged in the rebranding process early on are also the most likely to limit the budget to effectively introduce and build consistency around your new identity.

Funding to support a rebrand begins with internal communications. Employees need to see and feel the new brand, whether that's through a new tee shirt, new signage or a combination of tactics. Along with physical expressions, they also need to hear the reason for the new brand and how it impacts them. This is often done through a company-wide meeting, smaller sessions with department managers or even a celebratory event where spouses and partners are included.

Extending the brand rollout to your customers, suppliers and other partners should be considered next. This is often more of an investment in time to make sure these relationships are nurtured appropriately.

Finally, all other touchpoints should be identified and woven into a strategic plan to build consistency and help establish the new brand in the hearts and minds of existing and prospective customers throughout your market. Rebranding is a marathon, not a sprint and the budget needs to reflect this. Trimming or limiting the investment across any of these audiences or key touchpoints creates a risk of watering down the new brand before it has a chance to thrive.

## One of the biggest challenges companies face during pivotal moments is leadership buy-in.

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The CEO and all layers of management need to believe in the change that's occurring and be open to collaborating with team members from across the organization. Without verbal or written support, physical engagement or participation in revealing the new brand, it becomes nearly impossible for new brands to endure.

Are you considering rebranding? Use the following questions to gain clarity around whether or not you, as the leader, are ready to embrace change:

1. Is there enough inertia for this? You're going for cultural renewal and changing the conversation about your brand. Is everyone warmed up to this idea? They need to be.
2. Have you organized a Mars Team, or guiding group, to take this on?
3. Have you created the conditions where everyone can do their most courageous thinking — together?
4. Does everyone understand the process and the level of commitment and perseverance this is going to take?
5. Do you have the right balance of leadership and management on board?





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