



SEROKA

Brand Development | Strategic Communications

Building a Compelling Employer Brand in the Manufacturing Industry



**A Whitepaper for Small to
Medium Size Manufacturers**

seroka.com



Introduction

“Scott, building a strong employer brand sounds great, but we’re doing everything under the sun just to find a warm body to show up on time, pass a drug test and do a decent job. We have guys in their late 60’s who we’re trying to hang on to for just a little while longer before they retire because these kids coming in have a lousy work ethic and they’ll leave for a job in a second that pays a dollar an hour more. How does an employer brand fix that?”

This was a question I received at my workshop on *How to Attract Top Talent With a Strong Employer Brand* in early, 2018.

This level of frustration is felt throughout the manufacturing industry, especially in those lower-population areas (e.g. Sparta, WI) where talent is especially scarce, or where smaller manufacturers find themselves competing with much larger manufacturers offering better compensation packages and stability. Yet, there are those rare manufacturers that seem to be a magnet for the better people with skilled trades, such as welders, electricians, truck drivers, machinists, equipment operators, etc., and their strategy for attracting higher-quality people to their companies from a seemingly dry well of talent is no secret.

The good news for you is that it doesn’t matter how soft, blurry or confusing your employer brand is today. In this whitepaper, you will be presented with thoughts, ideas, and insights to consider to build an employer brand for your company that will give you the edge you need to attract more qualified people to your company.



Providing clarity to what an employer brand really is

For the purpose of this whitepaper, I will need to provide you with two unique definitions of employer brand:

1. ***Thoughts that come to mind when job candidates hear or see the name of your company, including your reputation, experiences they may have had, and any perceptions of your culture.*** This definition is true of *all* employer brands – good and bad. I often say to everyone that they have a brand, both corporately and personally, whether they choose to think about it or not. *Your* employer brand, as it stands today, is a product of how you conduct yourself, make decisions, treat your employees, your customers, and the values you and your company live by. Your employer brand is not something that can be deleted from the minds of your employees and job candidates. Whatever your employer brand is today is what it is. However, it is up to you if you wish to take control of it and turn it into my second definition of employer brand, which is...
2. ***A compelling set of distinctions your company owns that make a positive and noteworthy difference in the lives of its employees.*** The focus of this whitepaper will be on elevating your employer brand to this status.

I often say to everyone that they have a brand, both corporately and personally, whether they choose to think about it or not.



Do you need to build a stronger employer brand for your company?

Here's an easy and quick way to find out. If your company suffers from one or more of the following maladies, the need to build a stronger employer brand for your company is urgent.

1. Losing good people to other manufacturers offering slightly better pay/benefits
2. Unable to find strong employment candidates
3. You're unable to answer the question, *Why should the good people want to work for my company instead of for other manufacturers offering similar pay and benefits?*
4. Your talent pool is bone dry
5. Lack of a compelling employer value proposition

Ask yourself, *Why specifically should top-performers want to work for me?*



Discovering your employer value propositions

Let me state for the record that “unique” employer value propositions are overrated.

For far too long, CEOs and HR professionals have placed much emphasis on defining their “unique” employer value proposition, believing that if they don’t own one, they couldn’t attract high quality people. However, in today’s environment, owning a unique employee value proposition (*having no like or equal; unparalleled; incomparable*) is only *one of many components* required to attract high-quality people to your company.

In other words, if you don’t have a “unique” employer value proposition, don’t sweat it. Direct your attention to other things that will have a significant impact on your ability to find and retain good people, such as:

1. Grouping together your top three or four employer value propositions (which others may also claim) and focus on how you can enhance each to the point where they *far exceed employee expectations*. This will require some creative thinking, brainstorming and even speaking with some of your employees to fuel ideas.
2. Building a culture where people love to come to work every day inspired to perform at their best. Delivering exceptional service to your beloved customers require it. If you’re interested in building a continuous improvement and top-performance culture at your company, [contact us](#).
3. Strongly consider leadership training for yourself, and others who hold leadership titles. Great employees require and deserve good leadership. You’ve likely heard the phrase, *Employees join companies, but they leave people*.
4. Knowing what your employees want and giving it to them. If you’re not sure, a simple survey will provide you with great ideas.

**Build a
culture
where
people love
to come to
work every
day.**



Don't confuse employer value propositions with minimum employee expectations

When a company is unable to identify or define a compelling employee value proposition, the leadership team typically resorts to (*ahem*, settles for) making employment brand claims that are soft, irrelevant, or do little more than meet minimum employee expectations. After quite a few years of reviewing ads and career/job pages on websites, I have compiled a list of the most frequently used statements and employer brand claims (marketing messages) that do little, if anything to attract the interest of good employment candidates.

1. Competitive pay and benefits package
2. We have a great culture
3. We have great people on our team
4. We are a growing company
5. Conveniently located...
6. Opportunities for advancement

Employees have seen these messages so many times that they go unnoticed. If your company is touting any of the above as a value proposition, I encourage you to create stronger ones. Yes, it can be done. Keep reading...

Don't settle for a soft employer value proposition.



When defining your employer value propositions, focus on what employees value the most

For manufacturers to win the war on talent acquisition, CEOs and HR professionals must make a radical change in their focus. Many of the top six statements and claims previously mentioned are mostly meaningless simply because most employers make nearly identical claims, and they are nothing more than minimum employee expectations. Top-level employees want and *need* more, such as:

1. Training
2. Being rewarded and recognized for a job well done
3. Goals to shoot for
4. Strong leadership
5. Safety
6. Knowing how their contribution improves the lives of end-users
7. Flexible schedules
8. Ongoing feedback/communication
9. To know what they are doing and why they are doing it
10. Being treated with respect and dignity by senior-level leaders, no matter what their title
11. Being treated importantly and fairly, even if their role is small, mundane, or one that nearly anyone could fill
12. Being heard in respect to ideas on improvements, leadership, culture, etc.
13. To be understood
14. Honesty and transparency



Steps to a successful employer brand development initiative

1. Internal brand and culture audit: Ask your employees what their perception is of your brand and gain insights into the health of your culture. You'll be amazed at what your employees will tell you if you ask them.
2. Competitive research: As the topic of employer branding continues to heat up, more manufacturers struggling to find quality people are creating and/or expanding sections on their websites speaking directly to future employment candidates and promoting their employer value propositions. Yes, most of them are the larger employers, but smaller employers are fighting the good fight with promoting employer value propositions of their own. You'll want to know who they are and what they are doing to attract the people *you* need.
3. Employer brand discovery: This is the phase where you will need to unearth, or create your employer value proposition(s). The meeting is ideally led by a trained facilitator and it *must* include CEO participation along with that of his/her leadership team. Remember – you need an employer value proposition that is factual, achievable, and compelling enough for the best candidates in the industry to become interested in you. (At Seroka, we have two certified facilitators with deep experience in the manufacturing industry who could lead the discovery process to a strong and compelling conclusion.)
4. Validation: Once you unearth your employer value proposition(s), consider presenting it to a handful and mixture of your current top-performers for their thoughts. You'll be amazed by the dialogue you will have with them. After all, don't you want to clone them, anyway?
5. Brand guidelines manual: Once your employer brand has been defined, get to work on creating a manual for how you will source candidates, onboard them, train them, and indoctrinate them into your brand.



6. Employer brand rollout: With a new employer brand, you've likely (hopefully) raised the watermark on performance, expectations, and the minimum requirements of the type of candidate you will search for and hire. When you present the new brand to your current employees, they will need to know the following:
- a. Why you embarked on an employer branding mission
 - b. What you discovered from the internal brand and culture audit
 - c. What the new employer brand is
 - d. Positive changes that will take place
 - e. Your new vision as a result of adopting a stronger employer brand
 - f. New expectations *AND REWARDS* for performance

**Make sure your
employees know what
is expected of them
and what the rewards
will be for
performance.**



Don't forget about your culture

So now that you've unboxed your new employer brand, what's next?

Well, this is where things get interesting.

During your employer brand discovery phase, I hope you claimed employer value propositions that you are able to deliver upon very well, one-hundred percent of the time, even on your worst day. Whatever employer value propositions you are promoting to attract higher-caliber job candidates, you must be able to deliver on them at a level that far exceeds employee expectations.

For example, if one of your value propositions is "caring about our employees as much as our most profitable customer" and some of your managers seem distant, autocratic, or are rarely available, employees will think the entire message you made, as the CEO was nothing more than a ploy.

Culture is best defined as *the process by which employees are indoctrinated into the brand and how they are inspired to give their best.*

Culture requires a shift in how everything at your company is viewed by you and your employees. Going back to my example of "caring about our employees as much as our most profitable customer," whenever a manager "touches" an employee through any conversation or interaction, that employee must feel as if s/he is treated as a member of the family.

And one more thought about culture: Culture has *nothing* to do with what people call the "touchy-feely stuff" like Pizza Fridays or ping-pong tables. These are perks. Rather, culture is very strategic, deliberate and carefully thought out to ensure the right people are trained the proper way to deliver the brand effectively, supported with leadership that facilitates, encourages and rewards desired behaviors.

Culture: The process by which employees are indoctrinated into the brand and how they are inspired to give their best.

If you would like to learn more about building a strong employer brand and culture to attract high-quality candidates, [contact us](#) today!



About the Author: *Scott Seroka is Wisconsin's only Certified Brand Strategist and a Principal of Seroka, a brand development and strategic communications firm with deep experience in the manufacturing industry.*

scott@seroka.com
414-628-4547