



How Australia Post Used Storytelling To Engage Employees

There are a variety of ways to introduce storytelling into your company and the best approach depends on what you want to achieve. Over the past two years I have worked extensively with Australia Post to introduce storytelling. Their approach was unique because they did not start with senior leaders but rather influential people, regardless of hierarchy, from across the organisation. This method of introducing storytelling into an organisation produced impressive results.

In 2015, due to significant changes in their business, Australia Post went through rebranding which included a new set of company values. Lauren Trethowan, Head of Enterprise Culture, established an engagement program to help everyone understand and connect with the new values.

In her previous roles at PwC, Lauren had experienced many large-scale organisational changes with varying degrees of success. So she had an idea of what worked and didn't work; however, this was bigger than anything she had managed before.

The idea behind the engagement program was to tap into a group of influential people in the organisation who would be critical in driving the

desired mind-set and behavioural change. This was an opportunity to explore their company culture, embed their new values and capture powerful stories about their people.

The five Australia Post values to be communicated were:

1. Being safe everywhere
2. Respecting everyone
3. Helping each other
4. Improving every day
5. Delighting our customers

The process

Lauren explained that, 'we needed not only the program to positively impact the people attending, but also for them to go back to their teams and positively impact the people around them. Allowing the natural process of what happens in a grapevine to occur.'

A two-day program was designed and delivered with a broad cross-section of Australia Post employees. It was called the Grapevine to acknowledge that the most powerful communication medium any company has is their own internal grapevine ...every employee is part of it, every single day. Colin Pidd, global partner and managing director at Conversant, and myself, facilitated the Grapevine events.

The chief customer officer at Australia Post, Christine Corbett, and Bob Black, Executive

General Manager Parcel & eCommerce Services, became the sponsors of the Grapevine program and committed to playing an active role in the sessions.

The two days were designed to help employees understand the significant change the company was going through. They were given time to explore their own reactions to the changes and to ask direct questions to senior executives and selected customers.

Personal stories about the company values were to be developed and shared at the event. Time was provided to create an action plan around potential questions team members would be asked post event, how they would respond and the corresponding stories they could share to create a positive ripple effect throughout the organisation. These personal stories were not only shared on the day but were also either video or audio recorded and shared on internal communication platforms throughout Australia Post.

The Grapevine program was piloted in August 2015, with resounding success. An additional 10 sessions were run across four states within Australia in 2016.

Participants were surveyed at the start of the two-day Grapevine session and then at the end. One statement they were asked was, 'I can confidently explain our Group values'. Prior to the session 50% of the participants agreed, whereas after the 2 days a resounding 97% agreed.

In addition, a recent enterprise-wide employee engagement survey compared how Australia

Post employees who had and had not attended the Grapevine session felt about the organisation and its values. Some of the results highlighted were:

1. Overall, employee engagement was 13 percent higher for those who had attended a Grapevine session.
2. Being proud of the organisation's purpose was 19 percent higher for Grapevine participants.
3. Connection to the organisation's values was 13 percent higher for Grapevine participants.
4. Overall engagement was higher in teams where at least one person had attended a Grapevine session. This showed that people were going back to their place of work and sharing what they'd learnt, which was one of the key outcomes of the program.

Due to the success, storytelling training has also been delivered to senior leaders across the organisation and additional Grapevine sessions in other sites are continuing in 2017. To date the program has been delivered to over 1200 employees.

As evidenced by Australia Post, storytelling can have a positive impact on employee engagement. This can be achieved by training senior leaders and other key influencers in storytelling as well as actively finding stories and then sharing them via your formal communication channels, including newsletters and websites or informal channels such as your own grapevine.



Gabrielle Dolan

Gabrielle Dolan is a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business storytelling. She has worked with thousands of high-profile leaders around the world, helping them to become better leaders and communicators using the art of business storytelling.

Gabrielle co-founded One Thousand & One, one of Australia's leading storytelling companies before launching her practice in 2013. She is the best selling author of Ignite: Real Leadership, Real Talk, Real Results, and other publications. Her newest book Gabrielle Dolan in an international speaker and trainer on business storytelling. Her latest book, Stories for Work: The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling is available online or in book stores. Find her at gabrielledolan.com.