

Preserving your employer brand in uncertain times

 By [Celeste Sirin](#)

6 Apr 2020

The global uncertainty of the unknown presently resides within all of us and especially those HR leaders who are grappling with managing the mental and financial well-being of their employees, while continuing business as best as they can. With no playbook or compass to navigate through these uncharted waters, leaders are innovating and learning as they go along.



Employer branding specialist Celeste Sirin

We are being swamped with a glut of mixed communications, ranging from free webinar invitations to opinion pieces on how to juggle remote working, along with mixed news messaging making it extremely difficult to filter what's true or not. This has an enormous impact on how companies are managing the perception and communication of their employer brands and in how they are being viewed.

Employer brands never sleep and, if anything, they are now in the spotlight! Employees, the potential talent market and even consumers are watching what action companies are taking to manage and accommodate their most valued resources through this pandemic. Effective communication is key both internally and externally and the glue that will preserve employer brands from not fragmenting! HR is front and central within this crisis. Companies that are taking deliberate action in constantly communicating, interacting and engaging with their remote workforce are doing this successfully.



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Teamwork essential

As I place an optimistic lens over our current situation, I highlight that now, more than ever before, HR and employer branding leaders cannot be held solely responsible for their people driving business continuity whilst still preserving their employer brand. Teamwork is essential through HR leaders leveraging off critical partners within their companies i.e., internal communications, corporate marketing and communications, training and development, transformation officers, IT

and the like. This being said, I have distilled what I believe to be the most fundamental priorities to which leaders should be paying attention:

1. With monitoring virtual teams, regular, concise, clear and constructive communication is of the utmost importance to building trust and sustaining employee morale. HR leaders must utilise their internal communications partners to assist with the often confusing government and media communications, translating it appropriately to employees as to how it will affect them personally whilst simultaneously keeping them updated 24/7 regarding applicable daily health and safety news.
2. Operational managers on the forefront are often the employee's first point of contact. For them to support HR adequately, they need to receive ongoing up-to-date workplace policy changes, an understanding of what support is available for their employees and be properly trained to communicate this effectively into their teams. Leaders don't like to communicate if they don't have answers, thus HR's partnership, guidance and training will assist them in fostering a positive employee experience.
3. Conducting weekly update meetings through platforms like Zoom, Teams, WebEx is a given, especially when it involves global offices. Communicating best practice and facts on how the organisation is managing operations in light of the crisis is essential with utmost transparency and clarity on how deliverables are being met.
4. Proactive delivery of answers to employees' questions regarding their health, wellness and financial disposition, without them having to search for such information around the pandemic, will earn employee brand credibility and loyalty.
5. Leaders need to establish a routine and cadence when setting up meetings, with assurance to sticking to mission critical issues, actions plans, deliverables and dates.
6. Ongoing internal employee feedback should be welcomed and real-time pulse surveys scheduled and conducted more regularly now. Proactively assessing the "heartbeat of the company" will be the guide to you quickly overcoming any crisis.



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7. Gather an understanding of preferential channels of communications that work and test whether its conducive to working in times like this. Video usage where employees are able to see and hear their leaders seems to be trumping emails and intranet, although what needs to be communicated will be the deciding factor.
8. To boost morale, change behaviours and maintain team collaboration, set up virtual coffee sessions, sun-downer virtual gatherings or fun quiz competitions. Humanise it by including kids, pets, etc., as many people miss the actual face-to-face connection through physical distancing. [Spotify](#) confirms what they are doing to define themselves as company.
9. There is no rule book and you might not have all the answers as witnessed with [Edcon](#). Leaders need to be transparent, authentic and brutally honest when communicating with their employees. Leaders will gain far more support and understanding from employees.
10. [Research](#) highlights the global cost-cutting initiatives companies are taking in efforts to maintain business stability; without haemorrhaging layoffs of their workforce (evident in big brands such as [Macy's](#) and Gap) through:
 - Requesting employees to take an unpaid leave of absence being the most common measure companies are pursuing. Re-frame the stigma attached to unpaid leave through positively referring to it as a "sabbatical";
 - Revising compensation structure and delaying increments (salary-increase freezes, halting bonus, bans on overtime, pausing payments into retirement funds);
 - Encouraging employees to seek part-time jobs to supplement their income;
 - Implementing short work weeks to save costs;
 - Leveraging training opportunities with the realisation that our new world at work is going to require new job roles;
 - Identifying and optimising on eager talent that are ready to step into new job roles and/projects;

- Creating a time bank where employees are paid for working less hours now, but in agreement that these hours will be utilised in the future;
- Many executives and senior management across the [globe](#) have announced they are taking partial or full pay cuts and/or wage freezes in order to relocate cash-flow to those most impacted and to sustain layoffs from happening. Here in [South Africa](#) there are mixed sentiments towards whether this is in fact the right thing to do and whether it will boost morale; and
- Seeking [government support/funds](#).



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Future of work

Covid-19 has accelerated how the new world of work will look in the future. We need to realise that we will not be going back to our normal working environments. This will fundamentally shift how companies position their employer brands and value propositions as they look towards the future in attracting a different set of roles and skills (which we are already witnessing via [Glassdoor](#)), revising their workplace environment to engage/interact quite differently to what was, and endeavour to retain employees that have remained loyal to their employers during these extraordinary times!

ABOUT CELESTE SIRIN

Celeste Sirin is an employer branding specialist, speaker, facilitator and founder of Employer Branding Africa which aims to develop employer branding best practice in South Africa by educating South African leaders. She is a leading authority in positioning and elevating employer brands for companies, offering extensive insight into local, African and international employer branding trends.

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