Five Critical Success Factors

When implementing storytelling into an organisation

Over the last 15 years I have been working with a variety of organisations to help them introduce storytelling into their business. Along the way, I have seen some spectacular successes and a few failures. This experience has led me to understand the 5 critical success factors to introduce storytelling successfully into business.

Attach storytelling to a current business issue:

Bring in storytelling for a specific purpose, such as to communicate a new strategy, cultural change or new organisational values. Whilst storytelling can be introduced as part of a general leadership development program, it can achieve better results when attached to a current business need.

For example, Bupa introduced storytelling to bring their company values alive and Australia Post are currently driving cultural change through storytelling.

Provide business storytelling training

Storytelling in business is a skill. Just like any other skill you expect your employees to undertake, you need to provide effective training. Even though some people may be naturally better at storytelling than others, the right training will enable all employees to improve their skills.

The biggest mistake a company can make is to assume that storytelling is not difficult. To ensure success with storytelling, ideally the skilling should start with the senior leaders and cascade down to lower levels. Whilst order is not crucial, it is however important for the senior leaders to be skilled.

Role model storytelling from the top

It is critical for the most senior leaders to role model the successful use of business storytelling throughout the organisation. Once again, this reiterates the importance of ensuring the senior leaders are involved in the skilling process.

A few years ago I was asked to come in and train 40 senior leaders across an organisation but this did not include the CEO and the executive leadership team. My suggestion to train them fell on deaf ears as the executive leadership team and CEO felt they did not need the training, nor did they have the time. Consequently, this meant that the power of storytelling was not role modelled from the top down which resulted in reluctance from some employees to use their new storytelling skills.

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Train key support staff in storytelling

Besides training the leaders, the skilling should also include key support people like Corporate Affairs and Human Resources as well as other key influencers across the organisation. This allows them to support and encourage the use of storytelling throughout the organisation.

Many companies I work with provide additional training for these support people so they can take on the informal role as internal storytelling coaches. When the Nab trained their top 250 leaders in storytelling they also provided additional training for their Corporate Affairs specialists and Executive Managers.

Capture and share stories

This is about developing formal and informal strategies to capture stories throughout your organisation. The focus of the stories you gather should be around the values and behaviours you want to encourage.

Once stories are captured you then need to start to share stories. This includes sharing them with the leaders you have skilled so that they can start to use the stories in their day-to-day interactions with employees, customers, potential customers and other stakeholders. You can also share stories across your already established formal channels of communication, such as newsletters and websites. Additionally, it is important not to underestimate the power of the office grapevine as a useful informal communication channel.

Addressing these five critical success factors when implementing storytelling in your organisation will ensure you get the maximum return on your investment with both time and money.

If you would like to discuss how Gabrielle could help with introducing storytelling into your organisation please contact the office on +61 3 8383 2128 or enquire@gabrielledolan.com.

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