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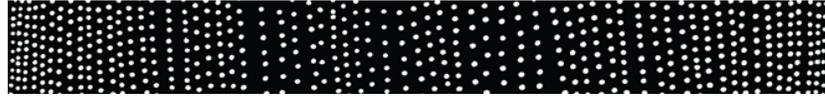
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Managing your nonprofit's employer brand



Michael Cummings is the principal of Tate/Cummings and helps associations and nonprofits with employer branding strategies. A frequent speaker, he

recently presented on the topic of volunteer management at the 2016 ASAE Annual Meeting & Expo in Salt Lake City. For more information on employer branding, help yourself to The Tate/Cummings 2015 Employer Branding Report.

The advance of technology and the emerging dominance of the Millennial generation in the workforce has forever changed workplace culture. What had once been confidential information—like salary or the content of a severance agreement—can now be made public in a matter of seconds on employer review sites such as Glassdoor, where job candidates are cross-referencing hiring managers' claims with reviews penned by former staffers.

Many nonprofit human resources professionals and hiring managers tell me that recruitment has never been more

challenging, that employer branding is beyond their reach —something only big companies and associations can afford—and that they do not know how to compete with employers that offer higher salaries and perks like remote work options and daycare. I tell hiring managers to focus on what they *can* offer their candidates—not on what they cannot.

To that end, employees increasingly cite workplace “authenticity” as a key factor in their positive assessment of an employer. But what does that even mean? The *Harvard Business Review* defines an “authentic organization” as a workplace where people can be—and are valued as—their best selves. In order to achieve authenticity, employers must foster environments where employees are appreciated for what they can do and given the opportunity to grow. Only then will they feel engaged and committed.



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Nonprofits offer a compelling alternative to for-profits, especially in the realm of authenticity. That built-in advantage is the opportunity for meaningful work, a message that resonates with many candidates. So how can you begin to use that message, and the work culture behind it, to determine, manage, and utilize an effective employer brand?

Ask your people what’s working—and what isn’t. You might be taking many of the best elements of working at your organization for

granted; on the other hand, you cannot fix something when you do not know what's broken. To truly assess your workplace, it helps to get some fresh input. Before determining an employer branding strategy and launching a campaign, you should consider conducting an employer brand perception audit. The audit may be as elementary as collecting and analyzing reviews of your organization from employer review sites, or as sophisticated as hiring a consultant to conduct customized research. Ultimately, the audit will identify the reasons people love working for your nonprofit, and the workplace issues you might need to improve.

Craft an Employee Value Proposition, using the results of your audit as building blocks. Include key messages that explain why candidates should aspire to work for your organization. How is your mission helping make the world a better place? Do you offer a meaningful mentoring program? Are you proud of your staff diversity initiatives? Does the structure of your organization mean that new hires will learn a lot—and quickly?

Reconsider the way you manage candidate relationships. What is the experience like for your job candidates? Are they treated well during the interview process? Offered a beverage on-site? Do they witness organizational clarity or disarray? Keep in mind that any one employee they meet with has the potential to derail a candidate's entire perception of your organization.

Train human resources staff in positive messaging. Too many times I watch nonprofit managers apologize to candidates for the appearance of the office, for the low salary, or for the lack of opportunities to advance from within. Instead, you must learn to lead with the positive. For the chance to perform meaningful or professionally strategic work, many candidates will do without the latest version of MS Office or even the most competitive pay package.

Be a part of the online conversation. Employer review sites like Glassdoor encourage employers to respond to reviews, but many employers fail to do so. Some feel that an official response validates a negative review; others prefer to pretend they simply don't exist. Fear and denial are not viable strategies, and employer review sites are only gaining more cachet. If you do not make your voice heard on these professional networking platforms, you send a signal to the talent community that all of the opinions expressed there—positive and negative—are accurate.

Determining an employer branding strategy—as well as managing it and measuring its impact—does not always come naturally, but talent recruitment and retention are far too important to leave to chance. Ultimately, if you're not managing the perception of your employer brand, a handful of former employees will likely be doing it for you.

By Michael Cummings

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