



» The Glass-Door Revolution

“Sunlight is the best disinfectant”. Louis D. Brandeis.

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Close your eyes, relax and reflect for a moment on the following scenario. Imagine your company boldly decides to focus on transparency as a way to structure and organize all its activities, a scenario in which transparency is your company’s new guiding light. Imagine it starts with small steps, like using the company’s website to describe its values and how they influence its conduct. Now imagine that, a bit later, your company decides to share information on important matters, such as statistics regarding workforce diversity. Imagine, a year later, your company is publicly sharing all its financial data in detail: the salaries it pays employees, its profits, information on the destination of every euro it earns, etc. It even shares news on the products and services still under development! Now imagine, internally, this policy is taken even further, with all email correspondence among employees visible to any member of the company.

This scenario may seem shocking—although in some ways desirable—and may too often be considered futuristic. The truth is, this is a real company, and its name is Buffer.¹ Transparency is one of the

most powerful strategies that can be deployed by companies,² political parties or institutions, allowing them to build support among those on whom their futures depend, whether this means a vote, shopping decision or recommendation. This is because transparency is one of the most direct paths to trust,³ which is an essential and indispensable component for any company that wishes to stay in business.

This becomes crucially important when we consider companies’ need for talent. It is key to attract talented professionals, get them to commit to your company and turn them into your best allies (in the best case scenarios, former employees will continue to speak highly of your company).

In order to better picture the scenario described above, let us consider the other side of the coin and engage in a brief memory exercise. Consider how, not too long ago, concepts such as internal communications, employer branding and transparency were defined and interrelated. Internal communications was a private and protected space for sharing issues that were not to go beyond the confines of the company under any circumstances. Employer brand management often failed to consider a company’s internal reality, resulting in a predictable discrepancy between what talented professionals expected to find and what they actually experienced once employed. To conclude, it should be noted that transparency was managed as any other individual element with an inherently distinctive reputational value. In other words: internal communications could not be shared outside the company, the value proposition to potential employees externally did not coincide with the companies’ internal reality and, when used, transparency was only applied to inconsequential issues with no strategic



¹ <https://buffer.com/transparency>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2018/04/16/why-you-should-be-radically-transparent-with-your-customers/#5b2ad1ee7aef>

³ <https://www.inc.com/adam-fridman/why-trust-and-transparency-are-crucial-to-purpose-.html>

importance. It might seem that, to a certain extent, the parties responsible for those circumstances were doing their absolute best to block their companies' progress. It was important to maintain a healthy distance between these worlds to avoid any kind of problem.

For better or worse, it is now impossible to continue facing these challenges the same way. The advent of globalization and digitalization changed how we deal with issues and how distinctions are made between what is necessary and what is contingent on decisionmakers' opinions.

Today, talented professionals are not readily willing to accept the fact that companies reflect a multifaceted image with internal inconsistencies (in the best cases), or (in the worst) differences that are deliberately contradictory and irreconcilable.

One of the clearest examples of what skilled professionals' need to know about the place they are going to work at is seen in the title of this text and its reference to a glass-door revolution.⁴ Historically, companies have protected themselves in relation to aspects such as their culture, values, ways of doing things, innovation processes, etc. Today, however, the most prestigious organizations—and those most often targeted for employment by top professionals—use openness and transparency as one of their most powerful marketing tools. Google does not only sell “what it does.” The aspirational aura of everything around it has more to do with “why does it do it?” “how does it do it?” and “who does it?” College students who consistently target this company for their career seem not to care if they end up working on Gmail or Maps. What truly fascinates them is the realization they could be part of a brilliant, non-conformist community working to shape the world's future.⁵

People are always talking about Google, but what does it take for other types of companies to walk the path that goes from “transparency as a necessary evil” to “transparency as one of the most valuable resources in our corporate DNA for attracting and retaining talent?”

There is no simple answer to this question, but here are three observations related to some of the best-known examples of transparent companies.

“Transparency should not be viewed as a means of achieving something or a goal. It should simply be part of a company's”

1. It is not a question of demonstrating transparency or acting transparently, but of being transparent. Transparency should not be viewed as a means of achieving something or a goal. It should simply be part of a company's way of doing things despite the obvious benefits to be gained in different contexts, especially regarding talent, which is the case at hand. It seems that the best approach is to adopt new transparency practices gradually and highlight them

afterward, rather than embrace transparency as an intangible concept and take concrete action after the fact.

2. Transparency is an indispensable tool for managing communications around two of the most critical aspects for attracting and retaining talent: integrity and diversity. Companies need not concern themselves with projecting an image of perfection. Obviously, nothing in this world is perfect and, accordingly, projecting such an image would only seem insincere. The general public will only see transparency as authentic if the company shares its pros and cons and demonstrates an ongoing desire to surpass its limits and improve itself.
3. Furthermore, there are considerable business benefits to be gained when transparency becomes an integral part of day-to-day life and is perceived as the way that the company works. Regarding this, it is worth looking at Buffer's values,⁶ as they clearly reflect this idea. When transparency is rewarded rather than punished, innovation is more efficient, services are more closely focused on customers, corporate culture is better shared across teams and the workplace in general becomes more rewarding for everyone involved in the company. Transparency allows companies to be more successful throughout their range of activities.

WHERE SHOULD ONE START USING TRANSPARENCY AS A TOOL FOR ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT?

1. Walk the talk. It is important to start with small steps essential to your way of doing things. One of the most interesting ways to get started on

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/employees-rate-their-employers-ceos-on-glassdoor-1.1314945>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/10/26/five-things-millennial-workers-want-more-than-a-fat-paycheck/#79d4a2b315a7>

⁶ <https://open.buffer.com/buffer-values/>

the path to transparency (and attract talent) is to launch an employee-advocacy program, which consists of empowering a company's professionals, turning them into its best allies via social networks. Such initiatives are organized programs in which employees are given the capacity, tools and content they need to make this task as easy and accurate as possible. Making these professionals into the ones sharing information on what is happening in the company solves several employer branding problems, such as credibility (an employee always inspires more trust than a company) and authenticity (the demeanor of someone sharing their experience is more fresh and natural than the one a company might have). Internally, collaborative intelligence processes—in which companies rely on talent to engage in plural, open, sincere and constructive discussion on important topics—are another very interesting resource that underpins a company's transparency.

2. Embrace the situation and explore daring new approaches. For example, L'Oréal encouraged its employees to visit Glassdoo⁷ (a well-known website where current and former employees can freely express their opinions about companies), and it was soon observed that most of the posts were from former employees—who do not usually have the most favorable opinions. Another interesting option is letting employees express their opinions on the company's most important talent-related assets. One way to do this involves the company's careers page, where you can make employees the narrators of the stories that appear there. Alternately, you could offer young talent visibility into the company via your LinkedIn profile. Instagram can even be used to share brief but memorable moments in a typical day, giving prospective talent a desire to work there.

Beginning to use transparent communications to attract and retain talent is a process that, on first impression, may seem daunting. It is therefore key to take this process step by step and remember that transparency is not a question of nakedness, but of voluntary and coherent integrity.

⁷ <https://linkhumans.com/alexander-onish-loreal/>



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