
Leadership from the perspective of cool

A few months back I came to an interesting realization about what makes leaders different and why they transcend others in their category.

It all has to do with their ability to interest the disinterested. That is, instead of focusing all their efforts on trying to compete with others just like them, market leaders make themselves busy trying to innovate new concepts, march to the beat of a different drum, and look for new ideas that might be useful and attractive to their audiences. Ideas that say (whether spoken or not): "If you try this... if you do this with me... things will be different than they are now."

Think about that for a moment: "If you try my product/service, things won't be like they are now. They'll be a lot cooler."

How cool a concept is that, folks? "If you do what I suggest, it'll be cool."

I decided to test out my theory by looking at some of the brands that I'd put in the market leadership category to see if it plays out.

I recently became the owner of a new Lexus. Nice car, right?

But just what about it is so great?

What makes a Lexus cool? Is it because my friends will envy me... or is it something else?

The coolness factor

For most of my day, things are pretty much blah, blah, blah. I do my job. I make some phone calls. I write a bit. I eat lunch. I come home, eat dinner and maybe read or watch a little TV.

No big whoop. But... for those few minutes when I'm driving in my dream car, when I'm surrounded by luxury... I'm transported to somewhere else... to somewhere that's really cool.

For 23 hours and 15 minutes, things are just so-so. But when I go into Starbucks for my

decaf skim latte... and I'm surrounded by those aromas and rich colors and funky graphics... I'm transported to somewhere else... to somewhere that's really cool.

The things that surround me... that I take for granted? Well, I just take them for granted. But give me a little, cigarette lighter device that stores 1000 songs and has an incredible sound... I'm fixated on it and transported to somewhere else... to somewhere that's really cool.

Whenever I use something, or do something, or buy something that breaks the mold and delivers me to somewhere different than where I am, I'm transported... to somewhere that makes me feel good... to somewhere that makes me smile... to somewhere that's really cool.

So how does this cool stuff wash when it comes to non-luxury stuff -- like serious business to business transactions? Does the coolness factor hold up?

Well, coolness sure does play a BIG role in B2B commerce.

Maybe even more than it does in the consumer products land.

A buyer of goods and services in the B2B world is often spending someone else's money. Sometimes a great deal of it. The purchases she makes can often affect the future of the company -- or, if she makes the wrong decision, maybe even her job.

There's a need to feel that she did the best thing and got the very best value.

So here's where the coolness factor comes in.

Vendors and goods that represent the best quality, attention to detail, passion, service, and a commitment to creating the best possible value are almost always the safest choice.

They're the ones that offer surety, confidence, satisfaction and happiness. And, by extension, isn't that really a promise that says: "If you use my product/service, things will be better than they are now"?

With that assurance, the purchase, the transaction, and the experience are delightful... and really cool.

Are you delivering the experience of cool?

Is a unique, delightful, and cool experience a promise that you can make?

If not -- and you're just the same as everyone else -- to them you're just a blah. And that makes you uncool and replaceable.

Think about what you can do to make a difference in the lives of your customers. What can you do to transform your company, your products, and your industry so that you can genuinely deliver on the promise of, "If you try this... if you do this with me... things will be different (better) than they are now"?

Six action steps to coolness

You can't make yourself cool. You can only create something that they might think is cool. If so, their perceptions can change and make you really cool... and a lot more successful.

Here are some steps you can take towards achieving that goal:

1. Change your focus to the long-term acquisition and retention of customers. Make a commitment to finding some unique way of finding a solution that can meet a real need. You can't do this by imitating someone else, or improving on someone else's idea. You do it by studying the market and what it can use.
2. Understand as much as you can about your ideal customer. If you're already in business, that's usually the one who sought out your services -- who called you in the first place... and keeps on coming back. Ask him why he first selected you and why he keeps coming back, who else he talked to and who and what he admires. (This will give you hint as to where the coolness factor might reside.)
3. Brainstorm and explore new ideas that might suit that particular type of customer. Narrow your list to a few and sleep on them.
4. When ready, build a prototype model and show it to the ideal customer for feedback. When he says, "that's cool," take it as a hint that you might be on to something.
5. Try a test of your new concept. Build it and take it to market. Keep improving it and perfecting it so it's the best that it can possibly be.
6. Start telling people how their lives will be different if they try what you're offering and make sure you can deliver on that promise.

You'll start to become really cool... and you'll be on your way to real leadership.

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