

# Corporate impression: What rides on individual behaviour



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**H**ave you ever thought that you might be the only person that someone from your organization ever meets? Thinking about this might bring the sobering reality home that each member of staff has the direct power to create a lasting impact—good or bad!

In an era where corporate-speak is endlessly dotted with references to ROI (Return on Investment), it is surprising that scant attention is paid to what employees say about their organization—or even less to putting them in a position to say the right thing. Like it or not, careless talk will cost money if a bad impression sours the prospects of potential business.

Perhaps it is because this is not an identifiable—or worse, quantifiable—concept that dealing with this issue at executive level is such a hard sell.

Rather than prattle on, perhaps a simple industry example will illustrate what I mean. Some years back a senior HR person of one of the largest North American media producer/distributors smugly informed me that his organization had little time for concepts such as loyalty, corporate depth and the like. He added that he was in the business of “purchasing competencies”.

These could always be replaced as his corporate budget and standing would always attract the best candidate: “I will just purchase more competencies if anyone leaves”. And “Yes, this does reflect our corporate culture”.

I was livid. Here was a responsible representative of a major organization brazenly telling me that employees were expendable commodities!

Being an emotional type, I needed to talk about this... and did. I dined out on the story for years.

This week, however, I received a call from another senior HR person at the same company, following up on a character reference for a new hire. What a different story. She took great pains to lay the context of the potential career path, describing how her organization wanted to be sure they could accommodate fully the candidate’s excellence, hoping that his potential commitment would be a long term and happy prospect. She invested more than an hour of her time making sure the exercise was efficiently completed.

Wow. Was this the same organization?

As it turns out, my fury, what I think or thought or even said about the behemoth company, is hardly of great consequence. In other cases, however, it might well be the opposite.

The point is that opinions are formed in a second and are not that easily undone. Noticing what is going on around

one is part of everyday life. We form and reform opinions about people and circumstances without cease. Many times the conscious part of the process is shut down by people who do not want to be considered *judgmental*—as ridiculous a notion as not excising one of the five senses.

Noticing detail and formulating opinion is normal... keeping an open and flexible mind to adjust opinion/judgment is a skill that needs to be practised.

This is a subjective process and depends entirely on individual experience, learning and level of involvement. All utterances, behaviour, change in procedure, altered appearance, new habits, spending patterns, associations, etc. will all be noticed as something different from the normal or usual pattern—a discordant note or red warning flag.

Once a pattern emerges perception fast becomes reality. The individual role of noticing events, behaviour and developments related to the operation of any given organization will rarely appear in a job description, yet this vital function may be what leads to a policy or decision that will potentially engender success, prevent financial collapse and save jobs. Like it or not, what we notice affects what we think and what we do.

It is hardly necessary to add at this point that dismissed employees, for whatever reason, are hardly likely to openly assume any responsibility for their demise. If asked why you were let go/downsized/retrrenched/made redundant, would you not in some form point an accusing finger at the organization? Would not the same story heard from different sources send up a red flag?

Rules, penalties and threats cannot produce loyalty. An engaged work force, proud of their organization will, for the most part, be fiercely protective of their employer. From CEO to janitor, an awareness of this vital role will, by default, result in a culture of belonging that will sustain business success.