

Leading by Moral Compass in the Digital Age

By **Isabelle St-Jean**

KNOWING YOUR TRUE NORTH HAS NEVER HAD TRUER VALUE than now.

At a time when social media is blurring personal and professional boundaries, the need for accountability, best practices and organizational alignment on all levels becomes imperative. In this day and age, that alignment needs to include not only those visionary managers and thought-leaders at the top, but the wider forum of the organization, including our virtual teams—some of whom might not even ‘yet’ work for the company.

Building Better Brands

Such inner/outer alignment lies at the core of branding, something most companies pay careful attention to as they seek to project consistency throughout their corporate image and reputation. However, with social media’s pervasive presence, branding is now more complex and more difficult to control. As we have seen with some large multinational companies, branding often serves as a veneer over a dysfunctional core. When such is the case, branding strategies defeat their purpose—exponentially so in a world of quick response social media.

Alternatively, when true alignment grows and evolves as part of a broad, solid foundation of people who work together with a shared purpose, values and a solid moral compass, the organization is more likely to endure, succeed, and retain its people. Social media takes the pulse on such companies and reflects their worth with dynamics of integrity being naturally validated, supported and encouraged.

The Appeal of Opinion

While most large companies have traditionally been striving to remain politically neutral to avoid alienating potential or existing customers, since the last U.S. election the world has become

pervasively more polarized. As a result, while some companies choose to express their views with political correctness, others take more definitive stands to greater effect.

Whether this is Nordstrom’s announcing it would no longer carry Ivanka Trump’s brand for ‘business reasons,’ or popular restaurants promoting boldly named drinks mocking particular politicians, social media has gained renown for its polarizing, and often times, non-politically-correct appeal.

For bold companies daring to communicate where they stand politically, social media is ever-present and convenient. After all, standing for meaningful core values such as transparency or diversity inevitably places one on the political landscape whether we choose it consciously or not.

“...seeing it,
owning it,
solving it
and
doing it.”

Innovation vs. Productivity

As Josh Bersin of Bersin by Deloitte stated emphatically at the recent HR Conference + Tradeshow, the gap between technological sophistication and business productivity continues to increase. He also pointed out that the three prior industrial revolutions brought about a 20 per cent rise in productivity each time. This does not hold true, Bersin noted, with the fourth digital revolution we are now experiencing which shows almost no signs of productivity increase. In this light, perhaps it is not surprising that nearly 70 per cent of companies do not yet have social media policies, according to Aliah D. Wright in *Necessary Evil: Managing Employee Activity of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the Hundreds of Other Social Media Sites*.

As Bersin pointed out, innovation and speed of learning are what currently define successful companies. We can certainly appreciate that social media can support innovation as it circulates stimulating, new ideas which may spark a whole new product line or service.

On the other hand, most companies are trying to catch up to the speed of technological development, and employees are struggling to keep up with the volume and pace of emails and work-related social media exchanges. Given that staying on top of the workload is increasingly difficult, it is essential that managers and their teams set best practices and clear parameters of ethics and accountability. Especially when more teams are scattered across the globe, a practical code of accountability can help to maintain cohesion and generate more alignment across outputs of productivity and communications.

Accountability Key to Moral Compass

This is echoed in the business classic, *The Oz Principle*, recently updated by Roger Connors and Thomas Smith, in which they identify accountability as the underestimated, yet powerful, key to bright futures in companies. Indeed, the journey towards accountability, when undertaken proactively and with awareness, will yield the courage, wisdom, heart and means to achieve unprecedented levels of success.

In the *Oz Principle*, the authors explain that by rising above the blame game and the victim mentality traps, we can embrace new levels of accountability by breaking it down in four essential steps: seeing it, owning it, solving it and doing it.

“Seeing it” reveals the full and bare reality of a challenging situation. By then “owning it,” we take on responsibility for our contribution to this reality. Thirdly, as the first two steps are generating new perspectives, “solving it” can be achieved with

these fresh insights in mind. Lastly, “doing it” is all about the roll out and sustenance of the actions required to follow through on the solutions identified. These steps can also be woven into best practices to be applied to proper use of social technology—and the problems that may arise even within the boundaries of good usage.

Fuelling Further Drive

Not only is accountability a matter of attitude and mindset, its practical application can be both inspirational and tangibly results-driven. Typically, when we know that our performance is measured—as when we strive to reach team-driven goals—we are likely to reach better results. Tying social media usage to those goals, fuelled by the same mindset, can be a powerful driver in the emerging economy.

As Wright pointed out in her book, *Necessary Evil*, 76 per cent of companies that embrace social media grow faster than those who do not. By taking charge, as managers and HR professionals, and ensuring that social media use is grounded by a shared moral compass, we can only expand the horizon of business profitability. **D**

Professional speaker, author and business coach, Isabelle St-Jean, RSW, PCC brings to her clients two decades of experience in leading, educating and providing practical solutions to major work/life challenges and transitions. (inspiredmomentum.com)



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