



What Was Unilever Thinking?

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The PR Disaster that resulted when Unilever decided to run a Dove Soap ad on its U.S. Facebook page last Friday, that showed a black woman turning white, could have been avoided with better leadership.



It's that simple!

No more discussion or debate needed. It was a lack of leadership that led to this kind of tone deaf flub on the part of the company.

Here are some thoughts on the matter:

The senior leadership team was not aligned and was not hands-on:

Alignment of group or organizational form and function with the strategic plan is essential to successful, long-term execution. The cheetah is considered one of the fastest animals on the planet. From body composition to bone structure, these elegant animals are built for speed! You want your organization to be organized and aligned to achieve its best performance, as well. While rushing to get an ad out on Facebook may be a goal of the marketing department, not vetting its content properly hurt the brand and the rest of Unilever!

That said, even when an organization is aligned, the leaders must still lead. Their involvement and guidance helps to avoid situations like the one experienced at Unilever.

Silos exist that prohibited proper vetting:

Group or organizational silos must be broken down to reduce bottlenecks and enable efficient operations. The silo mentality encourages individual unit performance and optimization. Winning groups and organizations recognize that work must be designed to flow seamlessly throughout the entity. Replace silos with cross-functional teaming for the best results.

If the social media unit doesn't pass their work through the PR department, more messaging mistakes are likely.

Designing workflow to be performed as a "whole job" enables breakthrough performance. This principle enables business processes to flow through an entity unfettered by existing organizational designs and reporting structures. The "right" people are involved at the "right" time to get things done "right" the first time.

Staff was ill prepared to make the "right" choices:

Training and education of staff is critical to extending their capabilities and sets the stage for breakthrough performance. Clearly, the creative people responsible for producing the ad were not properly trained to recognize the social and societal implications of what they were publishing.

Training team leaders to manage to outcomes, rather than tasks, facilitates the sharing of responsibilities among staff and promotes creative teaming. This philosophy is liberating for your front-line staff and it goes a long way to establishing collaboration and other supporting elements that are integral to creating an outstanding culture. Clearly, not enough trained people were involved for this fiasco to have been averted.

I hope that these ideas, as derived from my latest book, help you to avoid making the same kind of mistake that the Unilever leadership team just made. Contact me if you'd like to bounce around some ideas for how to bring these ideas to life in your business.

