

Cognitive Dissonance: Why Social Sharing Creates Employee Advocates

"It is contrary to etiquette to yawn in the presence of a king," the monarch told him. "I forbid you to do so."

"I can't help it," replied the little prince, thoroughly embarrassed. "I have come on a long journey, and I haven't slept..."

"Ah, then," the king said, "I order you to yawn."

Le Petit Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupery [translation by yours truly, hopefully it's correct]



Le Petit Prince

Coined by a young American social psychologist in 1956, cognitive dissonance refers to the psychological state that occurs when someone holds two conflicting cognitions (ie ideas, beliefs, emotions) at the same time. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that holding two conflicting cognitions is frustrating and motivates people to reduce the conflict through rationalization.

In this post, I'm going to quickly explain how social media and cognitive dissonance can have a positive impact on employee morale and engagement at your company.

If you've ever been to a football game and seen a bunch of freezing, half-naked guys covered in paint and cheering for your favorite team, you have experienced the positive side effects of cognitive dissonance. Sitting in the cold, covered in paint and waving homemade signs in the air, those guys have to make a choice: they can either be rowdy

die hard fans or a bunch of suckers covered in paint. Logic would suggest only die hard fans would dress up in paint, but this is where cognitive dissonance makes it interesting: if a regular fan dresses up like a die hard fan, his mind will try to rationalize himself into being a die hard fan to avoid being a poor, cold sucker sitting with a bunch of die hards.

Cognitive dissonance helps our brain draw connections between our feelings and our actions. **For companies, when employees share great news about their company, cognitive dissonance helps pave the way to loyalty and engagement:** publicly declaring your support and affiliation motivates you to back it up with real loyalty and engagement. It's loosely like telling yourself, "I can really do this," before trying to shoot a free throw.

The online equivalent of orange face paint and a Broncos jersey is your personal profile with posts about companies you love. Cognitive dissonance explains that just like wearing a Broncos jersey can help turn you into a bigger Denver fan, online posts about your company can help make you a bigger fan of your company.

Why does this matter to you? **Because it means employee sharing can influence your employees to love your company more.** In this one sweet corner of modern science we have an answer to the chicken and the egg question- and the answer is good for us! Whether an employee is a fan yet or not is not as important as whether that employee has started sharing about your company yet. When they start sharing, the ball starts rolling and they're on their way to loving your company more. **Cognitive dissonance explains that by advocating for a brand once, a person starts to think and act like a brand advocate all the time.**

How can you get your employees to start acting like brand ambassadors? Great question. Focus on the fundamentals: make it easy, motivate them ([more on the science of social business and motivation here](#)), and measure it so you can recognize brand advocacy. Pepsi discovered that over 50% of its employees already wanted to share news about Pepsi with their networks (more on that [here](#)).

Do you know how many of your colleagues are interested in sharing about your company? It's worth finding out.