

## The Journey – Revolutionizing Employment Brand to Transform Talent Strategy

A conversation with General Electric (GE) on how the company completely rebuilt their employment brand, and the transformational impact it had on talent acquisition, talent management, and the business overall.

## Company's across the globe have begun to realize that talent acquisition and talent management are about much more than simply filling open roles.

Candidates and employees are smarter than they've ever been while the amount of technology and mediums available today allows them to be more transparent in their experiences and open about their demands. In response, truly innovative organizations are adopting total talent strategy – focusing on the full employment journey, from pre-candidate experiences all the way through helping a long-time employee remain engaged, motivated and fulfilled.

Digital industrial company GE is one such entity.

Over the past five years, GE has revolutionized their employment brand by empowering both employees and candidates; by focusing on the needs of their people across more than 170 countries worldwide and making their mission – "imagination at work" – a reality. By giving their talent a voice, and truly listening, they've not only transformed their employment brand, talent strategy and marketing efforts, but have significantly impacted the GE business as a whole. In fact, in WilsonHCG's 2017 Fortune 500 Top 100 Employment Brands Report, GE outpaced all Fortune 500 peers to achieve the No. 1 overall ranking.

We recently sat down with GE's Shaunda Zilich, Global Employment Brand Leader, taking a deep dive into the company's history, employment brand efforts, the "perfect storm" that signified their need for change from traditional to disruptive, the importance of their unique 13,000 person "brand ambassador" alliance, and how the company has restored trust between the company, candidates, employees and business partners.

What worked? What didn't? How has GE leveraged their employment brand to "land the top talent on the market"? What steps can companies across all regions and industries take today to begin their own employment brand revolution? How do the successes (and failures) of Thomas Edison factor into the equation? The following discussion between WilsonHCG and Ms. Zilich answers these questions, among many others. Join the conversation!







The top 100 companies in WilsonHCG's 2017 Fortune 500 Employment Brands Report scored 225 percent better than the bottom 100 in corporate social responsibility, 171 percent better in career pages, 131 percent better in job boards, and 129 percent better in employee reviews and candidate experience – indicating some of the initiatives Fortune 500 leaders have undertaken to maximize their employment brands

- WILSONHCG 2017 FORTUNE 500 TOP 100 EMPLOYMENT BRANDS REPORT

Corporate Social Responsibility 225% Higher

Career Pages 171% Better

Job Boards 131% Better

Employee Reviews 129% Better

Candidate Experience 129% Better







#### **QUESTION & ANSWER ROAD MAP**

Click on any question to jump to that point in the conversation and begin your journey...

#### Q: When you began this Q: When you joined Q: What turning point GE, how would you within GE signaled brand transformation, describe the state where did you start? the need to evolve the **START** of the company's employment brand? What was your employment brand? budget? Q: How did you go about Q: What stage is your **Q:** How important was Q: Do you see your developing personas employment brand consumer brand and it for you to partner for the candidate currently in? How do with marketing when employment brand as profiles you were you see it continuing to revamping GE's a marriage of the two? evolve? seeking? employment brand? Q: What challenges Q: How are you Q: What can other Q: What is your best piece did GE face when of advice for those measuring the success organizations learn going through your from GE's employment looking to reinvent their of your employment employment brand brand? brand journey? employment brand? evolution?

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#### When you joined the GE team, how would you describe the state of the company's employment brand?

#### "LET'S FIGURE THIS OUT TOGETHER."

There are two different ways this can be answered. Internally, it was almost non-existent or, at the very least, we were unknown. GE knew there was an online "thing" called social media and that we could possibly recruit using it. GE initially hired me as a social media recruiter. So my approach was: let's figure this out together. That was five years ago. I didn't know what I was getting into, and neither did GE. But we both knew it would be a journey; a journey we're on together.

Externally, GE's employment brand and company brand is often misrepresented or misinterpreted. In the US, we're misunderstood to be about appliances and light bulbs. In reality, appliances used to be a small part of our business. We actually sold that part of our business just about a year and a half ago. GE has been on this journey over the past few years to become a digital industrial company. For software engineers, though, GE probably wouldn't be their first, top of mind company. We're getting better in that area, but we're still working on it.

Globally, GE isn't a household name. We're still, in some regions, educating people on what GE is and what we provide. It's not uncommon for us to get social media comments like "Hey, I just bought a car from you." And we have to say, "That's actually General Motors, not General Electric." So it's interesting because many people and businesses in

the US know who we are, but we have to remember that globally GE isn't yet a household or big brand name. We're gaining strength in a number of global regions, but when I walked in five years ago we knew there was a lot of work to be done in order to educate all markets on who we really are.

When you're an old company – we're 125 years old – and I think we've portrayed this with our "What's the Matter with Owen?" commercials, GE was always your grandad's company. It was hammer and nails, very much a manufacturing company, and conservative. And now it's a completely different culture. We're modernizing in a lot of different ways. We're becoming inclusive. Like I said, it's a journey because we're a huge company; there are a lot of pockets still stuck in certain traditional ways.

As we've begun this journey, for example, our benefits – we went to unlimited permissive time off a couple of years ago. We now have a lot of the characteristics of an innovative culture and brand. I wouldn't say just like a startup, because we're still the same company, but at the same time we're really trying to modernize the culture, the benefits. There is less policing, more empowering, and sometimes that's a hard thing to change when you're talking about employment brand and externally how you've been seen for over one hundred years.







### What turning point within GE signaled the need to evolve the employment brand?

## "WE NEED TO FACE REALITY, TRUST IS AT AN ALL TIME LOW NO MATTER WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT - WHETHER THAT'S TRUST IN OUR BRANDS, OUR COMPANIES, OUR COUNTRY, ACROSS THE GLOBE."

Specific to employment brand, there are a lot of companies out there today regardless of industry doing the same things. We're all becoming more digital. I just got done talking to the employment brand leader at a large retail corporation, and she's struggling with the same issues we are challenged by. We're in completely different industries, but they're also becoming more digital, more of an online store than a retail store and figuring out what that looks like as far as the talent they need to attract and retain. A lot of companies are going through a transformation right now. The need to become more digital, to catch up with today's demands has made the need to evolve our brand the perfect storm.

Marketing right now is about connecting with people's emotions. Marketing our employment brand needed to become person-to-person, about human relationships. We need to face reality, trust is at an all time low no matter what you're talking about — whether that's trust in our brands, our companies, our country, across the globe. Also, it's all really unknown. People want to know from other people what it's like to be part of a given company; people trust other people. The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer said that for the first time ever people trust their friends and peers just as much as they trust professional voices in the employment brand and talent acquisition space. Think about that, we often trust what comes across our Facebook feeds more than we trust a doctor or world leaders. We're asking our friends and family about stuff. Because of that, employment brand and telling stories through people is really important. It's not easy to create a fully trusted brand, and it's a journey for many companies today.

Business is distrusted in 46 percent of countries worldwide. Further, only 37 percent of the general population believe CEOs are credible.

- 2017 EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER







#### When you began this brand transformation, where did you start? What was your budget?

#### "WHEN I WALKED IN WE HAD A BUDGET OF ZERO."

In starting this adventure, none of us knew what we needed. We knew we needed something, but for any company you're not going to get budget until you prove this "something's" importance. You've got to make the business case. When I walked in we had a budget of zero, and so our efforts were very home grown, very organic. And honestly, looking back, I'm okay with that because it really made us dig deep into what we had and how we could maximize that. What we had was our people – we had 350,000 employees, and so we put together a brand ambassador training program at a cost of zero dollars. It was an hour long, voluntary training. We trained interested GE people on social media, how to brand themselves as both GE employees and individual professionals, which made it a win-win for them. We talked to them about telling their why, telling their story. We spent time on story telling and really getting into the "Why do I do what I do at GE? What is my core purpose, and how can I speak about that externally?"

It really resonated. We had and continue to have huge reach with this program. Today, we have over 13,000 people we've trained to become brand ambassadors for GE, and a lot of them are very active on social media. You're most passionate people speak about the company and, as we've discussed, that's where people are looking – their own friends and social media feeds, instead of a company's advertisement. Starting with a zero dollar budget really made us learn fast. We did research, research and more research on what mentions to use, what hashtags to use, how to make our social media channels grow, and what content resonates with people.

At times, we still in recruiting fall victim to the post and pray method. Across all companies and industries, we say we're long past that. But we're all still just pushing out jobs a lot of the time. What we found, jobs should really should be about 10 percent of all employment branding. The other 90 percent has to be telling your company's story, from the inside out. For example, maybe an example of a why somebody does something at GE, something like top 10 tips to consider before heading into your next job interview, or perhaps something about trends across the industry. Our non-existent budget made us dig deep and figure out what we had and how we could use it to the best of our ability.

Back on the topic of trust, we saw this become a real trend about two years ago. We found that about 80 percent of people were looking at company reviews before making a decision on employment, and I think a lot of people here at GE got a little scared by that. But we're seeing just how smart today's candidates really are. Eighty percent of job seekers are looking at reviews, but they're also working hard to figure out the facts. They're jumping on social media or the company website or talking to friends who have actually worked at the company to find the facts. I think we all struggle with the mentality sometimes where we get a little scared by reviews, but we have to trust that today's candidates are smart enough to explore the entire story and believe they will seek out many avenues beyond just one job review website.







#### How did you go about developing personas for the candidate profiles you were seeking?

# "IF YOU LOOK AT DATA ON WHAT A WOMAN LOOKS FOR IN A CAREER COMPARED TO A MAN, THEY'RE GOING TO LOOK DIFFERENT. IF YOU LOOK AT DATA ON WHAT A 20-SOMETHING IS LOOKING FOR COMPARED TO SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN IN THEIR PROFESSION FOR A COUPLE DECADES, THEY'RE GOING TO LOOK DIFFERENT."

This is still part of our journey. At the beginning, we looked for passionate people and employees who wanted to be part of telling the GE story. We wanted to find people interested in sharing their "day in the life" or telling their "why I work at GE." These stories, especially at such a large company can be all over the board, and you want them to be. You want people to realize the breadth and depth of your company, your company's story, not just the position they're looking to apply for. This year we're actually implementing a brand ambassador superhero campaign where interested GE employees can be "the" engineer, for example, and be the spokesperson for open engineering positions. The representative might help create a "day in the life" video, for example, and then we'll post that video to job descriptions to make them more interactive, engaging and informative. Our hope is tt integrate these kinds of videos across social media, rather than just job postings because, as we've talked about, people are going to social media more than anywhere else in 2017.

Along the same lines, we're also working on a huge employee value proposition project right now. We're identifying targeted candidate personas and, as you can imagine, in a matrixed environment that's difficult because we've got 12 businesses, across more than 170 countries. But as far as labeling those personas for this employee value proposition project, we really went in with the idea that we're very much in need of diverse and top talent.

But conversely, also trying to uncover what candidates are looking for in a career as well. Because there are different sets of data and different personas looking for different things. If you look at data on what a woman looks for in a career compared to a man, they're going to look different. If you look at data on what a 20-something is looking for compared to someone who has been in their profession for a couple decades, they're going to look different. There will of course be overlap on what people are looking for, but different generations and genders and industries have different needs across the spectrum. We ended up coming up with 12 different targeted personas that we're zeroing in on, and we recognize by no means does 12 even scratch the surface. But we recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all kinds of different personalities, finding where they are, and showing them what GE has to offer.







### What stage is your employment brand currently in? How do you see it continuing to evolve?

### "THE TALENT ACQUISITION AND MARKETING LINES WILL CONTINUE TO BLUR."

It has taken us five years to get from a place where no one recognized GE and employment brand in the same sentence; we had no strategy internally, or budget, to now we have a team, set goals and a budget. Within the next few years, I see the evolution further aligning talent acquisition and marketing. Five years ago at GE, these two functions hardly recognized each other but now the lines are really blurred. We recognize the need for the two to work together in partnership to make sure we're going to market as the same company in terms of consumer brand and employment brand.

There is going to be really big, continued evolution over the next couple of years. Not only will the talent acquisition and marketing lines continue to blur, but I think companies will start to respect employment brand as much if not more than company or consumer brand. Business leaders are going to realize employment brand has a great impact not only on finding and keeping top talent in order to have and provide the very best products and services, but also – they're going to realize "If I don't take care of my employment brand, my corporate brand doesn't mean anything." I see respect for employment brand strategy is going to continue to grow.

Over the past year, WilsonHCG's research noticed a stronger tie between corporate social responsibility (e.g., employee well-being, gender equality, community outreach, diversity and inclusion initiatives, among others) and employee engagement than in previous years. GE scored a perfect 9/9 in this category.

#### - WILSONHCG 2017 FORTUNE 500 TOP 100 EMPLOYMENT BRANDS REPORT

In the past, internal processes were built around the open job, strictly filling the open job or finding the best talent. Talent acquisition cannot be solely that way anymore. Now, I see company's moving toward the realization that talent acquisition is so much more about the entire employment experience. It's about the human relationship. Mostly, recruiting and talent acquisition are now about the full employment journey, from the pre-candidate experience all the way through helping a long-time employee remain engaged, motivated or grow into a company leader. And we, as a company, using our employment brand to tell that story so candidates and employees in turn want to tell their story – which will continue to develop and evolve our brand and business as a whole.







How important was it for you to partner with marketing when revamping GE's employment brand? Why is this strategic partnership so critical?

#### "YOU HAVE TO ASK YOURSELF THE TREE FALLING IN A FOREST QUESTION. IF WE CREATE A CAMPAIGN OR AD AND NOBODY EXPERIENCES IT - IS THERE ANY SOUND? IS THERE ANY IMPACT?"

With marketing and employment brand, I always say: "We're friends but we're not necessarily holding hands just yet." But we both realize the importance of partnering, and we're on that journey. One of the best ways to make your case for aligning marketing to improve employment brand is to really show them the business case. Showing marketing the reach and engagement we had with our brand ambassadors was jaw dropping; I literally watched one of our leader's jaw drop when I told them the reach we had with our LinkedIn profiles and brand ambassador training. Showing them those numbers, showing them how much we can both gain by working in partnership has been really impactful.

Another important piece was content, giving marketing content to use. When we had employees sharing their "why" and telling their stories, all of a sudden marketing had significant amounts of content to push out. And it was on us to help them with that. The Millie Dresselhaus Scientist Commercial we created is a great example of this. Everyone loved the campaign, and I've heard from a number of people telling me about getting goosebumps, even tearing up. Still, you have to ask yourself the tree falling in a forest question. If we

create a campaign or ad and nobody experiences it – is there any sound? Is there any impact? If we don't capture the audience we're seeking, what good is the marketing campaign.

In partnering with marketing, we said "Alright, here is the commercial reach and engagement." Marketing then has their normal channels of sending and sharing the content. But beyond that, we unveiled the commercial to our brand ambassadors three days before it went live. This created exclusivity, make our brand ambassadors feel acknowledged and showed them how much we value their support in building the GE brand. This has been a huge win for us. We did it with Millie Dresselhaus, with Owen and with the Sarah: Building Amazing Things With Her Two Hands Commercial. We sent sneak peeks to our employees/brand ambassadors, then we sent them a copy and paste for their own social media platforms. In this way, our teams feel part of something important and, remember, trust in people is so much higher than trust in companies - so it was a huge win for marketing and for our employment brand ambassador program, and continues to be.





Our reach and engagement has been huge, but what's the call to action? You can have a great marketing campaign, great reach and engagement, but companies have to create a call to action. At GE, calls to action capture leads through our customer relationship management software. With this info, for the Millie Dresselhaus campaign, for example, we started sending emails our leads and different messages about women rockstars at GE as a follow-up. "Hey, this woman is in tech and this is what she's doing, this is her story." People love that. At the end of the Millie Dresselhaus commercial it shows 12-13 women who are actual GE employees. Highlighting their story and sharing it with these leads saw huge engagement. It created conversation. It also shows active and passive candidates our efforts in gender equality and women in leadership.

We have a 75 percent open rate on those stories. I've had to run the numbers many times because I still can't even believe it. We've had a 25 percent click through rate where people are actually clicking through to articles or jobs we've posted within these emails. On top of that, we have an over 10 percent apply rate. These leads, initially they just agreed with the story in a commercial. They, like our Millie Dresselhaus campaign, want to see women scientists being treated as the celebrities they are. They weren't thinking about applying for a new job at first, but then we witnessed a 10 percent apply rate and realized these passive candidates are becoming interested in joining GE. That's how we've helped land, really, the top talent on the market.









Do you see your consumer brand and employment brand as a marriage of the two? How do you manage this marriage as your brands evolve?

#### "BUSINESSES AND PEOPLE WANT TO MAKE SURE WE STAND FOR THE SAME THINGS BEFORE PARTNERING WITH US, AS THEY SHOULD."

For somebody in my position, at GE we're a business-to-business company. For us it's a definitely a marriage between the marketing of GE as a company and the marketing of GE's employment brand. I've seen a lot of articles and research indicating that if you don't take care of your employment brand your company brand will suffer. I think that is definitely the case. Maybe even more so for business-to-business companies where another business doesn't want to partner with us because they hear we have terrible benefits for our employees. Or, a company doesn't want to partner with us because we're still viewed as this stuffy, conservative company. Ultimately, businesses and people want to know we stand for the same things before partnering with us, as they should.

Now, for consumer marketing in employment branding, I have friends out there in the field of employment branding who market for consumer companies that completely disagree with me. They don't think there is a marriage between employment brand and consumer brand, that the two have to be completely separate. And I can see why. Consumers of cell phones or cell phone services might not necessarily be the pool that a company is hiring from. That said, even if my customers aren't my candidates, there is usually cross over. What if my candidates become my customers — I want to know that! The more you can write about the full story the better off you're going to be in the end.







What challenges did GE face when going through your employment brand evolution?

## "COMPANIES HAVE TO MAKE SURE THEIR ASPIRATIONAL BRAND STORIES COME TRUE OR THEY'RE GOING TO START LOSING TALENT."

Obviously budget was a big deal. That was a challenge. But with every challenge comes an opportunity. With GE, it's a very matrixed environment. Part of being a big, global company that people might not realize is worldwide, when you're going through change and transformation it's not like you snap your fingers and it's done. It's a process. Selling GE's employment brand is still somewhat of an aspiration. We're "becoming" this modern company. But it takes time to infiltrate all 170+ of our countries and many industries. In one area, maybe in this region or this function of the business, they're very open to working from home. And it just works out that way. But in another region they might not have gotten there quite yet. Brand will always be aspirational. But we can make sure these aspirations come true by fulfilling our promises and continuing along the journey. Companies have to make sure their aspirational brand stories come true or they're going to start losing talent.

As far as our culture, another challenge is just the fact that we're so global. Selling the GE "culture" across more than 170 countries, even going to the market externally, the fact that we're so global means culture means something different everywhere we go. GE China has some of the same messaging that we have here in the US for employment brand, but they do it in a completely different way on different channels. It's important for us at GE and other companies to make sure we're all keeping in mind what employment brand looks like within each individual region. Having a person on the ground in each region who understands employment brand and can take what an organization is doing in one region and customize to their region, that can have such a significant impact.







How are you measuring the success of your employment brand?

## "WE'RE STARTING TO SEE UPWARDS OF 15 TOUCHES THAT HAVE TO HAPPEN WITH A CANDIDATE BEFORE THEY APPLY; FOR EMPLOYMENT BRAND, THIS IS SO IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER."

We're not great at metrics, not quite. It's still part of our journey. We're actually working on an employment brand dashboard right now that is going to show a number of different measurements. We're going to be measuring and showing reach and engagement, click throughs and the candidate journey. For example, we're starting to see upwards of 15 touches that have to happen with a candidate before they apply; for employment brand, this is so important to consider. We need to figure out what these 15 touch points are, what touch points made the most difference in a candidate's decision, what was the enticing point that drew a candidate in and caused them to reach out – figuring out these things and how to best measure them is important.

It's important to measure simple pieces like the applicant funnel. We want to work on quality candidates not necessarily quantity. Where are the highest quality candidates coming from and how should that influence the conversations taking place within each part of the applicant funnel, meaning application, candidates reviewed, candidates screened, candidates interviewed, offers and accepts. The next evolution of employment brand is brand plus data equals innovative recruiting. We really only want the most qualified candidates placed in requisition folders and make sure recruiters are spending their time on the highest quality. If we, and other companies, measure right I think it's possible to simplify brand and recruiting to that level.







#### What can other organizations, small and large, learn from GE's employment brand journey?

### "ONCE YOUR ACTUAL STRATEGY IS NAILED DOWN, THEN BEGIN THE EFFORT."

If you're just beginning the journey, it can be overwhelming. Boil it down. What do I have around me? What's the problem? What am I trying to solve? From there, what's the strategy? Then implement the tool. A lot of times, if we're overwhelmed it's because we start with the tool or the action before the strategy. For example, "I want to do social media" is where we began when I first started. I was hired as a social media recruiter and asked to help GE recruit through social media. But we didn't yet have our strategy around social media.

Instead, we should've said, "Alright, the problem we want to solve is reaching people where they're present and where they're active online." From there, the strategy is going to be: we're going to focus on Linkedin, Facebook and Twitter. In order to do that, we're going need to develop a content calendar and put together campaigns through these channels, then create a call to action defining success or failure of the campaign. Once your actual strategy is nailed down, then begin the effort. If you're further along the journey and light years of where we are at GE, I think it's important to figure out how all of our efforts combine – employment brand, talent acquisition, talent management, career development, all of it. Also, for global organizations, it's priceless to have people on the ground in given regions, to customize brand and outreach to each unique area. It's something I wish we would have done a lot sooner at GE.







What is your best piece of advice for organizations looking to reinvent their employment brand and attract competitive talent?

## "WHEN YOU THINK OF EMPLOYMENT BRAND TODAY, IN A WORLD CURRENTLY IN THE MIDST OF AN INDUSTRIAL AND DIGITAL REVOLUTION, WE NEED TO BE PART OF TELLING OUR PEOPLE'S STORIES."

Take risks. Try it. This outlook could be because <u>Thomas Edison was GE's founder</u>, but that's what he always said: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." Failure isn't failure, it's just the way we're not going to do it next time. With employment brand right now, we need to be in a state of mind that says, "Let's just try it. What is it going to hurt?" My one piece of advice, when you're kind of questioning when you should try something or not – yes, you should. Do it. Try it. I think, at GE, this is what has gained us our biggest advances. Even in times of failure we've learned what we can do better the next time. And when you think of employment brand today, in a world currently in the midst of an industrial and digital revolution, we need to be part of telling our people's stories.

For more on the GE journey and their ongoing employment brand ambassador efforts, check out GE's most recent case study:

How GE Developed a Brand Ambassador Program



## "I HAVE NOT FAILED. I'VE JUST FOUND 10,000 WAYS THAT WON'T WORK."

-Thomas Edison



For more information about employment branding services, <u>Contact WilsonHCG</u>.



