

Blake sports apparel case analysis



Blake Sports Apparel and Switch Activewear was once a small manufacturing company that developed sports apparel and accessories using logos of leagues and brands. Founded by Cameron Barker's father, Blake Sports Apparel and Switch Activewear changed hands after a decade, placing the company in the management of his son Cameron Barker. Soon after the change in leadership, Barker was determined to grow the company by expanding his clientele. Barker began a partnership with the mid-size brand Cartlock and after, transitioned to the very large company Howell. However, new challenges and problems arose for Blake Sports because of the rapid growth. Several employees were punished and criticized for expressing pressing issues that needed to be addressed in the company. Some of the issues included lack of leadership, communication barriers, secrecy and mistrust, and lack of involvement and interaction. With these pressing matters brought to light, Barker internally reflected on his own leadership, or lack thereof, and proposed possible solutions that could benefit and improve his team and the company.

To me, the most pressing problem within this case study is the poor leadership that has been demonstrated throughout the company. Not only CEO Cameron Barker, but the whole Blake Sports executive team failed to provide examples and demonstrate what proper leadership should look like. When asked about their opinions on the leadership within the company, employees went as far as saying that CEO Barker "was described as inspiring, empowering, and talented, for example, but not as a coach to his team. As a self-identified introvert, he admitted to spending little time engaging socially with colleagues" (Groysberg 9). Personally, if I did not have

any intimate connection or social interactions with my boss or managers, I would find it very difficult to grow and further our relationship. By disclosing personal information, you allow yourself to be vulnerable and create a bond of trust. To me, the personal interaction of managers is part of what makes them a good leader. Companies need good personal managers that can find a balance of work and play, however still being able to construct a sense of production and encourage hard work.. Another problem that employees highlighted was the lack of communication in the workplace. In the article, there are several examples of how poor communication is a major issue within the Blake Sports. In one instance, because of lack of communication, employees felt the company was secretly withholding information from them, and not providing critical information needed between the various departments. Information from the case study stated that “ the combination of apparent secrecy and the company’s privately held status led employees to question the company’s financial standing and the degree of its profitability” (Groysberg 6). By withholding information, the employees assumed that the company was in financial trouble, thus hindering their job performance because of the possible financial distraction. Another example of communication problem would be that there was a lack of communication between personnel regarding important information. Missing deadlines, unacceptable work environment behavior, and task orientation/ deadlines are all things that should be address via face to face or personal communication. As stated in the case analysis, “ the deadlines were habitually ignored, which led to otherwise avoidable issues, such as missing shipping dates to customers and although team members did make the effort to attend the check-in meetings, no one set an agenda, so the

meetings often ran for an inadequate length of time”(Groysberg 6-7).

Perhaps the biggest issue of all in the Blake Sports company was the level of cooperation. Because individuals in the organization were working against each other rather than together, production and shipping slowed and was complicated. Because the employees did not have any team bonding activities or exterior relationship, they were dividing among themselves because of differences. Thus, hindering production because they would compete against each other rather than working together. In the article employees state that “ the executive-team members look at one another as competition, not as collaborators” (Groysberg 9-11).

In one’s own reflection, I feel that one of the reasons the company has so many problems is because of the rapid growth that was unexpected. Transitioning from a small company to a large company comes with challenges and difficulties. For instance, you have more employees, thus meaning very different cultures, backgrounds, and values that all must mesh together to work in harmony. Because the company grew and transitioned so quickly, I feel that if they were to implement more guidelines to follow, they could give direct expectations as to what the employees are expected to act and preform to help ensure a smoother transition. I feel that by also making training and employee bonding mandatory, this would ensure that each employee starts off on a clean slate with the companies’ value and expectations as their foundation. In many large companies such as Amazon, Google, Apple, and now Blake Sports, you need a strong, determined, and respected leader who can intern be an example of what your company represents. I feel that a CEO is necessary for the face of a company,

however having multiple powers of leadership, like a board of directors, is a good, in-depth way to address issues and get various opinions and ideas on how to handle them. I also think that training for managers on how to handle different problem situations that arise would be beneficial to the company, as the managers can provide feedback to the bosses in regard to performance, employee satisfaction, and production. I feel that this solution would also help with the communication drawbacks. I feel that by having weekly or bi-weekly meeting with the head of the company, the employees would feel more involved and interactive. By doing this, you are creating a bond with the employees that suggests that the executives do care about each person. Supporting my idea, the textbooks states that “ if employees trust their leaders, they will buy in more readily” (Nelson 200). In these meetings there should be a timekeeper and secretary to take notes of the meetings. The company could go a step further and publish the notes and future agendas taken at the meetings for those who could not attend or as a reminder. These meetings would set the tone for open information. By having this since of open communication between departments, this leaves no room for secrecy or miscommunication- especially if it is published in a newsletter.

By using Bruce Tuckman’s five-stage model, Cameron Barker could successfully improve the overall environment of Blake Sports Apparel and Switch Activewear. By using this group model, Barker could make the environment fun, productive, and the place people want to work at. The following is a summarized explanation of how the five-stage model works. Forming (stage one) would allow for team members to get to know each

other better and acknowledge each other's values or "ground rules".

Storming (stage two) is the stage in which they will first experience conflict.

However, they will also experience and exercise "trustworthiness, emotional comfort, and evaluative acceptance" per the textbook (Nelson 141-142).

Norming (stage three) is when employees begin to settle into their job, having a clearer understanding of their responsibilities and duties.

Performing (stage four) is the stage in which members are goal oriented and do not have to rely on the directions from a manager/leader. Adjourning

(stage five) the final stage, is when the employees feel accomplished because they have successfully completed the given task at hand.

Companies that focus on employee training, group activities, and communication are by far the most successful companies with the happiest employees. By making it your companies' mission to value, uphold, and instate these three things, you are creating an environment that will thrive. Remember, people don't quit companies- they quit managers.

Work Cited

- Groysberg, Boris and Baden, Katherine C. "Blake Sports Apparel and Switch Activewear: Bringing the Executive Team Together." *Harvard Business School*. (2017) p. 1-12. Print.
- Nelson, Debra L., and James C. Quick. *ORGB5: Organizational Behavior*. Cengage Learning, 2017.