



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: CUSTOMER CODE OF CONDUCT

Leaders know they are ultimately responsible for the leadership behavior of their organization's executives, managers, and employees. These are the people who represent your brand. But are they the only representatives of your brand? Customers represent your brand also.

For internal constituencies, you probably have one or more codes of conduct, based on company values. Internally, it is fairly easy to deliver consequences if people do not comply. For example, consider the case of an executive of a Fortune 100 company attending a convention in Las Vegas. He was observed engaging in disruptive behavior while displaying a name badge with the company's logo clearly visible. It was determined that his behavior was unbecoming of a representative of that company's brand and he was fired. The company did not want to be seen as employing an executive who did not live the values of the company at all times.

What effects might the actions of your external constituencies, chief among them, customers, have on your brand? What can you do about their behaviors linked to utilization of your products or services? You probably said, "Not much."

Before you leap to that conclusion, take the example of Brent Garrigus, owner of Ride Cyclery in Encinitas, California. His customers can have a big impact on the quality of life of the community around them. Garrigus decided that he did not want riders displaying his brand and simultaneously displaying bad behavior, such as disregard for traffic laws. He instituted a [customer code of conduct](#). Basically, Garrigus's code for customers says: if you are going to wear my brand, you are going to do it in a way that does not disrespect it, endanger others, or adversely affect the community. And there are consequences for anyone observed in violation.

Our company has something similar to an extent. We set out our expectations for our executive coaching clients in a "Coachees' Responsibilities" document that we distribute to new executive coaching clients. The document covers topics such as commitment, collaboration with us, role clarity, and more. The aim is to ensure that coachees know our expectations, have skin in the game, and get the best possible results from the coaching experience.

Another example is the [Electronic Industry Citizen Coalition code of conduct](#), which is aimed at "supporting the rights and wellbeing of workers and communities worldwide affected by the global electronics supply chain."

It could be beneficial to think about how this concept of external representatives of your brand translates to your industry and organization. Here are some steps you can take.

- Identify external representatives of your brand—customers, strategic partners, vendors, etc.
- Determine how the actions of each group could harm or enhance perceptions of your brand.

- Define your standards for their actions (code of conduct) as they relate to your products and services.
- Choose the channels to communicate your external constituents' code of conduct.
- Establish appropriate accountability mechanisms.

How could a customer using your products or services affect perceptions of your brands? What do external constituents know about your expectations of them?