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Saturday, April 14, 2007

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Ford asks staff to tout company

Automaker urges workers to help boost brand image by serving as 'walking advertisement' when talking to others.

Bryce G. Hoffman / The Detroit News

Break out the sandwich boards. Ford Motor Co. is asking every employee to become "a walking advertisement" for the company as it struggles to boost its brand image and stem its U.S. market share slide.

The message was delivered in a webcast to employees earlier this week by Ray Day, executive director of global automotive communications at Ford. Mark Fields, president of Ford's Americas group, reiterated this point in his weekly e-mail to managers Friday, asking them to urge each employee to talk up Ford with friends, family and any media they may encounter.

"An improving reputation leads to higher purchase consideration among our customers and, ultimately, more vehicle sales," Fields wrote in the memo, a copy of which was obtained by The Detroit News. "Externally, each of us is a walking advertisement for the company to the world around us. We need to take this role very seriously as we speak with our co-workers, our neighbors and everyone with whom we associate."

Fields called on employees to adopt "a more confident tone of voice -- one that underscores we are a team that knows how to win and we have a plan that shows us how to win."

Specifically, he suggested Ford workers tout the new products coming from Dearborn.

Michael Bernacchi, professor of marketing at the University of Detroit Mercy's College of Business Administration, said positive word-of-mouth from employees is fine but far from the answer to Ford's issues.

"Products and brands need to speak for



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themselves," he said.

Ford has had some noteworthy success with newer products like the Ford Edge and Mercury Milan, but the company continues to yield market share to its competitors. The company, which controlled 25 percent of the U.S. market in 1995, only claims a 17.1 percent share today.

Ford is in the midst of a massive restructuring that aims to stop that share loss and return the company to profitability by 2009. Last year, Ford lost \$12.7 billion.

In his memo, Fields also urged managers to communicate regularly with their employees about the company's turnaround progress. He said supervisors should brief their staff at least once a week about the progress Ford is making with its "Way Forward" plan, as well as improvements their own departments have made toward meeting their objectives.

To that end, the company has started issuing monthly report cards to show workers where progress is being made and where the automaker continues to lag behind. So far, the marks have been less than stellar.

But Fields said this sort of frank and direct communication is helping to boost morale.

Each quarter, Ford surveys its own workers to gauge employee sentiment. The last poll, published internally in February, found fewer than half of Ford employees surveyed believed the company's turnaround plan would succeed.

In his Friday memo, Fields said the results of the latest survey are more encouraging.

You can reach Bryce Hoffman at (313) 222-2443 or bhoffman@detnews.com.

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Ford's Mark Fields asks workers to use "a more confident tone." [See full image](#)

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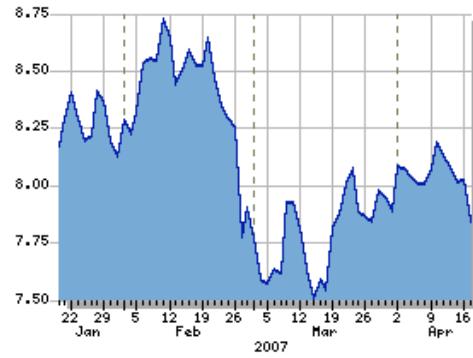
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