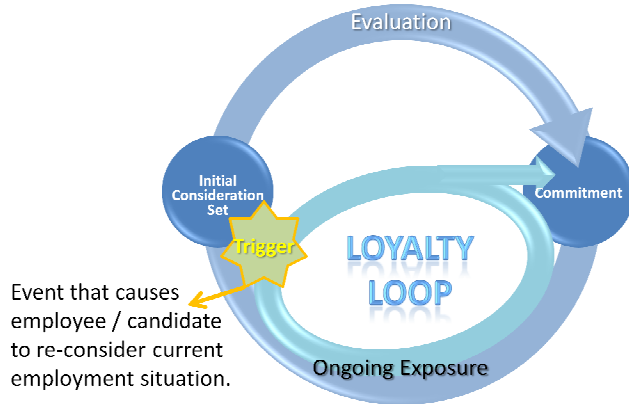
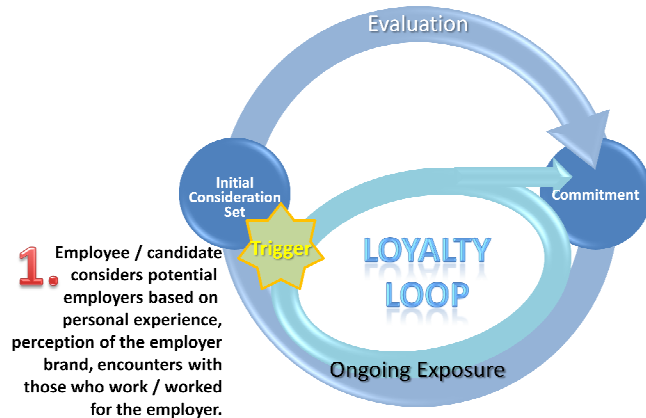


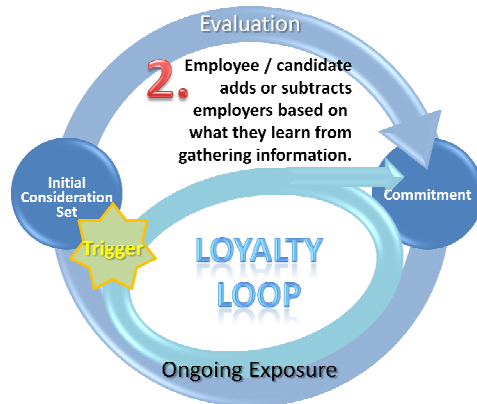
Most brand theorists agree that the venerable Brand Funnel has outlived its usefulness. Changes in media, and how people use those new media, have changed the relationship between brands and their stakeholders. McKinsey & Co. documented this change in a 2008 study entitled, “The Consumer Decision Journey” (David Court, Dave Elzinga, Susan Mulder, and Ole Jørgen Vetvik, 2009). They studied how consumers around the globe made purchase decisions in brand categories as disparate as automobiles, cosmetics, personal computers, insurance, and wireless services. The evidence pointed to more cyclical Consumer Journey similar to the diagram above. We were struck by how similar the findings were to what we were encountering anecdotally in employment. Granted, the Great Recession has dampened mobility in the labor markets. Not only are people afraid to risk their seniority by going to a new job (last in, first out), but the depressed real estate market has made re-location almost impossible. Given that, as the economy slowly recovers, we are beginning to see rejuvenation in job-seeking, particularly among those with skills in high demand. There are 34% more openings for software engineers in California in 2011 than there were just one year ago, for example. So employers need to examine the new Employer Branding, one characterized by a cyclical Employee / Candidate Journey that is fueled in part by social media.



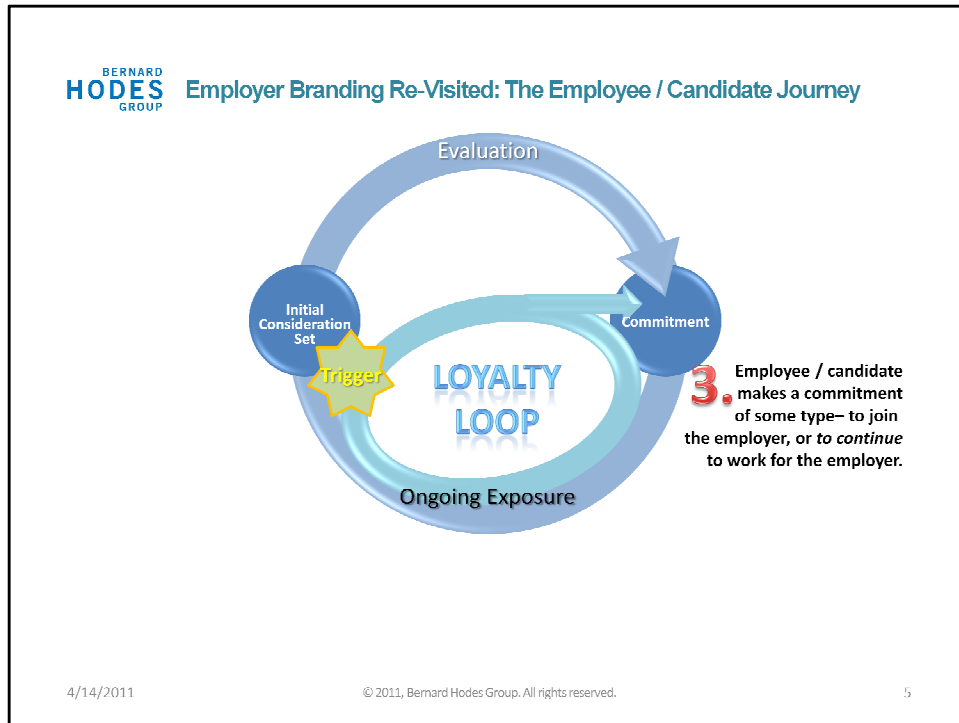
The Employee / Candidate Journey begins with some type of Trigger Event, *i.e.*, something that causes the person to re-consider his or her current employment situation. The Trigger Event could be positive (*e.g.*, a promotion, a large raise), negative (*e.g.*, being laid off, having a bad day at work, getting yelled at by your boss), or ambiguous (*e.g.*, your firm is being acquired by a rival, you are asked to transfer to a new location, your spouse/partner has an offer in a different city). Whatever it is, it causes the person to begin to look at various employment options.



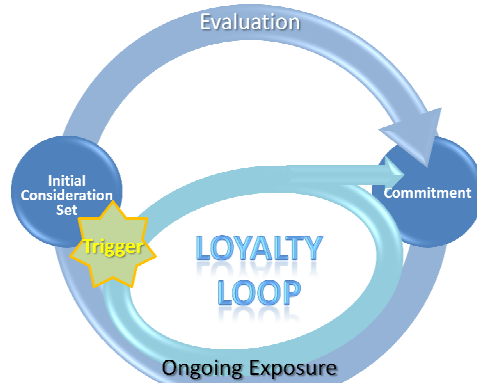
The Employee/Candidate begins with a set of employers s/he has been aware of before. These could be competing firms, or high profile employers (*e.g.*, Google, Apple, or Facebook), or— as we shall see— the incumbent employer. The person begins to consider this initial set of employers based on whatever experience s/he has had, as an employee or as a customer, vague perceptions of the brands, or word of mouth from people who work, or used to work, for the employers. Being in this Initial Consideration Set is a boon if you are going to be considered, so that is one reason why it is important to have a strong employer brand. If you are not in this cohort, you will have to work that much harder during the next phase to join the employers being considered. If an existing employee is considering you, that usually means something negative happened to spark a Trigger Event. Since research has found that, at any given moment, a significant percentage of your employees are considering leaving you, you need to be continuously “re-selling” your existing workforce so that as employees begin to evaluate you as an employer there are many points in your favor.



Many times, the Trigger Event will subside. The employee will forget the bad day at work or the negative event will turn out to be a harmless misunderstanding. If that doesn't happen, the employee/candidate begins to evaluate options. Today, people have a plethora of information outlets to help them form their assessments of employers. From corporate careers Web sites to online employment forums, to social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, people can learn what it is like to work for you from your own employees (and ex-employees). As they go through this process, one thing that has changed since the pre-Internet days is that there is so much information out there that people can now add or remove employers from their Consideration Set based on what they learn largely online. That means that if you are not among the Initial Consideration Set, there is still a chance you might make it onto the list if there is plenty of good commentary about you online. Conversely, even if you were in the Initial Consideration Set, you could be removed if the individual sees a poorly produced Web site or sees negative comments from people who work or used to work for you.



After completing the Evaluation, the Employee / Candidate makes a Commitment. (In the original McKinsey model, this is the “Moment of Purchase.”) Commitment is more descriptive of the relationship between the Employee / Candidate and the Employer at this point. It is not an absolute word, however— there are varying degrees of Commitment. One could agree to commit “for the time being,” or “until the dust settles,” as well as “for the rest of my career.” In today’s economic malaise, many will commit because they see no other option (the weakest Commitment possible). In that latter case, since the Commitment is so tenuous there will be more frequent Trigger events (since it will take less “force” to get someone to seek out other opportunities) and eventually the person will leave. The better, more highly skilled people will have an easier time of finding new opportunities. That is why it is important for the Employer to celebrate each Commitment. Onboarding new employees thoroughly is appropriate for those new to the organization. Celebrating job anniversaries and recognizing achievements reinforce the Commitment of current employees. Doing none of those courts danger as the Employee goes into Ongoing Exposure (next).



**4.** Employee / candidate builds expectations based on experience to inform the next trigger event.

After making the Commitment, the Employee begins to subconsciously log day-to-day experiences so that when the next Trigger event occurs (and it inevitably will, even among the most engaged employees) s/he can use those experiences to help guide the next step. If the Employee decides to stay with the Employer, the Loyalty Loop delivers a renewed Commitment. If the Employee decides to “see what’s out there,” the journey begins anew. Many Employers can identify trends as to when particular disciplines or job categories are “at risk” based on exit interviewing data. This allows the Employer to “triage” employees, conducting pre-emptive focus groups among Employees fitting that profile who are approaching the “danger zone” when they are most likely to leave. Doing so allows the Employees to vent and can mitigate turnover.