

Leadership Profile: Brett Hurt of Bazaarvoice

Professional Career

Brett Hurt earned a BBA in management information systems from the University of Texas, and also an MBA in high-tech entrepreneurship from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. After graduating from Wharton, he founded Coremetrics, a marketing analytics solutions company that was later acquired by IBM. Subsequently, he co-founded Bazaarvoice. He served as Bazaarvoice CEO until he resigned in 2012 to pursue other ventures. Hurt currently runs an investment firm, Hurt Family Investments, with his wife, Debra (Hurt).

Company he led during IPO

Bazaarvoice was founded in 2005 in Austin, Texas by Brett Hurt and Brant Barton. It is a network that helps retailers get company feedback on their products or services, through facilitating user reviews. Their website boasts that each month, more than 700 million people around the world view and share opinions on the millions of products in the Bazaarvoice network. Retailers and other companies consult these user reviews and use them to improve operations (“About”).

IPO Information

Bazaarvoice priced its IPO on February 24, 2012. They offered 9,484,296 shares at \$12.00, making the offer amount \$113,811,552 (“BAZAARVOICE INC (BV) IPO.”). On the first day of trading the stock opened at \$16 and closed at \$16.51. Hurt announced his resignation as Bazaarvoice CEO on November 5, 2012. On the day of trading prior to that, November 2, 2012, the stock closed at \$12.60. (“BV Historical Prices”).

Leadership Styles:

How Hurt exemplifies the affiliative leadership style

Brett Hurt hosts a personal blog that he uses to share his thoughts on a variety of subjects. In March 2013 Hurt wrote a series of posts titled “The tale of Bazaarvoice, as told through the shirts on our backs”. In the posts, Hurt goes through the entire history of Bazaarvoice, using company t shirts as a guide. Multiple times throughout the year, Hurt would assist in designing a t shirt that reflected the recent goings-on of the company, which would then be printed and distributed to company employees. Many startup companies create their own t shirts, and each company has their own motives behind this. For Hurt, the goal was to foster affiliation and create a sense of togetherness. He comments on the social significance of cultural identifies: “Even our Presidents have been wearing US flag pins ever since 9/11. Everyone has a pin, hat, shirt, or uniform that represents their commitment to the cause. This is deeply embedded tradition - ever since the days we were in tribes and needed to recognize fellow tribe members”(Hurt).

The company t shirts were one way that Hurt fostered affiliation amongst employees at Bazaarvoice. Another step he took was instituting a Bazaarvoice scavenger hunt for all new employees. In this tradition that began in 2009, it became compulsory for new employees to spend their first day completing a scavenger hunt engineered by Hurt and other leaders. Despite it being a solitary activity, Hurt viewed it as an effective way to integrate new employees into the community atmosphere that he was attempting to create: I cannot write enough about the benefits of the Scavenger Hunt. I noticed a near immediate impact in the way our employees related to each other and passionately carried the Bazaarvoice flag. It bonded them as part of a special club. It broke down barriers for communicating with other departments that are prevalent at so many companies that do not have such a process. It created more energy in the halls and everyone celebrated new team members in a very unusual and exciting way (Hurt).

By designing company T shirts and promoting activities such as the scavenger hunt, Hurt wanted employees to feel an attachment to Bazaarvoice, to him, and to their fellow co-workers. Hurt certainly felt that strong attachment. In October 2014, his place on the board of directors ended, thus ending his time at Bazaarvoice. In an open letter blog post titled “Dear Bazaarvoice, The Love of a Founder Never Dies”, he opened with “Dear Friends (for I consider each of you to be just that)...”(Hurt). He went on to say: In life and in one’s career, there are periods that shine for one reason or another and for me, the most transformational period has been my Bazaarvoice years. And that’s because of all of you. What we created together is one of a kind. The effort and skill it took amazes me. The devotion and care you brought to your work, the spirit of inspiration I saw thriving around me, and the eagerness to take a big risk on a new idea will inspire me for the rest of my life. I mean that with all of my heart (Hurt). Hurt feels that with his affiliative leadership style, he truly cultivated a culture of love and friendship that drove the business to success.

How Hurt exemplifies the democratic leadership style

In another blog post, Hurt describes lessons he learned as CEO. Early on, he learned the importance of valuing employee feedback, and began using a democratic leadership style. He discusses the great lengths they he went to to encourage employees to speak their mind and let their feelings be known: We enabled individuals to regularly rate managers on whether or not we were living the core values... We regularly ran Climate Surveys for everyone in the company to evaluate our overall culture - and we recently found a tool to benchmark against other companies to see how we rank. We participated in Best Places to Work surveys, where we were ranked against other companies in town. These are difficult practices. They require you to be open and sometimes what you learn is hard to change. But to not do them - and not make them a priority

as CEO - is to turn your back on the voice of your people, which ultimately will affect not just your culture but your performance (Hurt). The opinions of employees at all levels were incorporated, and Hurt went to great lengths to let employees know that they had a say and an impact on the direction of the company.

Works Cited

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