

The Heart of Branding

Who Are We?
What's Our Story?
Why Are We Here?
How Are We Unique?
Does It Make a Dramatic Difference?
Who Cares?

Tom Peters

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“We are in a brawl with no rules.”

– Paul Allaire, former CEO, Xerox

MANIFESTO. The word suggests a pointed view. (Rodale’s *Synonym Finder*: Manifesto ... Proclamation. Declaration. Pronunciamento. Broadcast. Airing. Broadside.) And “Pointed View” is precisely the idea of this series of “booklets” – in what we call **The BRAWL WITH NO RULES Series**. Each booklet is an expanded chapter of my cornerstone day-long seminars. But I have chosen these topics for two particular reasons. First, I think they (1) are important and (2) present enormous opportunities and (3) are grossly neglected by most organizations. Second, I have a Radical Point of View about each one; you will find no half-way suggestions here!

THE HEART OF BRANDING

Brand Power!

I believe in it. Fervently. There is a case to be made that the brand is *more* important than ever. But other people say the importance of the brand is waning ... as the Internet (and “one-to-one” marketing) ascends.

I will join in the fray in a moment. Just to pay my dues. But I’m not really interested in the argument. Branding is ... so bloody damned obvious to me. When one has an Identity ... life gets a whole lot simpler. Instantly. The problem is ... an Identity That Matters ... is insanely hard to inculcate ... insanely hard to maintain. On the other hand, the rewards for doing so – just ask the folks at Nike or Starbucks or Coke or The Body Shop – is billions, if not hundreds of billions, in market capitalization. Plus the Pride that what you’re doing has Meaning. (And, yes, please capitalize the “M” in Meaning.)

1. The Case.

“There will be more confusion in the business world in the next decade than in any decade in history,” says AOL Time Warner Chairman Steve Case. “And the current pace of change will only accelerate.” It is a time of total madness. And, oddly enough (or is it so odd?), that “madness” plays directly into the hands of ... branding. In a period of ambiguity and insanity and craziness ... with everything gone amok ... then we look for some kind of Signposts. And what is a brand if not a ... Signpost?

New Zealand marketers Gillian Law and Nick Grant speak to this with unequaled clarity: **“The increasing difficulty in differentiating between products and the speed with which competitors take up innovations will assist in the rise and rise of the brand.”**

To which I say: Amen.

The insanity of the times demands those Signposts. That’s one thing. And the other thing is that we’ve come a long ... long ... way, baby. Simply providing STW/Stuff That Works (decent quality) is not the automatic winner it was a rather short while ago. **“The ‘surplus society,’ ”** write Swedish business professors Kjell Nordström and Jonas Ridderstråle in *Funky Business*,

“has a surplus of similar companies, employing similar people, with similar educational backgrounds, working in similar jobs, coming up with similar ideas, producing similar things, with similar prices and similar quality.” Adding salt to that particular wound, Danish marketing phenom Jesper Kunde, in *A Unique Moment*, says: **“Companies have defined so much ‘best practice’ that they are now more or less identical.”** When I talk about all this in my seminars, I am astounded that literally every head – in a clambake of 700 – nods. Yes, we’ve come a long ... long ... way, baby. Problem: So has everybody else.

Hence, the desperate need to ... stand out from the herd. And answer #1 ... branding. “Most companies in the old, product-oriented economy waste far too many of their resources on product development, management systems, and logistics,” Jesper Kunde claims, “compared to what the company could achieve by investing in the strength of the brand and its positioning in the market.”

Again, all that I can add is: **Amen.**

2. The (the!) Question.

The top management of a giant American company invited me to speak with them. Their situation was far from fatal. On the other hand, they had experienced a couple of decades of exceptional growth, and it seemed to be slowing. Substantially. Employee morale, surveys showed, was lousy, resulting in high turnover, as well as some teetering in their formerly awesome customer service ratings. No, the world hadn’t come to an end ... but it was decidedly wobbly. And talented, energetic competition made the issue even more worrisome.

I studied like hell. Talked to customers. Talked to vendors. Talked to front-line employees. I had but three hours to spend with the top management, and my pride and professionalism insisted that I make each moment count. The first hour and a half was supposed to be a presentation. I’d parade my PowerPoint slides ... probably 125 for an hour and a half. And then we’d talk for the second half of the “show.”

As I said, I studied. And studied. The time was almost at hand. The speech was at 8:15 a.m. It was 3:00 a.m. As usual, I was suffering pre-presentation insomnia. And, yes, I had those slides ready ... 127 to be precise. I thought. And thought. And I did something strange. I deleted 126 of the 127 slides. Just one was left.

And it read:

“WHO ARE YOU [these days]?”

That's what I took to the presentation. I told them I'd studied ... and studied. And it seemed to me to boil down to something insanely simple. (And insanely complex.) The company had made several acquisitions in the last half dozen years. Though I'm a publicly avowed enemy of big acquisitions, I had no complaint with what this firm had done; each one filled a gaping hole in their portfolio, relative to their excellent competitors. But somewhere ... somehow ... and God knows how ... the "Who are we?" seemed to have slithered away, deep into the bushes. Their identity was, to be kind, muddy. Or at least much muddier than it had been. So I said: "You can have your money back if you want. (There was a lot of money at stake for me.) But we're going to spend the entire three hours talking about ... 'WHO ARE YOU [these days]?' "

"You can't survive floating on the tide," writes my Danish friend Jesper Kunde, "assessing the competition, conducting surveys to find out what your customers want right now. *What do you want? What do you want to tell the world in the future? What does your company have that will enrich the world?* You must believe in that 'it' strongly enough to become **unique** at what you do." I think that's brilliant. I think that's just about all you need to know about branding.

Branding. I believe in it. Insanely. I believe in it for myself. As an individual. As a small company owner. I believe in it for you. As a staffer in the Purchasing Department at a giant multinational. Or as a 22-year-old waiter ... or Haitian housekeeper ... in a fast-food restaurant, or 800-room hotel.

Branding. Distinction. There is nothing more to it than that. (And ... nothing less, either.)

Branding is dead flat simple. (And impossible.) It's the answer ... to the question. The question(s): "**WHO ARE YOU?**" "**WHO CARES?**" (Or, Rather: "**WHY SHOULD WE CARE?**")

"Some companies," Mr. Kunde adds, "tend to equate branding with the company's marketing. Design a new marketing campaign and, voilà, you're on course. They are wrong. The task is bigger, much bigger. It is about fulfilling your potential ... not about a new logo, no matter how clever. **WHAT IS MY MISSION IN LIFE? WHAT DO I WANT TO CONVEY TO PEOPLE? HOW DO I MAKE SURE THAT WHAT I HAVE TO OFFER THE WORLD IS ACTUALLY UNIQUE?** *The brand has to give of itself, the company has to give of itself, and the management has to give of itself.* To put it bluntly, it is a matter of whether – or not – you want to be ... UNIQUE ... NOW."

And one more time: AMEN!

3. Emotion Rules.

Warren Bennis – scholar, leadership guru – is the only person on earth who is close to both Peter Drucker (the management uber guru) and me. Asked by a reporter about the two of us, Warren replied, "If Peter 'invented' modern management, Tom repainted it in Technicolor." I love that!

And I hope it contains a grain of truth.

(Ah, yes, Technicolor. **Brand = Technicolor.** Right?)

When Bob Waterman and I penned *In Search of Excellence*, the reason I'm allowed to address you ... to be frank, America was under economic frontal assault by Japan. Our post-WW II invincibility was anything but. A lot of the fault lay beside the Charles River, at the Harvard Business School. That, of course, is not fair to Harvard ... but the Harvard MBA-Strategic Planning received dogma of the time had reduced "management" to a dry, by-the-numbers exercise. Bob and I roamed the nation, looking at companies that worked, and we saw something else. "It" was "soft," by the Charles River Standard. It had to do with people & engagement in the work & love of quality & entrepreneurial instincts & values worth going to the mat for. We wrote about it, and to our delight ... and dismay ... the world listened.

The world listened not because of the scintillating prose, but because the competitive situation demanded it. Our wild "stuff" has now become commonplace. *Engage your folks. Make things that are cool and that work. Stick your neck out.* Our leading business strategist at the millennium's start, Gary Hamel, offers this as his #1 rule for success: **"Create a cause, not a business."**

That's all a long-winded way of saying that PASSION has ... finally! ... begun to become recognized as the staple of business ... not something that sits at the outside edge. Not an option. Waterman and I put it this way ... way back in 1982:

SOFT IS HARD. HARD IS SOFT.

It's the by-the-numbers "stuff" that's abstract and lifeless. (*Hard is soft.*) It's the people & passion stuff that moves mountains. King. Gandhi. Steinem. Picasso. Einstein. (*Soft is hard.*) Virgin Group

founder ... and brand maestro extraordinaire! ... Richard Branson put it this way: "The idea that business is just a numbers affair has always struck me as preposterous. For one thing, I've never been particularly good at numbers, but I think I've done a reasonable job with feelings. **And I'm convinced that it is feelings – and feelings alone – that account for the success of the Virgin brand and all of its myriad forms.**" (And myriad is the right word ... he's performed his Bright Red Virgin Magic in everything from airline service to financial services to the record business. An exceptional story. Virtually unique. Based on feelings. Period.

My Swedish pals Nordström and Ridderstråle join this parade in *Funky Business*. "In the funky village," they write, "real competition no longer revolves around market share. **We are competing for attention – mindshare and heartshare.**" Rolf Jensen, head of the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, adds his (brilliant) two cents worth: "We are in the twilight of a society based on data. **As information and intelligence become the domain of computers, society will place more value on the one human**

ability that cannot be automated: emotion. Imagination, myth, ritual – the language of emotion – will affect everything from our purchasing decisions to how we work with others.

Companies will thrive on the basis of their stories and myths.

Companies will need to understand that their products are less

important than their stories.” Scott Bedbury did a twofer. That is, played a lead role in the branding of both Nike and Starbucks. (Yeow.) “A Great Brand taps into emotions,” he writes. “Emotions drive most, if not all, of our decisions. A brand reaches out with a powerful connecting experience. It’s an emotional connecting point that transcends the product. **A great brand is a story that’s never completely told. A brand is a metaphorical story that can connect with something very deep – a fundamental appreciation of mythology.** Stories create the emotional context people need to locate themselves in a larger experience.” And Mr. Kunde says that’s a problem: **“Most executives have no idea how to add value to a market in the metaphysical world.** But that is what the world will cry out for in the future. There is no lack of ‘physical’ products to choose between.”

I could go on. And on. I’ve been doing so for the last 20 years. And I welcome the privilege to do so again, in this slight essay. I’m trained as an engineer. I understand what it takes to build a tall building. And a long-span bridge. In the words of the immortal Sergeant Joe Friday, “Just the facts, ma’am.” I don’t deny that you need to know your numbers. Know your demographics. On the other hand ... it all boils down to ... **WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU HERE? HOW ARE YOU UNIQUE? DOES IT MAKE A DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE? WHO CARES?** Those are the ultimate “emotional” questions. For ... Tom Peters. Winston Churchill. Martin Luther King, Jr. Eleanor Roosevelt. George W. Bush. And you and yours.

Right?

4. Unique or Bust.

There is no bigger word. None.

And the word is?

UNIQUE.

Unique means ... SINGULAR. Right? (And ... period.)

“Success,” says Tom Chappell, founder of Tom’s of Maine, “means never letting the competition define you. ***Instead you have to define yourself based on a point of view you care deeply about.***”

Brilliant. But even Tom C. can be upstaged. By ... ***the man*** ... the late Jerry Garcia ... he of The Grateful Dead. ***“You do not merely want to be the best of the best,”*** Mr. G. said at one point. ***“You want to be considered the only ones who do what you do.”*** They were. They did. They changed the world. Some have problems with him. I am his-their fan. Not quite a Deadhead, but a sympathizer ... to be sure. Very sure.

It’s actually quite easy to move from the world of the Dead to Martha’s Vineyard’s Polly Hill Arboretum. Stephen Spongberg, who runs this magnificent facility says, “We’re not going to be driven by where we think a funding agency would like to see us go. We’re going to build our case ... and then find an organization that agrees with us.”

Bless you, Mr. Spongberg. What he said, as I see it, is that he is very ... VERY ... clear that he knows ... the answer to ... WHO ARE WE?

Yes, unique is a big word. Very BIG. But if not unique ... why bother? (Again, right?)

4A. Dramatic Difference!

Doug Hall is the idea man. **The** “idea man.” (According, for example, to a recent *Inc.* cover story.) The former P&G marketer, now overseer of Eureka Ranch, has guided big corporation marketing team after big corporation marketing team to stunning new product breakthroughs. Now focused on translating these notions to smaller businesses, he has just released *Jump Start Your Business Brain*. In a foreword, I called it ...

SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPEALIDOCIOUS.

(I REALLY DID.) (I REALLY BELIEVE IT.) (FOR ONE THING, IT IS BASED ON A TON OF THAT “HARD DATA” ... SUPPORTING “SOFT IDEAS.”)

At the book’s heart are 3 “laws” of “marketing physics.” First ... **OVERT BENEFIT.** In short, the product or service’s **“One Great Thing.”** (1 or 2 “great things” is far better than 3 or more “great things,” the data shout.) Second ... **REAL REASON TO BELIEVE.** I.e.: Does the organization Really & Consistently Deliver that One Great Thing/Overt Benefit?

And Law #3 ...

DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE.

The Hard Data say/scream: Dramatic Difference makes a dramatic difference in top- & bottom-line success. Sadly, Hall reports, damn few (Very Damn Few) execs get it. For instance, 400 consumers are asked to evaluate a new product or service. They are asked 2 questions: (1) “How likely are you to purchase the new product or service?” (2) “How **unique** is the new product or service?” Execs – **no exceptions in 20 years, per Mr. Hall** – give a 95% to 100% weighting to “intent to purchase”; and a 0% to 5% weighting to “uniqueness.” Fact: **THEY GET IT ASS**

BACKWARDS. (Trust the data!)

TP: Review the last two sections – 4. & 4A. Brands that Matter: Unique. One Great Thing. Dramatic Difference. (Trust the Data.)

5. Brand = A Great Story!

Humans communicate via stories. Great leadership is great storytelling. Churchill. Gandhi. Lincoln. Reagan. Stories. Great Branding is ... a great story. Story ... a (VERY!) powerful word.

“Car designers need to create a story,” claims Freeman Thomas, co-designer of the new VW Beetle and designer of the Audi TT. “Every car provides an opportunity to create an adventure. The [Plymouth] Prowler makes you smile. Why? Because it’s focused. It has a plot, a reason for being, a passion.”

Wow! I love those words:

**Story.
Adventure.
Smile.
Focus.
Plot.
Reason for being.
Passion.**

But, I am especially enamored with ... ***plot***. Every training course has a ... *plot*. Every business process has a ... *plot*. Every form has a ... *plot*. As does every hard product and soft service. Plot suggests dynamics, Technicolor, coherence.

I tried out the plot idea at a seminar last year. I was talking to the execs of a catalog retailer about “brand position,” and looking for a hook.

Every catalogue, I posited, has a plot. I offered some of my evaluations. I went so far as to quantify: A plot score of 1 = Dull as a doornail, scattered and pointless. 10 = WOW, what a story!

Williams-Sonoma. Was a clear “10.” Founder Chuck Williams redefined the American kitchen 20 or so years ago. Now? I’d give W-S a 5. The quality is still top drawer, but the stories tend to re-runs. **Crate and Barrel.** A little bit bland for me. But, they have a mission. A point of view. A pretty decent plot. I gave them a 7.

Sharper Image. Love it or hate it, but when you open that Sharper Image catalogue, you know what you’re going to get. They get a 9 in my scoring scheme. The same heights for **Garnet Hill.**

And then there’s **L.L.Bean.** Oh, how I used to anxiously await the arrival of the latest Bean catalogue! Gave them a 12. In 1960. Today? I have no idea what the hell Bean stands for. The quality, of course, remains pretty darn good. But, the “plot”? Indiscernible. In a kindly mood, I offered a grade of 4.

But forget my rankings. They’re personal. The point is that this little concoction – using the idea of *plot* to think about catalogues – turned out to be a grand-slam home run. (According to the client, *my* scorekeeper.) I’ve trotted out the exercise a dozen times since. Incredible (appropriate term) how a single word can transform the way you look at the world. Plot!

Let the semantics fest continue. Now try “**experience.**” Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a whole book on the topic. A grand-slam home run of a book: *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage.* “Experiences,” the authors assert, “are as distinct from services as services are from goods.”

Experiences. Starbucks. “*We’ve identified a ‘third place,’*” District Manager Nancy Orsolini told us. “*And I really believe that sets us apart. The third place is that place that’s not work or home. It’s the place our customers come for refuge.*” “*What we sell,*” says a Harley Davidson executive quoted in *Results-Based Leadership*, “*is the ability for a 43-year-old accountant to dress in black leather, ride through small towns, and have people be afraid of him.*”

Love that! Love those plots! Love those stories! Love those experiences! P.S.: The idea is ubiquitous. I spoke to an association of Treasury Executives. The ultimate DBCs, right? (Dreary Bean Counters.) No! Treasury folks have a leading role in “making the business work.” They – as I saw it – provide Scintillating Business Experiences. Their work – at its best – has a Plot Line as provocative as marketing’s. E.g., the “friendliness” & security of a payment scheme at a B2B or B2C site. Treasury, then, is a Full-scale Member of the Brand Promise Team. (Agree?)

Hence, we add to this Heart of Branding message ...

What’s Your Story?

What’s the Plot?

6. Brand "Inside": The Systems & Talent Connection.

This is all astonishingly boring. **It's so damned obvious.** Emotion moves the world. If emotion moves the world ... then Brands move the world. It's so bloody damned obvious. And the brand ... is ... nothing more than the answer to ... WHO ARE WE? HOW ARE WE UNIQUE/DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT? WHO CARES?

All of this has been brewing within me for 20 years. And all of it came to a head during the couple of days I spent in Northern Europe with Jesper Kunde, the previously mentioned (several times) branding guru from Copenhagen. I listened as he gave a couple of presentations to European business leaders. In addition to the things that I have quoted from him before, he added one other remarkable comment. He said that: **Each & every *business process* should be directly aligned with & animated by the Brand-Value Promise.**

Brilliant. Simple. (Hard, that is. But simple in concept.) Obvious. BLOODY OBVIOUS. The brand is it. The brand is what we stand for. The brand is where the Market Capitalization comes from. So every damn system. HR. Finance. Procurement. Engineering. EVERY DAMN SYSTEM. Every damn system ... should do nothing more ... and nothing less ... than support and indeed magnify the Brand Promise.

Think about it. Try it out. Try it on a new training course. Try it on the benefits program. Try it on a business process in finance. ***Does this Business Process ... no matter how apparently humble ... Absolutely Positively Support & Magnify the Brand Promise?*** (I guarantee you ... and I've now had a little bit of experience ... that this is a daunting/awesome exercise.)

I tend repeatedly to use the term "Brand Inside." When we say "Brand," we normally refer to the marketing program, the logo, or a dozen things associated therewith. That's not wrong. But it's hardly right. Or complete. It misses the point. Frankly, it misses most of the point. It's "brand inside" that really matters. ***That is, the energy & spunk & vitality of the innards of the enterprise ... Brand INSIDE ... is the ultimate wellspring from which the devotion to the Brand Promise emerges.*** At Levi Strauss. Or Coca-Cola. At Charles Schwab. And Nike & Nokia.

Mr. Kunde gets part of it right. He says that every system needs to be aligned – EXACTLY – with the brand. But there is something that goes beyond that. Far beyond it. And that is:

TALENT = BRAND.

(See one of the other booklets in this series: *Talent!*)

My old McKinsey & Co. colleague, Ed Michaels, has spent the last several years digging into the topic that he calls the War For Talent. I could go on ... and on ... and on ... about what Michaels has been doing. But one “simple” notion sums it up perfectly, and summing it up is all that I have time for here. He says: “What’s your company’s EVP?” **EVP?** Obvious. Right? It stands for ...

Employee Value Proposition.

That is, what is the **Internal Brand Promise** that you make to your ...

employees? Is this an **ICPW/Insanely Cool Place to Work?** (Or not.) (Obviously – recall Section 4A – if it ain’t an Insanely Great Place to Work, then forget about Overt Benefit/Real Reason to Believe/Dramatic Difference.) And I’m not just talking here about high-tech companies like Intel or Cisco. I’m also talking about car dealerships. Community banks. Twenty-seven table Italian restaurants in cities of 50,000 people. Everything. Everybody.

So ...

What is your EVP?

All this came home to roost for me just a few weeks before I sat down to write this. I am privileged enough to have a house on Martha’s Vineyard. I had been there for a couple of days. Heading home. On the way to the Vineyard Haven-Woods Hole ferry. I drove past an A&P grocery store. On the outside I saw a big banner: *A&P Fun in the Sun Store.*

I don’t have any problem with that aspiration. I think it’s great, to tell the truth. But then I thought about the innards of the store. I thought about a checkout clerk. Call her Mary N. I thought about a stocking clerk. Call him Ricardo D. Does that stocking clerk or checkout clerk *really believe* that she or he is an Insanely Great Contributor to the “Fun in the Sun Store?”

Answer: I doubt it.

Which led me to a great deal of reflection. Great slogans and logos and brand promises are ...

TOTAL, EGREGIOUS, IMMORAL, COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BULLSHIT. **Unless** the “talent” ... the stocking clerks and checkout clerks ... buy in. One hundred percent. Or if not 100%, at least 98%.

Branding *is* about the logo. The slogan. The marketing campaign. The advertising ... and the advertising budget. But in the end, branding is about ... CREDIBILITY. Do those ... the “99.99%” ... who work in the trenches ... buy the act?

I spoke at a seminar for a large financial services company. I listened to the CEO give a fine address. (Truly, it was damn good, and I’m a damn good judge.) He laid out a Vision. (And don’t forget to capitalize the “V” in Vision!) I thought it made sense. But it was a stretch. A damn big

stretch. I spoke after the Big Dude. And I warned ... and challenged ... the several thousand people in the room.

I said that the Brand Promise (Vision) was important. And it made all sorts of sense. But I also said that unless they-in-the-room Totally Bought In ... then the whole exercise was ... a crock. Does this Brand Promise make sense ... to them? *As individuals? In their daily work? With their clients?*

And if not, I said to them, please ... **PLEASE** ... raise hell with the CEO and tell him why the products and services that you guys offer do not add up to the Promise/Dramatic Difference that he has just laid out in his "Vision."

(I'm not at all sure that I'll be invited back. Maybe I pissed him off. But there is also a chance, albeit a small chance, that even "he" learned a little bit from what I was saying. He had gone on at length to talk about how the "top team" had worked on the vision. Top team, schlop team. *Who the bloody hell cares?* "Visions" only matter ... if the PFC ... private first class ... buys in ... and will run into machine gun fire because of his belief in that vision.)

7. Getting Started.

As I said ... the whole brand thing is ... simple. (And ... totally ... IMPOSSIBLE.) That's what is so incredible about it. So important. So frustrating. So cool.

WHO ARE I/YOU/WE? WHO CARES? WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

I like to take my pals (Clients) through a little exercise. I call it the "*Brand Promise Exercise.*" It goes like this:

1. **WHO ARE WE?** (a) Write a two-page Short Story. (With a Very Cool Plot Line.) (b) Then: Write it on one page. Better yet, capture it as a poem or song! (Yes, including the Brand Promise/Song of the Finance Department.) (c) Then: Reduce it to 25 words. Perhaps 10.
2. List **THREE** ways in which we are **UNIQUE** to our Clients. (Unique = Unique.)
3. Spell out **OUR DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE**. State Our One Great & Dramatic Thing in 25 words or less.
4. Who are **THEY**. (Competitors. Explain ... **EXACTLY** ... who Each One Is ... in 25 Powerful Words or Less.) List three distinct "us"/"them" differences. **DIFFERENT = DIFFERENT. No bull here.**

5. Try the “results” of all this on your teammates. TALK ABOUT IT. ARGUE ABOUT IT. SERIOUSLY. AT LENGTH.
6. Try the results on a friendly Client. Try the results on a Skeptical Client.
7. Try the results on a cross section of Check Out & Stocking Clerks! (Etc.)

It’s simple. It’s impossible. It demands your total attention. Your attention to ... WHO YOU ARE ... WHO WE ARE ... WHO CARES ... WHY. (Right?)

There are, to be sure, dozens of ways to get “into this.” Our friend Jesper Kunde has the folks who work for him write an essay on “*Who we are.*” I like that. In my own case, this idea came distinctly home when I made the decision to provide BOOKMARKS in my new books in the *Work Matters* series. I thought it was a great idea. That is, I thought it was a great idea ... until I sat down ... to write the copy ... for a Bookmark. Which meant I had about 15 words to summarize ... WHO I WAS AND WHAT I HAD BEEN DOING FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS AND WHY IT OUGHT TO MATTER TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF READERS. Yikes. In our training around the topic of Brand You, we find that the most useful exercise is having folks concoct a Yellow Pages ad ... for themselves. Many tell us it’s the toughest task they remember doing. In our WOW Projects training, the centerpiece is preparing “the elevator speech” ... the 90-second, utterly persuasive spiel you’d use to get support for your project if you inadvertently found yourself alone with your Big Boss for a ten-floor ride! All of these exercises aim at one thing: capturing the essence of the Brand Promise in a succinct & compelling fashion.

If the company is Big, the Brand Promise is worth ... billions. Truth be known, Hundreds of Billions. Of Dollars, that is. Of course there are issues about appropriate financial controls. But the Brand Issue ... the heart of it all ... is about ... you guessed it ... one more time ... WHO ARE WE? WHO CARES? WHY? One of my good friends says that the essence of the essence is ... actually ... *Psychotherapy*. That is, the answer to “Who are we?” is a psychotherapeutic issue ... for me ... for the 27-person department ... for the 27,000-person corporation.

8. Who Are We, Anyway?

I say it again. (I’m sorry for the repetition.) Branding is simple. (Branding is impossible.)

Message:

REAL Branding is personal.
REAL Branding is integrity.
REAL Branding is consistency & freshness.
REAL Branding is the answer to WHO ARE WE? WHAT’S

OUR STORY? WHY ARE WE HERE? HOW ARE WE UNIQUE? WHAT IS OUR ONE GREAT THING? DOES IT MAKE A DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE? WHO CARES?

REAL Branding is why I/you/we [all] get out of bed in the morning.

REAL Branding can't be faked.

REAL Branding is a systemic, 24/7, all-departments, all-hands affair.

9. Brand Leadership: **Passion in the Open.**

Leadership. Branding. Brand promise. Passion. Make a difference. Whatever!

“Leadership is a performance,” says Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina. “You have to be conscious of your behavior, because everybody else is.” Gandhi put it this way: **“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”** And Franklin Roosevelt added to that: “It’s necessary for the President to be the nation’s #1 actor.”

Leadership *is* an act. So is the Brand Promise. In the best sense of the word. The brand promise is about ...

A Saga Called Things We Care About.

(Right?)

I’m befuddled by all of this. I’m impressed by it. I’m turned on by it. I care about it. “Branding” to me is not about marketing “tricks.” It is about ... well, you’ve heard me say it about 100 times before in this short essay ... WHO WE ARE ... WHY IT MATTERS ... WHO CARES?

“Leaders achieve their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they relate,” says Harvard leadership guru Howard Gardner in *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. “In addition to communicating, leaders embody these stories.” “Stories have identity,” Gardner continues, “narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed ... constitute the ... *single* most powerful weapon in a leader’s arsenal.”

I love all of this. Leadership as Inspired Storytelling. Stories. Myths. Rituals. It’s the FDR secret. The Gandhi secret. Every leader’s secret. (And, alas, it is ... mostly ... a “secret.” Why? Beats me!)

As I said before, leading strategy guru Gary Hamel asserts that the #1 secret for business success ... in these Totally Madcap Times ... is: **“Create a cause, not a business.”** Well, my old pals Ron Rubin and Stuart Avery Gold get it! They are the honchos of the Republic of Tea. In their new book, *success@life*, they say, “As Ministers of The Republic of Tea, our not-so-covert mission is to carry out a Tea Revolution.” I love that. Love it! Simply love it! (WOW! How cool. Don’t you wish they were your CEOs?) “*Our free and open immigration policies,*” the R of T honchos continue, “*welcome all who wish to flee the tyranny of coffee-crazed lives, and escape the frazzled fast paced race-to-stay-in-one-place existence that it fuels. In our tiny land, we have come to learn that coffee is about speeding up and losing sight, while tea is about slowing down and taking a look. Because tea is not just a beverage, it is a consciousness-altering substance that allows for a way of getting in touch with and taking pleasure of the beauty and wonder that life has to offer.*”

You might find that to be crap. (I don’t. At all.) My point is that is the essence of the ... Brand Promise. Something you **care** about. Something that **matters**. Something you’ll **stand for**. Something that, perhaps, **17,000** people who work for you will care about. (And wouldn’t that be cool?)

There is a “guru” who is hotter than any other on the management scene as I write this. His name is **Ben Zander**. He is the Conductor of the Boston Philharmonic. And highly regarded in that role. Ben has said a lot of things that make sense. That turn me on. But there is one that I love above all others: **“I am a dispenser of enthusiasm.”** How cool. The essence of [BRAND] leadership. But Ben didn’t get there first. Perhaps Napoleon did: **“A leader is a dealer in hope.”** I love these ideas. In general. Because they reflect what I think about life.

But I love these ideas because they reflect ... far more important ... what I believe about Branding. Branding is about ... **ENTHUSIASM. HOPE.**

I’m not dwelling on false promises here. I don’t believe in false promises. I’m 58, so I have heard many false promises. But I’m talking here about promises ... that live up to their ... Promise. Brands that matter. People ... and organizations ... that **Make a Difference**. That’s the whole ... **damn** ... bloody ... idea of Branding and of the Brand Promise.

Right?

Brands exude respect?

Right?

Harvard Sociology Professor Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot gave us a magnificent book. It has a one-word title. The title: *Respect*. She says many things that are brilliant. But this is the one I loved: “It was much later that I realized Dad’s secret. He gained respect by giving it. He talked and listened to the fourth-grade kids in Spring Valley who shined shoes the same way he talked and listened to a

bishop or a college president. ***He was seriously interested in who you were and what you had to say.***”

I do love that. I love that so much that I could weep.

Parker Palmer has written another magnificent book. Title: *The Courage to Teach*. “In every class I teach,” he writes, “my ability to connect with my students and to connect them with the subject depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my self-hood – and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning.”

I weep at all of this. I know how much it sounds like pap. I know ... well ... how much it sounds glib. But I think that’s wrong. Disastrously wrong. Brands are about ... IMAGINATION ... PROMISE ... RESPECT. (“A leader is a dealer in hope.” – Napoleon) (“I am a dispenser of enthusiasm.” – Ben Zander)

But let’s get back to Mr. Palmer, in his book *The Courage to Teach*. “It is impossible to claim that all good teachers use similar techniques,” he writes. “Some lecture non-stop and others speak very little. Some stay close to their material, and others loose the imagination. Some teach with a carrot and others teach with a stick. But in every instance, good teachers share one trait: ***a strong sense of personal identity infuses their work.*** ‘Doctor A is really *there* when he teaches.’ ‘Mr. B has such enthusiasm for his subjects.’ ‘You can tell that this is really Prof. C’s life.’ ” Parker Palmer goes on: “One student said she could not describe her good teachers because they differed so greatly, one from another. But she could describe her bad teachers because they were all the same: *‘their words float somewhere in front of their faces, like the balloon speech in cartoons.’* ”

I kid you not. I’m 58. I do not wear rose-colored glasses. I did weep when I read this. **There are those who ... CONNECT. And there are those who do not.**

Now in my world, at least relative to this essay, this is all about Branding. Why branding matters. Branding is worth ... BILLIONS. Truth be known, Hundreds of Billions. Of Dollars, that is. And branding is about ... I believe ... **connection.**

I wrote something about leadership recently. I surprised myself. I said, “Leadership is all about love!” It’s not a soft statement. IT’S THE ULTIMATE “HARD” STATEMENT. Leadership is about ... ***Churchill & Gandhi & Einstein ... Passion ... Enthusiasm ... Appetite for Life ... Engagement ... Commitment ... Great Causes and Determination to Make a Damn Difference ... Shared Adventures ... Bizarre Failures ... Growth ... Insatiable Appetite for Change.***

As usual, I say: Right?

I hate Dilbert. Not just because author Scott Adams sells more books than I do. (Of course, being a garden-variety human being, I’m jealous.) I laugh at Dilbert ... but I hate him because ... the strip exudes ... cynicism. And I hate cynicism. I’m 58. I don’t have that many years to go. I would like to make those years count. I care. Care passionately. And people who don’t care ... appall me. In any walk of life. Street sweeper. Top engineer at Cisco Systems. I care. I hope you care.

I've lived in Silicon Valley for about three decades. I've seen it all. (And that's damn close to the truth.) There is one guy I love more than anybody else who has inhabited that Valley. Steve Jobs. Apple founder. He may not be quite as business-aggressive as Microsoft boss Bill Gates. But Steve is the one who really made this revolution happen. The Apple was the engine of all that has followed. Here is my favorite Steveism ...

“Let’s make a dent in ... the universe.”

How sweet that is.

Most of us won't “make a dent in the universe.” But at least – and every one of us has this ability – we can try.

(Right?)

**Who Are You?
What’s Your Story?
Why Are You Here?
How Are You Unique?
Does It Make a Dramatic Difference?
Who Cares?**

It's the ... Heart of Branding.

