

# What Great Brands Do

*"When you can't see any daylight between what you believe, what you practice, what you offer and what you say about yourself, you are doing what great brands do."*

If you want to dramatically improve your company, the solution may be right under your nose – in your brand. The trouble is that average businesses use their brand as an outwardly facing symbol or a message. Denise Lee Yohn argues that only when their brand becomes who they are and the compass for all their decisions, can they change their game.

In *What Great Brands Do*, Denise shares her exercises, tools and action steps that she's used in her twenty-five years of consulting with dozens of Fortune 1000 brands. They are organized into seven chapters that describe the seven most distinctive principles of what great brands do (and don't do!). When your company adopts all these principles, your brand will be transformed to greatness!

## The Golden Egg

### 7 Principles

*"Your brand is the experience that is actually delivered and communicated through every single thing you do, every day, around the clock."*

What is the one quality that ultimately separates all great brands from the rest? Denise calls it her eighth principle. "Great Brands Do Brand as Business." In other words, what they tell the world about themselves is also how they behave. There is an alignment of words and actions.

It can't be delegated to a department. It must be driven and embraced company wide. How do you do that? Denise summarizes the many things needed to build a great brand into seven principles.

- 1) **Start inside** – Culture change is the first step because it determines whether employees see their connection to the deeper meaning of the brand.
- 2) **Avoid selling products** – Make emotional connections. People buy based on how the brand makes them feel, not on the logic of features and benefits alone. The people lining up for the latest iPhone seem like a perfect example of this.
- 3) **Ignore trends** – Trends may work in the short term. But to create enduring resonance, anticipate the larger cultural movements.
- 4) **Don't chase customers** – Identify your best target customers and focus on the unique value you bring them.
- 5) **Sweat the small stuff** – Organizational silos result in less than stellar customer experiences. Go to great lengths to close the gaps in the customer touch points with your brand.
- 6) **Commit and stay committed** – Consciously forgo opportunities for short-term growth that are not consistent with your brand.

7) **Never have to “give back”** – When you focus on creating value for all stakeholders and having an overall beneficial impact on the world you build ‘giving back’ into your business and do not then need to make side contributions.

It’s not enough to do one or two. Do all seven if you want to build a great brand.

## **Gem # 1**

### **Brand as a GPS**

| *“The traditional definition of a brand as a mere marketing asset needs to end – the sooner the better.”*

Putting your brand out to the world is a nice start and typically what most people do. Saying something about yourself is far easier than doing something about it. But imagine if you did. Imagine if you started living what you profess to the world.

When companies move from using their brand as a symbol or a message to gain a competitive edge to using it as a strategic management tool to guide all decisions, they change.

Because I work in the pharmaceutical industry, to understand this better, I imagined two pharmaceutical companies who both profess to be patient focused in their vision and mission statements (their outward expression of their brand). But internally:

Leaders at pharmaceutical company A:

- invest in fresh new advertising to build awareness in their “patient centricity”
- assign a Director of Patient Centricity
- fund various programs for patients
- donate to projects their patients are interested in

A year or two later a senior executive is overheard saying “We can’t afford to be patient centric anymore!”

Leaders at pharmaceutical company B:

- use their vision and mission as a compass for all decisions
- embed patient centricity in their culture
- talk about health outcome goals for patients instead of sales goals
- teach their people how to get in touch with their ‘why’ and the difference they can make to patients
- coach their people to think first about how their actions can help the patient
- change their bonus structure to award patient outcomes, not dollar outcomes

A year or two later, a senior executive is overheard saying “We’ve never seen such engagement in our people or our health care partners. We are serving more people than ever before and our dramatic profit increase is enabling us to serve even more patients!”

Sadly, only an elite few are in tune with what company B is doing; in tune with what Denise is teaching. These elite use their brand vision as a driver for everything their company does rather than just a goodwill producer.

## Gem # 2

### Start inside

*"One mark of a great brand is that even former employees remain proud to say they helped make the brand great."*

The starting point for a company to strengthen its brand is through its culture or its people. It is the employees that will turn the brand promise into breakthrough customer experiences.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Denise before her talk at Rotman's School of Management in Toronto. My ah-ha came when we discussed a visual around this idea.

Imagine one person or department shining a torch outwardly (eg. the director of patient centricity). Now imagine if that person turned around and shone that torch inwardly. Her torch sparks the torches of all the employees. Now together, they have an inferno!

How can we turn that torch inwardly? We can think of it as moving our brand efforts from project based to personnel based.

Do your people know what your brand promise is and what it means to them? If your people don't understand your brand, how can they possibly communicate it to your customers? Here are three ideas Denise shares:

- 1) **Define** – Help people identify what the brand stands for.
- 2) **Educate** – Help people identify why their brand's promise is important to them and how it can bring meaning to them.
- 3) **Activate** – Share ways that they can live the brand. Empower them with tools to infuse the brand into their daily decisions and behaviors.

And look at whether the following are brand focused (or in our example patient focused):

- 1) Leadership language and messages
- 2) Hiring criteria
- 3) Training/coaching
- 4) Bonus/award structures

You may have other ideas. Please share them below.

Saying what you want people to think of you is easy. Doing the work to make it real is a much bigger project. Only a few are willing to put forth the effort to achieve this greatness. Will it be you? When assessing the seven principles above, which one(s) are you doing well and which one(s) do you need to work on? What's stopping you? Greatness awaits.

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## **ABOUT Jill Donahue**

Everything I do is focused on improving patient outcomes. I do that by being a student and teacher of ethical, effective influence. I teach pharma people and health care professionals how to improve their ability to influence others...

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