

Book review: What Great Brands Do

by Jeff
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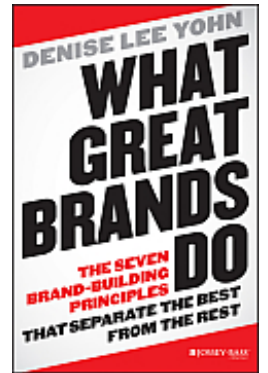
***What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest* by Denise Lee Yohn**

There are a lot of books about branding. The better ones take the high road and are quite inspiring about what a brand could be. A lot of the time, that sense of inspiration fades quickly when you ask, *Yes, but what does it mean in practice?*

Here's a branding book that doesn't leave you hanging. *What Great Brands Do* is relentlessly practical about brands. It starts with the assumption that great brand make their brand their business, not something they add on to their business to make it look better.

The book is about commercial branding, so there are a few things that don't quite connect for nonprofit brands. But a lot of it does.

Here are the main points, the things great brands do. I've interpreted them a bit for the nonprofit sector:



- **Great brands start inside.** Your brand is not something an outsider can create for you, and it doesn't live in the pages of a brand guidelines book. It's who you are as an organization. You can't fake that or count on the marketing department to gin it up.
- **Great brands avoid selling products.** This is one way commercial and nonprofit brands are fundamentally different. Successful fundraising sells "products" -- specific actions donors can make possible. (I long for the day when fundraisers are so specific and product-focused that we have to encourage them to consider the aspirational facet of those products.)
- **Great brands ignore trends.** Weak brands, especially weak nonprofit brands, spend a lot of energy running after the Next Big Thing. They think if they can just catch the wave, everything will be better. It doesn't work that way. Great brands help create the waves that the others try to catch. They do that by being relevant to their donors.
- **Great brands don't chase customers.** They have something a specific group of customers (donors) want, and they focus on making it great for those people.
- **Great brands sweat the small stuff.** Getting the details right is a *big deal*. Much more important than the visible and obvious manifestations of brand. For nonprofits, this means things like having error-free donor data, friendly and available donor service, prompt and relevant receipting. It's those small but important encounters with you that shape your donors' sense of what your organization is about.
- **Great brands commit and stay committed.** A great brand is not a management fad. It's something that you stay with.

- **Great brands never have to "Give back."** For many commercial brands, "giving back" is an activity they do that's unrelated to their business, attempting to appear to be better citizens. Since doing good is built into the mission of every nonprofit, this is seldom a problem in our sector. But the reminder is helpful: Doing good isn't merely an item on the checklist; it's the core of who you are.

If you've struggled with what your brand should be and what it means, you should read this book.

The author also produces a very useful blog, [Brand-as-Business Bites](#).

Available at [Amazon](#) and at [Powell's](#).