

Fusing These Two Key Facets of Business Will Supercharge Your Success

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Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) recently spoke with [Denise Lee Yohn](#), an expert brand-building and company culture strategist who has worked for global brands including Burger King, Target and Land Rover. Yohn shared insights about the importance of integrating company brand and culture from her new book, [Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies](#), available from booksellers on March 13.

As entrepreneurs striving to both define and achieve success on our own terms, many of us look to iconic brands—the ones we grew up with, introduced our families to and that are still part of our daily routines. Their success and staying power make us think, "How can I replicate that with my own brand?" Rarely, if ever, is that thought followed by, "[I wonder what their company culture is like?](#)" That's because few of us instinctively link a company's brand to its culture—how they are interconnected, inform a company's relationship with customers, and create a foundation for growth via staff development and overall morale.

Denise Lee Yohn is a leading strategist who has studied the connection between brand and culture and how the two work together to garner business success. Here's what she shared:

Many companies treat brand and culture as two very different concepts; you say that's a mistake. What are they missing by not taking an integrated approach?

DLY/ Your brand and culture should be inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing so the way your organization operates supports your brand aspiration. If your brand and culture aren't aligned and integrated, at best, your culture-building efforts go to waste. You might end up with happy, productive employees, but they won't necessarily produce the results you're looking for. At worst, a lack of brand-culture fusion damages customer relationships. Some of the most public failures in recent years—Wells Fargo, Uber, Volkswagen—were so damaging in part because the brand images of these companies had been so wildly different from what they were actually like.

In the first few pages of *Fusion*, you use the example of Amazon to dispel the notion that company culture has to be "warm and fuzzy." Why was it important to make that point?

DLY/ One of the key takeaways from the book is that there is no single "right" culture that all organizations must have. Most of the rhetoric on culture these days suggests that you must have a benevolent, supportive culture and managers must be nurturing and inclusive—and that's just wrong. The Amazon example shows how a challenging, demanding culture has produced tremendous success at that company. Highlighting that fact demonstrates that each organization should have a unique culture—one that is aligned and integrated with its brand. I wanted to get that point across from the very beginning so readers would keep that in mind as they progressed through the book.

Fusion lays out an extensive approach to understanding and developing an integrated brand culture. Every chapter begins with an outline of what to expect. Is the intention that leaders will use it as a manual?

DLY/ Yes, my intent is for the book to be inspiring and instructive, so it lays out a blueprint for culture-building. Most leaders don't know how to develop a healthy, sustainable, valuable culture. The book provides specific strategies, tools and even an online assessment to help them.

Throughout *Fusion*, you tout communication as a key to brand-culture fusion. Why is it so important?

DLY/ Effective communication is the key to successful leadership and brand-culture fusion requires strong leadership, but most leaders don't communicate well. According to talent management firm Aon Hewitt, only 46 percent of employees feel management communicates effectively. Human resources firm Towers Perrin has found that only 51 percent of employees believe that their leaders generally tell them the truth. To cultivate your desired culture, you need to be able to tell compelling stories and convey a clear, convincing case for it.

In the book, you write, "One reason it's critical to empower leaders at all levels to cultivate your desired culture is that leaders are responsible for the most important tasks in any organization: hiring, firing and promoting employees." How do hiring and firing impact brand-culture fusion?

DLY/ You need to ensure that everyone in your organization shares a common purpose and values so everyone's attitudes and behaviors are unified and aligned with your desired brand identity. Moreover, by using your values in people decisions, you show everyone how committed you are to the culture. Hanging on to a high-performer who doesn't embrace your organization's culture sends a strong message that your values really don't matter.

Having worked in brand-culture integration for more than 25 years, why did you choose this moment to write and release this book?

DLY/ A culture crisis threatens to disrupt corporations the way the financial crisis disrupted the marketplace a decade ago. Between the incidences of sexual harassment and discrimination, the widespread lack of engagement among employees, and the difficulties with diversity and inclusion that many companies are experiencing, a leader's approach to organizational culture is under tremendous scrutiny and pressure. I wanted to crack the code on culture-building. My experiences working with clients and research on many other companies clearly taught me that great brands are built from the inside out.

If a reader took away just one thing from your book, what would you want it to be?

DLY/ I'd return to where we started this conversation: Beyond a certain baseline, there is no universal definition of a "good" culture for all organizations. There is a unique culture that is right for your organization.