

Want a Great Brand? Build a Great Culture

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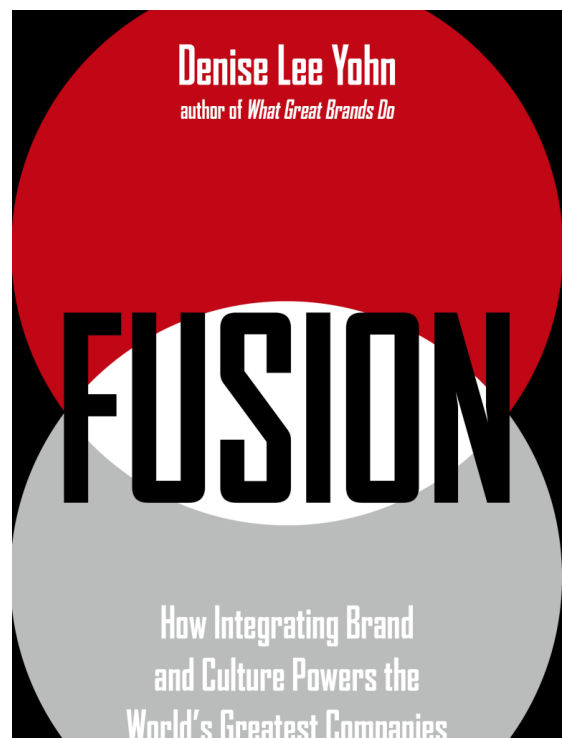


At a time when corporate America is facing a culture crisis—from increasing claims of sexual harassment to declining employee engagement—*Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies* (Nicholas Brealey, 2018) by Denise Lee Yohn cracks the code on culture-building. Most leaders put culture and brand in different silos (HR and marketing), Yohn writes, which leads to a disconnect between how companies behave on the inside (culture) and how they are perceived on the outside (brand). Her book teaches leaders how to cultivate a distinct organizational culture that is fully aligned with brand identity.

Yohn recently spoke to the *HR Magazine Book Blog* about the book.

Why did you write this book?

I first discovered the importance of corporate culture in general in my work for my first book, *What Great Brands Do* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014). In all the research and analysis I did, one



theme kept rising to the top: brand-building starts inside. Great brands start brand-building inside their organizations and don't come from external communications such as logos, PR and ad campaigns. If you want a great brand, you must cultivate a strong brand-led culture inside your organization.

But as I've talked with business leaders around the world about workplace culture, I've found widespread misperceptions about culture-building. I wrote this book to set the record straight on how to cultivate a culture that builds a great brand and produces great business results.

You've said that a culture crisis threatens to disrupt corporate America today as much as the financial crisis did a decade ago. Can you explain?

Just read the business headlines. Every day we hear about more claims of sexual harassment and discrimination, about companies held back by the lack of diversity and equality in their workforces. And only 13 percent of American workers are engaged at work, despite the fact that organizations currently spend more than \$100 billion annually to improve employee engagement. All of this means there is a lot of risk, cost, waste and ultimately poor performance because business leaders aren't cultivating healthy, valuable, sustainable workplace cultures.

What does culture have to do with brand-building? Aren't these separate functions?

I've discovered just the opposite. Your culture and brand can't be separate. Many culture-building tactics might fall under the purview of HR and marketing may spearhead many brand-building activities, but if you don't develop a mutually reinforcing, interdependent relationship between culture and brand, you miss the opportunity to unleash their combined power and you put your business at risk.

What happens when a company's brand and culture are NOT aligned?

First, your culture-building efforts are likely to go to waste. Your objective shouldn't be to simply produce happy, engaged employees—it should be to develop happy, engaged employees who achieve the right results. A brand-culture mismatch also makes situations like what happened at Wells Fargo even worse than they would be alone. Not only were employees' deceptive practices wrong, they were also in direct conflict with the company's wholesome image. It takes even more effort to reverse the damage and restore a brand when such gaps exist.

More importantly, a disconnect between what your organization values on the inside and how it is perceived on the outside can damage customer relationships. Customers have the ability—and the proclivity—to see if you are actually operating the way you say you are. If they sense you are being inauthentic, they will take their business elsewhere.

You argue that there is no universal definition of a good culture. Why is that?

Beyond a certain base line, there is no one single "right" culture for every organization. Each organization is different, so its culture should be, too. There is a unique culture that is right for

your workforce.

What are some best practices of building a great brand that aligns to the culture?

In my book, I outline the strategies that organizational leaders should implement to integrate and align their brands and cultures. The first three steps, which lay the groundwork for brand-culture fusion, are:

--**Identify** and clearly articulate a single overarching purpose and one set of core values.

--**Determine** your desired culture.

--**Take ownership** of the process, as a leader.

Then there are five strategies for aligning brand and culture.

--**Organize and operate.** Apply organizational design and run your operations to give your organization the structure and processes necessary to operationalize your culture.

--**Create culture-changing employee experiences.** Deliberately design and manage your company's employee experience—just as you would customer experiences—so that every facet of an employee's career journey encourages and enables your desired culture.

--**Sweat the small stuff.** Ensure that even the most mundane or minute aspects of your organization—from its "rituals" and "artifacts" (things your organization regularly does and creates to highlight important achievements) to its policies and procedures—advance and support your desired culture.

--**Ignite transformation.** Use employee brand engagement tactics—such as employee brand engagement toolkits, creative communications campaigns and employee brand engagement experiences—to kick-start the fusion process and to refocus momentum when necessary.

--**Build your brand from the inside out.** If your culture is so entrenched that it doesn't make sense to try to change it to achieve brand-culture fusion, leverage your existing culture to define or redefine your brand identity.

How does brand-culture fusion impact employee engagement?

Most employee engagement efforts fall short because they're designed to cultivate employees' commitment to the organization and their jobs in generic, general ways. With brand-culture fusion, the objective is to develop a more precise and robust approach that establishes a critical link between employees and customers. Employee brand engagement involves cultivating a positive, multidimensional connection between employees and the brand that results in greater knowledge of and commitment to customer experience excellence.

As a company works to align its brand and culture, how can leaders make sure this happens consistently throughout the organization?

Top leaders of the organization must take responsibility for driving alignment by making it a

priority and prioritizing strategies to support it, directing resources and attention to it, and holding managers throughout the organization accountable for achieving it.

When will leaders know they have achieved brand-culture fusion?

I've provided a list of brand-culture fusion success indicators in the book. They fall into four categories:

- Purpose and values integration.
- Employee experience–customer experience integration.
- Internal brand alignment.
- Employee brand engagement.

Also, I've developed a [free, online assessment tool](#) that enables you to determine the state of fusion at your organization.

Denise Lee Yohn has more than 25 years of business experience and is a leading authority on building and positioning exceptional brands.

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



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