

# Book review: Compliance lessons of fusing brand and culture

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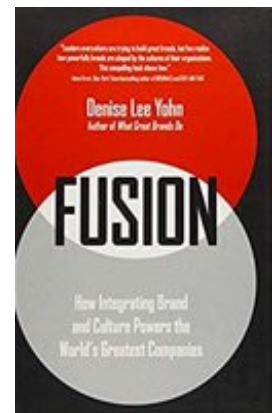
When I started *My Compliance Library* column, I wanted to have a certain amount of “randomness” around the books I selected, which so far have covered works addressing behavioral risk and corruption in China. In this edition, I will share my reflections on a book I recently read that had a major impact on how I view the relationship between branding and compliance. That probably doesn’t sound intuitive, but author Denise Lee Yohn, in a wonderful work, “Fusion, How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World’s Greatest Companies,” sets out a compelling proposition on how we can inspire our employees, just as much as our customers, in our branding initiatives.

Click [here](#) to purchase Denise Lee Yohn’s “Fusion, How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World’s Greatest Companies” from Amazon.com.

Kindle: \$15.99; Hardcover: \$17.72; Paperback: \$11.76

## About the Author

Blending a fresh perspective, over twenty-five years of experience, and a talent for inspiring audiences, San Francisco-based Denise Lee Yohn is the author of *What Great Brands Do* and a leading authority on building and positioning exceptional brands.



As she shares in her introduction, brand-culture fusion is the “full integration and alignment of external brand identity and internal organizational culture.” And if you think that’s already a given in your organization, according to research that Yohn shares by Tenet partners, “only 28 percent of employees strongly agree that they know their company’s brand values, and only one in five employees strongly agree that company leaders communicate how employees should live their company’s brand values.”

But what piqued my interest in this book was my corporate work. Usually, before a corporate engagement, I will spend some time on the multinational’s website, collecting background material for the live presentation. And what I have found is that even for organizations that have been through regulatory issues, external messages of ethics and culture, as amplified on those corporate websites, are always quite strong and persuasive. Furthermore, those narratives aren’t buried in a drag-down menu or back page—they are usually front and center, often embedded in the CEO “message.” This is where we often find organizations articulating their corporate principles, calling attention to their “commitment” and “values,” and more

recently we see the addition of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to convey a commitment to ethical business practices and sustainable growth. In our world of compliance, it's our stated values, right out there, for everyone to see.

I started to ponder: Are the employees of those same corporations understanding and embracing those professed values? And more importantly, are they inspired by them? Or is this part of a branding process that's more geared to external clients, shareholders, and consumers? I started to think about Yohn's model that if today's multinationals understood that when internal culture is *fused* with external brand power, "you create an interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between how your organization thinks and acts on the inside and how it is perceived and experienced on the outside."

Taking this book to our compliance world, I see tremendous upside. If we can fuse our internal values with external branding, ethics and compliance ceases to be a support function of rules, policies and procedures, but instead becomes a part of an organizational design in which internal purpose is aligned with external goals. It accelerates the compliance objective of anchoring and integrating stated values with operational values. But to achieve this alignment, marketing and compliance leaders need to partner to ensure the internal behavioral focus that might preoccupy a compliance team is in lockstep with the outward-facing goals of a branding and marketing program. We often talk about who is seated at the table when it comes to having compliance as a part of business discussions. This discussion extends that seating arrangement to one we don't hear too often: branding and compliance leaders working together both strategically and tactically.

You might still ask, "What does external branding have to do with a compliance program?" Simply: everything. When we think of our compliance initiatives that run the gamut from in-person training to online training to codes of conduct and workshops, where and when does the power of the brand, the *why and purpose* of the work that front-line teams perform, come into that discussion? I don't see it often, but one example that I did witness brings this untapped and what might seem abstract potential to life.

I was presenting at a pharma company, where business, compliance, and support leaders were in attendance. Earlier in the morning, before my own presentation, I heard a young woman tell her story of how the company's products and technology saved her life, and ultimately her daughter's as well, as they both suffered from a life-threatening genetic disease.

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Through pictures and her narrative, this young woman captured the *why* of the brand, which you could see cascade to *everyone* in that room, no matter how they were involved in the process, whether on the front lines or part of manufacturing. That was fusion to me, where the

external brand and messages of that pharma company also translated into an *internal* understanding and embracing of the company's purpose. As Yohn shares, "your brand isn't just what you *say*, it's what you *do*," and if those values can be intertwined and anchored to compliance initiatives and messages, it brings incredible life and opportunity to an organization, where ethics and compliance are anchored to real-world brand values. It's when we move from "I don't bribe, because it's against the law," to "I don't bribe, because it's abhorrent to our values and purpose."

Once those values are fused, it's time to share them throughout the organization, where that sense of purpose, even for a globally disbursed workforce, "unifies your employees, counteracting the divisions that naturally occur in work environments that are increasingly diverse, divided and distributed." Again, having worked with organizations that have globally disbursed teams and diversified portfolios of products and services, that's a tall order. But if everyone in the organization understands and embraces the *why* of their values and the brand, then aren't we adding a layer of foundation to our ethics and compliance program that transcends those differences? As Yohn states, a clear and compelling overarching purpose "unifies people with a higher calling that transcends functions, geographies, and even histories," adding that overarching purpose and core values "establish non-negotiables—the standards to which everyone will be held." Now, that sounds like a compliance message to me!

I am also in complete agreement with the author that "leaders in the middle layers of your organization hierarchy also need to be thoroughly engaged in cultivating your culture, because of their tremendous influence on the rest of your workforce." Indeed, that's the one layer of any organization that can turn the volume up or down on the importance of *how* business gets done, when middle management addresses their teams on the importance of getting the business done. Call them compliance and/or brand ambassadors, they are critical to the enterprise. Yohn takes it further, calling them the "critical group in any culture transformation effort." Simply said, they wield great influence, internally and externally.

Even a code of conduct or employee manual can become transformative, notes Yohn. Such written materials can be used to express a company's "unique core values, show employees how to work together to fulfill its overarching purpose, and to convey its distinctive personality." I have seen such codes of conducts and manuals in my corporate work. Those that inspire are a blend of content and art-form that takes compliance messages off the page and brings them to life for each individual employee. As Yohn says, when it comes to internal communications, manuals, etc., upholding the same high standards as if you were running a marketing campaign is "even more important, since these employee communications give you the chance to reinforce your brand message by embodying your brand attributes and personality."

As the author concludes, blending and fusing brand and culture isn't an overnight enterprise, "it is indeed a journey." But every company has a purpose, a *why*, and an organization's marketing team is probably well engaged on getting those messages across to their external stakeholders. So why not take what might already be strong and powerful external branding DNA and make sure that employees are as inspired by them as your clients? I think when we do so, we are tapping into a powerful source of ethics and compliance, empowering

employees to do what's right, not only by compliance initiatives, but by the transformative power of the brand. Why not give it a try and sit in the next time there's a branding session and see what develops!