

GREAT IDEAS: Fusion by Denise Lee Yohn

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Lessons from our interview with Denise Lee Yohn

By Karen Beattie / 9th January 2019



"Great brands are built from the inside out" – Denise Lee Yohn

In our interview with Denise Lee Yohn, we learned key lessons from her 25 years' experience helping companies accelerate their growth by building strong brands.

Here's a snapshot:

If you want a strong brand on the outside you need to have a strong brand culture on the inside

Every culture should be different. If you want to be known as a certain type of brand amongst customers and investors, then your internal brand culture must match.

Don't delegate culture building to Human Resources and brand building to Marketing. Align and integrate them, and, if you're the leader, take responsibility for both.

Look at your mission statement. Does it clash with your brand identity? If you want to be fun and playful as a brand, don't be staid and serious in the mission statement. It creates confusion for employees.

There are nine distinctive brand types, each with a point of reference (POR) – ie. what the brand is positioned relative to:

- Disruptive (POR= Category Leader)
- Conscious (POR = Higher purpose)
- Service (POR = Customer need)
- Innovative (POR = Possibility)
- Value (POR = Higher-priced brands)
- Performance (POR = Performance standard)
- Luxury (POR = Populist brand)
- Style (POR = Functional brand)
- Experience (POR = Customer emotion)

Each brand type has a tone and manner, and three top organisational core values. For example, a luxury brand is **discriminating, refined** and **glamorous** and its core values might be **sophistication, distinction** and **status**. An experience brand is **exciting, energetic** and **imaginative**, and its core values might be **entertainment, enjoyment, originality**.

Be distinctive. 90% of firms list a core value of *ethical behaviour*, 88% mention *commitment to customers*, 76% mention *teamwork and trust*. Don't default to these overused terms.

Ensure you develop brand-engaged employees, not just happy ones. Engage them at every turn. In their head, they should know your brand strategy, in their hearts, they need to feel emotional attachment, and in their hands and feet, they need to take action.

Beware the "frozen middle." You might focus on engagement at the top executive level and at the customer facing end, but department heads and middle management may be left out of the mix as their engagement is taken for granted. This middle management needs to get defrosted and get active in brand engagement.

Deliberately cultivate integration between Customer Experience (CX) and Employee Experience (EX). Think about the distinct type of customer experience you want, and think about your employee experience. For example, if you're all about technology, how do you equip your employees with great technology to engage them in the exact same way?

Great Eight (eight getting-to-know you questions we ask all our authors):

1. **Recommended book:** *Built to Last* by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras
2. **If you could co-author a book with anyone who would that be? And what's the book title be?** Jim Collins, because of the deep research he does. It would be fascinating to get into deep research on how to integrate brand and culture. He could come up with the

book title.

3. **What's a great piece of advice you could share?** Find your purpose. What is your why? Why are you doing what you do? It helps you decide how to spend your time, and it's clarifying overall.
4. **What's been your lowest moment and how did you recover?** A while back I set out to climb Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Unfortunately as we got closer to the top, I got sicker and sicker and ended up not summiting. You can imagine as a type A person, an Asian American how hard that was for me to not reach that goal. It was a very low moment, but also an important learning moment for me. It actually ended up being very affirming. I needed to own this failure, and be okay with it.
5. **How do you relax?** Working out 6 times a week, going to the gym, running, cycling.
6. **What's a fun fact about you that's not widely known?** When I was a child, from age 4 to 13, I danced with the St Louis dance company. I played Clara in the Nutcracker one year.
7. **What's the secret of success?** Fulfilling your purpose. If you can be clear on why what you do matters, and you work hard to fulfil what that is, then that is the secret of success.
8. **What's a prediction for 2025?** Autonomous vehicles will be mainstream by 2025. But, who can predict the future?

The Growth Faculty Members can view the full video interview, download the transcript or listen to MP3 audio by logging into the On Demand platform: [View Denise Lee Yohn's interview.](#)

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