

Denise Lee Yohn fuses brand, business, and culture

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My final guest for season three of the podcast is Denise Lee Yohn, author of the bestseller, *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest*. She's also an in-demand keynote speaker, and has appeared on CNBC, Fox Business, NPR, and in the *Wall Street Journal* discussing business and branding issues.

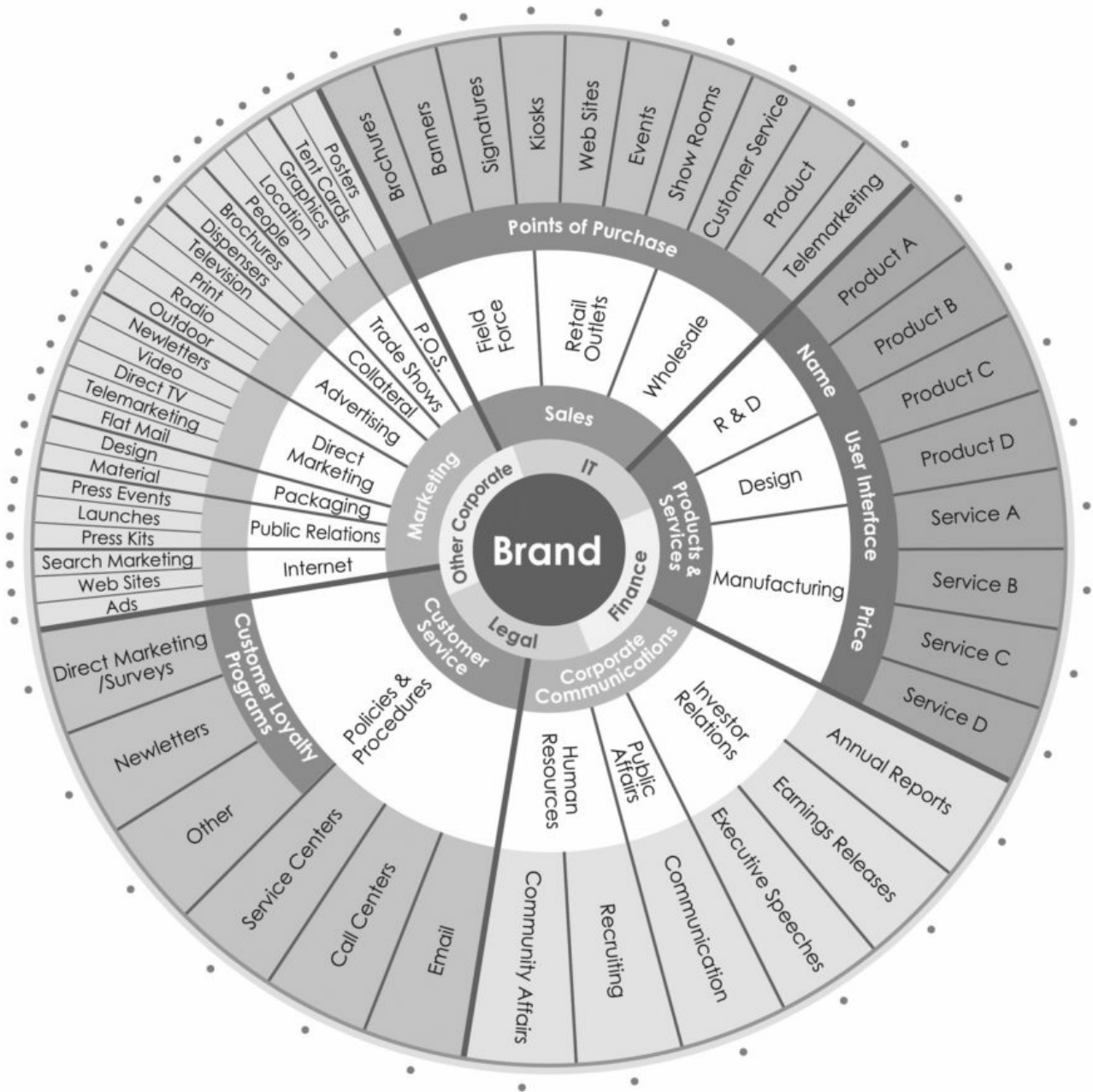
Denise cut her teeth in lead strategy roles for the advertising agencies behind campaigns for Burger King and Land Rover, and has held client-side positions at Jack In The Box and Sony.

On this episode, Denise and I talk about the relationship between brand and business, why it's important to "sweat the small stuff," brand experience versus employee experience, and her latest book, *Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*.

I kicked off the conversation with a question about the relationship between brand and business, something I've been interested in since writing [an article on the topic](#) for *The Guardian* in 2014. Denise and I agree that business leaders need to stop thinking of brand and business (or brand strategy and business strategy, at least) as two separate things. They are "one and the same," to use Denise's words.

Next, we talked about one of the seven "brand-building principles" from her book, *What Great Brands Do*. According to the book, great brands "Sweat the Small Stuff." Denise explains that the process she recommends for achieving this goal and introduces [one of the free tools](#) she's created, the Brand Touchpoint Wheel.

Brand Touchpoint Wheel -- Template



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The Brand Touchpoint Wheel, by Denise Lee Yohn

Later in the conversation, Denise and I talked about her latest book, *Fusion*, which explores the relationship between culture and brand. While she does not recommend creating employer brand platforms (partly because they create an unnecessary divide between the external and internal-facing brand), she does recommend working on the employee

experience using a similar approach to that used for customer brand experience. The Brand Touchpoint Wheel can again prove useful when working on the employee experience, as can [another tool Denise offers](#), the Employee Experience Architecture Framework.

As usual, we wrapped up the conversation with Denise's book recommendations and advice for junior/aspiring branding professionals. You won't want to miss it!

To learn more about Denise, visit deniseleeyohn.com. On her site, you'll find information about her books, speaking engagements, and consulting practice, as well as her blog, and more free, downloadable tools like the ones we mentioned in our conversation.

Below, you'll find the full transcript of the episode (may contain typos and/or transcription errors).

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ROB MEYERSON: Denise Lee Yohn, thank you so much for joining on the podcast.

DENISE LEE YOHN: I'm looking forward to our conversation.

R: I want to talk to you about a couple of the books that you've written and we'll start with your best seller, *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principle that Separate the Best from the Rest*. One of the essential themes on that book is something that you called Brand as Business Approach. Can you just explain what that means?

D: Sure. My approach to brand building is that there is really no or there should be no difference between your brand strategy and your business strategy, or how you build your brand and how you build your business, in the sense that these two things are really one and the same. Brand as business management is just this idea that you run your business as if you're running your brand and vice versa.

R: In your experience, do you feel that there are some companies that do that really well, whether it's a certain industry? Or are B2B companies better or worse than B2C companies? Or is it just all over the map? Some companies get it and some don't.

D: I really think it's the latter. Some companies and by definition, I guess some business leaders get it and some don't.

R: Is it without putting on the spot too much? I know it's hard to point out brands that aren't doing that well, but can you give an example of one that is doing it really well? And then if you're comfortable, is there one that you think really needs to work on this idea of treating brand strategy as business strategy, what would that be?

D: A brand that is doing it really well is actually a brand that I have been using quite a bit and that is REI, the outdoor outfitter retailer.

R: One of my favorite brands.

D: Yeah? Okay, great. I've been using that a lot because we are actually gearing out for a pretty big trekking trip. My husband and I alone have contributed to that company's profit margin this year. We were keeping the business afloat. What really stands out to me is that their mission is about bringing the excitement and adventure of the outdoors to people. I think that everything that they do, whether it's the way that they present themselves, kind of what you would consider to be traditional branding—their logo, their messaging, and their visual image, et cetera—as well as everything they do as a company—the products they sell, the retail environments they create, the employees that they hire—everything is a representation of this idea of the excitement adventure of outdoors.

To me, at least as much research as I've done on the organization, suggest to me that they do really believe in their brand as their business and they run their business by their brand. I think that is why they have continued to grow. I talked about profit margin jokingly, but I do believe that they have a different corporate structure so I can't say that [...] more profitable than their peers. But definitely, business-wise they're doing very well—customer loyalty, employee loyalty, et cetera.

R: I'm just curious and this is maybe getting a little too philosophical, but this idea that brands need to live up to their promise in more ways, in real ways, in substantive ways, and not just lipstick on the pig, so to speak. Maybe not to be too cynical, but does it really matter whether it feels like they're doing that. Is it more that they're able to convince the outside world that they're living up to these ideas or is more about them really doing it? Or is that just getting a little too philosophical about it all?

D: No. I think that's a great question. I think that there are brands that manage to be built more from the outside-in and from having an image and a message that is very compelling, but I think the difference is short-term versus long-term. Whether they have the staying

power, not only from the standpoint of are they able to attract and retain customers and attract and retain employees for a long period of time if they are living up to their promise.

More so that I just think, we as customers are so much more empowered and equipped to find out the truth about companies. I always say that we have both ability and the proclivity. I think the people really want to know if companies are what they say they are. There's a higher level of scrutiny and expectation that companies operate under these days, where it makes it even more important than just generally just trying to run a good business.

R: Yeah. Those are two really good points. I really like the first one. Again, I'm not to say that companies are doing this or certainly not that they should, but even if they're able to fool the public into thinking that they're living up to these ideas. It's one thing to fool people outside the company. It's quite another to be able to not live up to your ideals in front of your own employees. I see how over the long-term, if your employees don't buy into it, you start to lose the best employees and your company over the long haul starts to suffer as a result.

D: Yeah. You asked me for an example of a company that maybe isn't doing it well. I don't like to criticize. I do feel like one aspect of the whole WeWork debacle or The We Company debacle that has been unfolding in the last couple of weeks. One aspect that hasn't really been explored very much is this kind of brand incongruity or this gap between this brand that they have been presenting and then now through all of the financial papers that have been released. Also understanding what's really going on the company, I feel like they aren't operating in the way that they were presenting themselves.

I was just listening to Professor Scott Galloway on talk about WeWork. He was pointing out how the employees are probably the ones who are suffering the most. These are men and women who have been grinding it out, week after week, month after month, year after year for this company. Finally, they get this promise of this payoff that they are going to actually get something back to them, and then the whole company basically falls apart. It's exposed and far less valued than it was intended to be. When WeWork says that they're all about togetherness and authenticity, as an employee, I will just have a big problem with that because that's not what's happening.

R: Great point. I want to talk about some of the principles in *What Great Brands Do*, again the subtitle is The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separates the Best from the Rest. I don't want to detail all seven. I don't think we have time for that. But there's one that stuck out to me, especially in the context of this season of the podcast. I'm trying to focus and have conversations about brand experience. Principle number five is great brand swept the small stuff. Can you just go into that principle a little? Tell us more about that. I know there's also something called the brand touchpoint I think you bring up in that chapter. I'd love to learn what that is.

D: The truth is that all the little things that we do for someone, actually do for them, either in person if we are in that business model, or as we're delivering to them the value that we promised, far outweigh the big things that we say we do. Sweating the small stuff is about ensuring that all those little details, particularly of the customer experience are interpreting and reinforcing your brand values and attributes. The Brand Touchpoint Wheel is a tool that I use with my clients to identify all of those touch points, all of the different ways that someone from the outside world experiences your brand.

The wheel looks almost like concentric circles, where within those circles describe the departments, or the groups, or the functions within your organization that lead up to our responsible for those touchpoints. The tool becomes not only identifying what those touchpoints are and identifying who's responsible, but then it can be used as a tool for prioritizing, optimizing, and then ultimately tracking improvements and tracking performance across those touchpoints.

R: It looks like you make a copy of that touchpoint wheel available on your website. Is there a download or there's sort of a worksheet data?

D: Yes.

R: If I'm trying to build my brand and I download that worksheet, can you talk through without detailing what's on the worksheet too much? I don't want to be redundant because people can go download that themselves. What is the process beyond just downloading that PDF, what do I do with it?

D: They're very basic steps. It's really not rocket science, even not higher order thinking, really. It's very much like, let's go through a thorough audit and think about all the different audiences or different stakeholders or different external people and groups. Let's audit all the different ways that they come into contact with us. And then let's work back from there and say, "Okay. This particular page on the website, who writes the copy for that? Who actually decides what the designer is going to be like? Who actually designs that page? And then who actually serves it and delivers it to the customer when they come to our website?"

It's very much backing down from there and then it provides some guidance on how do you prioritize which touchpoints you should focus on first and then from there you just go through the work of optimizing it.

R: And once you've identified them, as you go through systematically, you prioritize touchpoints and then you try to, as you said, optimize them, is it mostly about just making the customer experience as universally good as it can be? Removing things that aren't working well? Or is it about tying it back to your specific brands, making it especially relevant to your brand idea, and differentiating from other brands in your space?

D: Yes. It's definitely the latter. Rob, you can just tell, you come from the same world where

it's critically important. It's unrealistic for most organizations to think that they can do everything well, or to do everything well all at once. It's really about identifying which touchpoints are most impactful to our most important audiences. And then how can we interpret our brand in a distinct way? How can we do something different? In fact that's one of the criteria for prioritization is just, what are touchpoints that people in your industry tend to overlook, that you could actually do something really distinctive?

One of the examples that I use is going back to REI. When you walk into their stores, the door handles are ice picks. And it's one of those things that, on every other door, there's probably some retail store door, there's probably some nice door handle. You wouldn't even really notice it, but there's something about that visceral grabbing this ice pick and opening the door and that interprets the REI brand in a very unique way. It's identifying what are those touchpoints where you can do something creative and memorable, and really bringing to life your brand, to have that kind of visceral or emotional impact on your customer.

R: That's a great example. Oftentimes, we try to have this universal lists of touchpoints that work for all brands, but I can't imagine door handles being on one of those lists. It really does surface that need to do it for your own business and really understand what that customer journey looks like.

D: Yes. There's certainly a baseline where you have to execute at a decent level on everything. But in terms of really optimizing, yeah, that's where that comes in.

R: Let's talk about your newer book, *Fusion*. Again, I'll read the whole title because I think these subtitles are so important. The book is *Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*.

D: Yes.

R: I know that culture played a role in *What Great Brands Do* as well. It seems to me, and correct me if I'm wrong, you've taken some of the thinking from *What Great Brands Do* and just zeroed in on that piece that's all about culture and written a longer book that goes into a much more detail about that one part because it's especially important. Is that how you think of it?

D: Pretty much. When I was working on developing the ideas for my second book, someone said, "You know the most important part of *What Great Brands Do* is chapter one which is great brands start inside. It's all about starting branding with your culture." They're like, "Why don't you just write more about that?" At the same time I will say, "Two more timely things happen. One is more personal. The other is more just culturally." Personally, I had an engagement with a client who brought me in one year to help them reposition and clarify their positioning as they were going into new markets.

And then the next year they had me coming and they wanted me to work on their employee experience. It was interesting how from their perspective, those two things were two totally different ideas. The source material, everything was different. I was like, "Wait a minute," and this is a fairly large national retailer. I thought if a company like this doesn't get it, then there must be lots of other companies that don't get it. So that personally happened to me.

And then I think also just more culturally, the employee experience organizational culture engagement, the war for talent, all of that has really raised the need for businesses to be much more intentional about the kind of culture that they're building. So, it was like all these things were like, "Yes, this is the book I'm writing."

R: Speaking of the war for talent, I feel like I've had—over the past year, especially in Silicon Valley where that war for talent is most intense—more questions and client request for employer branding or an employer brand platform. I want to get more into what you recommend in *Fusion*. Is that something that you recommend? What's your take on that?

D: I have a real issue with employer brand or employment branding.

R: I thought you might.

D: I thought that's why you asked the question. I do think it's like advertising in a sense that if you were creating this brand to represent this idealized version of what you hope you're delivering to your employees in order to attract and recruit them, then, just like advertising, if you built up this expectation and then you don't deliver it in the actual experience, that's a surefire way to lose employees or lose customers.

I recommend to my clients that they think about their brand values and attributes at the center of the organization and then everything they do for their customers is on one side and everything they do for their employees is on the other side. It's the same source material, same values. Then, your recruitment efforts bring those values to life in the authentic and honest way.

R: It's that second point that I was expecting, that why would you have a separate brand strategy for your employees than you do for customers? If it is core to the business, if your business strategy is your brand strategy and vice versa, then why would you need one for employees and one for customers?

D: Exactly. I hope we have time and I hope you don't mind me going on a little bit over it. One other thing that I see a lot of employers do is they pump up a lot of their corporate social responsibility or their community activities in their employment branding. Which I understand because employees, again, do care about that thing. It's like why are you talking about a volunteer day that you do once a year when you should be talking about the experience that you provide for your employees the other 364 days of the year?

If you can't represent to your prospective employees the meaning and value of the work that they do on a regular basis, if you can't describe that or convey that to prospective employees, then I think you have a real problem. Employment branding almost comes a kind of a crutch, like we can just talk about these great things we do for the community when we don't have to talk about what is it really like to work here and why is that important.

R: Right. I want to talk a little bit about what you do recommend. I want to read a little bit of the introduction to *Fusion* and then ask you a question about it. You wrote, "Culture can't be imposed. As a leader, you can't force people to think or behave in a certain way." I agree with that and that's frustrating (probably) for a lot of leaders. They know how important culture is and yet it feels like, what am I going to do about that? I can't make people have a culture, I can't enforce, impose my own idea of what the culture should be.

I know this is the premise of the entire book. Let's dig into it a little bit. What should business leaders or brand people do to create a great culture in their company.

D: First of all, I think it comes down to first, believing that you can cultivate a particular type of culture. You can't impose it. You can't say one thing and then do another. But I think that you can have intent or a desire to culture and then the top leaders or your organization then need to take responsibility for building in that culture. It needs to be a strategic leadership responsibility. Which then means that it needs to be woven into everything the company does. Kind of like brand in the sense that there's not the separation for brand and business. There's not a separation really between culture and business in the sense that the way you organize your company, for example, like the different departments you have or the different layers, different groups that you have. That will impact your culture.

If you want certain groups to work better together or you know that from a customer experience standpoint, you need to have these groups all integrated, well, organize your company like you had. That will at least create an environment more aware. Your desired attitudes and behaviors will come to life. Think about your operational processes, everything from your planning process. If you want to be nimble and agile, but you enforce a very strict annual planning process, you're not going to end up with an agile culture. Or you're going to have this kind of conflict that arises between trying to be agile and then trying to be very strategically aligned from day one.

You can think about your process. Everything from that to simple things like approving expense reports and what does that look like, or your compensation strategy. You need to think about all these things. Then, specifically one of the chapters in *Fusion* talks about employee experience, and specifically how you need to deliberately design and manage your employee experience the way that you do your customer experiences.

You can't just assume that these things are going to happen. It takes a multi disciplinary effort to think about what are the different segments we have on our employee base. What are their needs? How do we create an environment? How do we give them the tools and resources? How do we interact with them on a personal level to really develop this experience that embodies this desired culture? It's all of these steps but it really is, at the very fundamental level, believing that you can cultivate culture and that it is a strategic leadership responsibility.

R: Great. And that last part about really managing the employee experience, does that take on a form somewhat like that Brand Touchpoint Wheel but now doing it for the employee experience?

D: Yes, absolutely. Exactly. I started just to mention this, but it's like you use segmentation just like you use on customers. Then, you use a design process and part of your design process is using a tool like the Brand Touchpoint Wheel, yes.

R: It seems like a lot of startups do seem to actually have this idea of brand and culture, just these days it seems like a lot of startups have that in mind first and foremost. Maybe more than 10 years ago that there's just a general understanding that these things are important. By and large, is it the same ideas and the same processes that you would recommend independent of that stage that the company's in?

D: Not necessarily. One of the things that I'm particularly interested in and that I didn't have a chance to explore as much as I would've liked in my book is subcultures and orthogonal cultures. Particularly when they arise from M&As or when larger companies grow. I think the process or the requirements for cultivating the culture in that kind of situation are very different because you are dealing with existing cultures that you need to align and integrate as opposed to when you're starting up a culture and you're just trying to scale that one thing.

R: Yeah. That integration of cultures during a merger or an acquisition seems really critical. I know you didn't get the chance to write about it as much as you want, but just based on your research for the book and your work since the book, are there any pointers that you would give to CEOs or even to employees that have been acquired or something?

D: One of the things is to acknowledge the importance of culture in an M&A transaction. Everyone says it's important but then they often do go forward with the transaction because of strategic or operational or cost, financial reasons, or whatever. I wish I had the number at my fingertips. There's been some research that shows definitively that the top reason why M&As fail is because of culture.

Knowing that and making sure that you attend to culture and that you have that as part of the first assessment process is really important. And then not waiting until after you do the transaction to work on culture, but it should be part of the whole transition process and weaving it into everything that you do to bring these organizations together is critically important.

The last thing I would say is to acknowledge that existing cultures are hard to change and it's usually because there are leaders within the organization or influencers within the organization who are not necessarily designated leaders. The presidents of your business units might all be in line but this is a great transaction, if this is going to work, or can I do this? But there are other people who are very influential in the organization, who are holding on to old behaviors or old attitudes or old values. If you don't engage them the right way and ensure that they are coming along with you, then your efforts can be derailed as well.

R: Great point. Let's shift gears a little bit. I want to talk about a blogpost you wrote that you threw my attention to, this 9 Different Types of Brands. In that post you hypothesized that there are finite number of ways that brands can compete and be positioned. I'll read through those just for listeners. So the the nine types are Disruptive Brand, Conscious Brand, Service Brand, Innovative Brand, Value Brand, Performance Brand, Luxury Brand, Style Brand, and Experience Brand.

I want to hear a little bit about your thinking that went into this and then also how people reacted to it. In my experience, any time you suggest to the strategy world that there's a finite way of doing anything strategically, everyone froze their arms up because they want there to be this infinite number of ways for things to work. Frankly, so that they always have a job. They don't want it to feel like just choose one of the nine and you're good to go. How did people react and how's your thinking evolved since you wrote it, if at all?

D: In the background, I should say that I worked on these nine types of brands as it relates to *Fusion*, my book, in the Integration of Brand and Culture, which I'll talk about in just a moment. I say that because I want to explain that I did quite a bit of research on these nine different types. Meaning research like consulting with other brand strategy professionals, reaching out to my email community which has thousands of people in it, getting feedback and really trying to listen and learn from people. I felt like, at least when I ended up where I did, that I had enough validation from people who I respected and people who were in my community that I felt like I can say this with confidence. In addition to all my years of experience involved above all that stuff that everyone says.

I will also say that when I did introduce this idea both in the blogpost as well as in the book, I did have to put a lot of caveats out there. Of course every company, every brand needs to have an element of being service-oriented or being innovative. I have explained that yes,

you have to operate at a baseline in each of these areas but you need to pick one. That's what I mean by identifying a brand type. That is the biggest push back or the biggest feedback I got.

When I do my keynote engagements or I'm to do a workshop on this and I've talked about this, people always want to be, "Well, we are combination of innovative and performance," and I'm like, "Pick one. You can have a lead and you can have a second, but pick one."

It's just getting people to understand that if you don't put a stake in the ground and have clarity about how your brand is positioned, how can you expect your customers to have that clarity? They need to have a very clear idea in your head, like this mental file folder that they put you in and if you don't have that, how can you expect them to?

R: Right. Once a company has determined which one of those they think either represents them currently or aspirationally they're trying to point themselves toward, what do they do with that information? Is there a next step?

D: Yes. There is definitely brand building steps in terms of brand positioning and customer experience ideas that would flow out of it, but the reason why I put this out there when I did was because for the integration of brand culture. The point being that if you want to have, for example, a disruptive brand, then as a culture, you need to embrace this challenge or mindset, you need to be comfortable with risk, and you need to reward courage. That was why I did this.

I think that some people feel like, "Oh, we have a good culture," and I was like, "Great." A good culture is a great baseline, but you need to have a unique culture. You need to have your people working and thinking in a way that produces the specific result you want. And part of that result is the kind of brand positioning that you want. You need to cultivate a unique culture by knowing your brand type. In *Fusion*, I link each brand type to certain values that you would want to cultivate and build your culture around.

R: I see. Is it fair to think of these as not only nine brand types but maybe nine culture types as well?

D: Yes and no. I first wanted to just identify nine types of cultures. What I found is that culture is so unique. There are just so many different variables and there were so many great models out there that talked about different types of culture, that I felt like I'm not really adding to the conversation by doing something like this. What I think is better for me to do is focus in core values and what are some key core values that you need and your organization in order to achieve the kind of brand that you want.

Your talks about culture aligning with these brands but does not as if I'm saying that you need to have a disruptive culture per se. There are values that will lead you to have a disruptive brand, that then you can build a culture around.

R: Great. Just to be 100% clear, those nine types, those are featured in *Fusion*?

D: Yes, exactly. I have an online assessment tool to help people figure out this integration of brand and culture, so you can go through and you can figure out what type of brand you have. If you just go to deniseleeyohn.com/fusion, which is the website for my book, then you can find the assessment and find these nine types of brands there.

R: That's great. I love that you make all those tools available. I want to ask just a couple of general questions and this is partly because I've asked other people this season and I want to have some sort of apples-to-apples across different brands strategists. Let's start with just brand strategy or brand platforms. I'm assuming that in order to create a great brand experience, you probably start with strategy or positioning work. Do you have any kind of model or framework that you like using with clients? We've talked to David Aaker and Marty Neumeier and all these people that have their own models, and I know they're different agency models out there. Is there one that you prefer?

D: I have created my own. I will say that it's very much inspired by Aaker, Neumeier, and Adam Morgan, who you mentioned to me before. All these great thinkers, I have learned so much from them. I think I took everything I learned and put it into this brand strategy platform framework that has two parts, two pieces of a puzzle, your brand identity and your competitive brand positioning. Your brand identity is comprised of your purpose, your values, and your personality. And then your competitive brand positioning outlines who your target is, what is your competitive frame of reference, what is your unique value or unique benefit and then what are your key differentiators.

By filling in the blanks on those two together, you create this platform. And I love the word platform, I love that you use the platform because it really is a jumping off point and really, a strategic document that should inform everything that you do.

R: Great. And just out of curiosity, when you do that with clients and then when you're working with the same client on the culture, do you refer back to that for culture them? Does that become a touchdown for both brand expression and internal culture?

D: Yes. Actually what I would do, the brand identity remains the same. Again, your purpose, your values, your personality is all the same. But then the competitive brand positioning that I just walked you through, I was thinking from a customer perspective. Who is your core customer or your core target audience? What is the unique value created for them? Whereas then I would recommend that you have a competitive positioning for your employees. Who are the kinds of employees that you are trying to attract? What is the unique value that you deliver to them?

R: And then that case, the competition is where they might otherwise go work.

D: Exactly.

R: Got it. And then we talked about the Brand Touchpoint Wheel, which I take it was one of the big tools that you use to help clients build brand experience. I'm just curious. Is there anything else that you recommend, methodologies or tools that you use with clients to bring the brand to life?

D: Yeah. Another tool I use is an experience architecture. Again, this started off as a customer experience architecture, but I've been using it more and more as an employee experience architecture. Again, it's basically just a strategic framework. It's almost like a house where I say that your roof is your purpose, the foundation are your values, and then you build in columns and rows in this architecture based on your different segments, and then what are their needs, what is the experience that you provide for them, and what are the elements that comprise that experience. It's just a planning tool and it helps you breakdown your overarching experience into very discreet experiences.

R: Got it. Sounds great. I want to do a couple of wrap-up questions. You talked about REI as a brand with great brand experience. Is there any other brand that you just look to because of the experience or everything else they're doing as just a great example of building a strong brand?

D: Oh gosh. I hate answering this question because I always say the standard answers like Nike and Starbucks, and people make fun of me. It really is after doing a lot of research in the organizations and there was a time when I was questioning my conviction behind Nike (although I'm recovering from that and I'm just trying to understand what they are doing in this organization), but knowing what I know about them and again, doing the research that I've done, I just believe that they have a solid purpose, very clear values, and they are operationalizing those in ways that I think are very compelling.

R: How about books? So, we talked about yours. Who do you turn to when you're looking for a book? It could be about branding or could just be something inspired you and is relevant to the work you do.

D: I will talk about three books. The first is Building the Brand-Driven Business is written by two consultants from Profit. It used to be a brand consultancy and it's now a bigger consulting firm than that. That was foundational to my understanding of brand as business and operationalizing the brand. That is a core book.

The second is a book that I think both you and I probably refer to a lot which is Eating the Big Fish by Adam Morgan. I read that very early on and find that his concept of challenger brands still remains today and just kind of, how do you build a brand that is a thought leader and not just a market leader.

The last is by Jim Collins. Most people know his book, Good to Great, which is a great book. But before that, he wrote with Jerry Porras' book called the Build to Last and it's all about how enduring companies are built and all written way back, but I think the principles are still timeless and relevant, and they really just formed my thinking of how do you a sustainable business that customers and employees love.

R: Thanks for those additions. We keep a list on the website of these recommendations from interviewees so we will add those to the list and if anyone is interested, they can go find that whole list. It's getting pretty long, but it's a great list.

Last question is, given your successes in your career, I'm curious what advice you would give to younger people or people that are just getting started in brand consulting or related fields as to how they should grow their career?

D: This is probably bias because I look back on my career and think about what were the formative experiences, but I will say there are three things, three skills, three experiences, three perspectives that I think are really helpful for brand building.

One is more of the consumer insights and analytics perspective. Really understanding how to understand customers and how to understand what their needs are, and how to then project that from a small research sample into your larger population.

Second is creative communication, at this point I would say creative engagement. A lot of times, I recommend people to go work for an agency. It will suck, it will be hard, you'll hate it, but you will learn so much about the creative process and about how to resonate with people emotionally. It really is this human connection that, as brand builders, we are called to make.

The third is to run a P&L. Be a product manager, be a brand manager, do something where you can actually run a business and know all of the different aspects of running that business. Again, going back to the very first thing we said, there really should not be a difference between your brand and your business strategy, and you can't really build a brand without understanding how to build a business.

R: That's great. You got the data analytical side, the softer creative side, and the pure business strategy side. If you cover all three of those, then you are pretty well-rounded.

D: Yup.

R: Great. Denise, thank you so much for your time. This has been really valuable, a great conversation, so I appreciate it and I hope we'll talk again soon.

D: Thank you, Rob.

R: Great.