

CHAPTER ONE

ESSENTIAL #1: DISCOVER

We, the authors, are brand dependent.

And we admit it. We love to discover brands.

We each begin each day sipping or gulping a certain brand of coffee, showering with a specific brand of soap, eating a particular brand of yogurt topped with a selected brand of naturally healthy cereal. Nothing gets between us and our brands.

We are emotionally connected to our brands. And we come by this brand dependence naturally.

Our childhood memories are filled with brand images. The smiling face of a cold pitcher of Kool-Aid. The roar of Tony the Tiger. Our sadness at learning that Trix are for kids, not for rabbits. Mark running down a suburban street wearing Keds and a Davy Crockett coonskin cap. Libby playing with a Barbie doll.

Our mothers were classic brand consumers of the 1950s and 1960s. Mark's mother would serve only vegetables by Del Monte, catsup by Heinz, and soft drinks by Coca-Cola. Libby's mother would emerge for the day with makeup by Frances Denney, a permanent by Toni, and nail polish by Revlon. Our fathers got into the brand act, too. Mark's family only drove Chevrolets; Libby's family, only her father's Oldsmobile.

We were lucky to grow up in an era of great brands that instantly commanded respect and passion. Imagining the grand images of air travel of Pan Am and TWA. Trusting the family car to the men who wore the Texaco star. Watching a fatherly Walt Disney on television (before cable) introducing his *Wonderful World of Color* and telling us about the latest rides at Disneyland.

Laughing at Lucy and Ricky as they smoked their favorite cigarettes (provided, coincidentally, by the sponsors of the show) while chatting with Ethel and Fred. Hearing Dinah Shore sing that we should “see the USA in your Chevrolet.” Wondering if we needed an application to join the Pepsi Generation or if we really could teach the world to sing in perfect harmony by drinking Coca-Cola. Watching McDonald’s dot the nation with fast food, Sears and JC Penney becoming gateways to anything a consumer could want, and Macy’s putting on a parade long before businesses plastered their names on stadiums. We defined our lives through our brands. And we learned, first hand, how to emotionally connect to everything a brand represents.

With such branded beginnings, it’s no surprise we would land in branded experiences in our early professional work. Libby would spend her early HR years in the hallways of the legendary Mary Kay, two words that instantly evoke images of pink Cadillacs and successful saleswomen. Mark would write copy and stage new product events for, among others, Minute Maid and Quaker Oats—where he came up with the idea to introduce a new cereal to employees *before* the debut for customers. After all, he reasoned, “If we want customers to eat the new cereal we should first let employees experience the taste.”

We learned from these early years, as brand users and workers, just what a brand can do. How people react to brands. How brands provide emotional connection. How brands simplify. And we picked up valuable lessons that, years later, would help us capitalize on the power of this most intense business tool to create emotional connections.

So for you—someone interested in what an employer brand can do for your business—your first essential is to focus on your observations, in general, of what brand can do. The power. The language. The simplicity. Starting with the brand will help you apply its mystery to the realities of your business. So you can first absorb the fundamentals of how brands work and what brands can do, so you fully realize the potential of brands to create emotional connections with the people who make a difference to your business. Your employees.

Here is the short course: fifteen key lessons we have learned over the years for you to keep in mind as you build your employer brand from the inside.

FIFTEEN THINGS TO LEARN ABOUT BRANDS

1. BRANDS ARE ELUSIVE, MYSTERIOUS REALITIES OF BUSINESS.

Brands make people do things. They command people to think and buy, to want and do. They motivate people to consider and choose. They push people to do everything from pull levers in voting booths to fill shopping carts in a bricks-and-mortar store and on line. Their power is the target of billions of marketing dollars spent each year. A brand's influential power may be its most seductive feature. The feelings a brand generates. The personal experience of connecting with a favorite brand. The commitment to a longer-term relationship with a brand, filled with loyalty and trust. Why else would you, as a brand-driven customer, spend money at a retail location for a cup of coffee you could easily brew at home? Or go out for ice cream you could simply store in the freezer?

2. BRANDS SIMPLIFY THE VALUE, OPPORTUNITY, AND RESULTS YOU EXPECT.

Brands boil down choice to what is ultimately simple.

They crystallize what you, the customer, need and want. They articulate what you anticipate and experience. They simplify what you receive and remember. Every day, as a consumer, you make buying decisions based on the reputation sealed in a company's brand. You consider whether you trust a brand, believe in a brand, agree with a brand. And you remember what you choose.

Of course, this brand memory reaches beyond the items you purchase to the places you first choose to work. That's what we found. For Mark, the first branded stop was flipping hamburgers and dipping ice cream cones at the well-branded Dairy Queen just as it was introducing its now-famous Brazier Burger. For Libby, it was working at a coffee shop at Marriott, a hotel chain that had already learned the importance of employees in delivering a consistent customer experience. Something about the brands helped us make these initial choices. Just as if we were consumers buying products. They also help us remember why we were there. Is it the same for you?

3. EVERY BUSINESS HAS A BRAND.

There's no "get out of brand free" card. Every business has one.

Or, we should say, every business that wants to be known by someone for something.

Every business, no matter its size, no matter what it does, has customers. Although some may have more visible marketing to customers—because of what the business does—every business is known for something. As a result, every product has something in the market it needs to be known for—to sell more products. And that is the job of a brand.

At the same time, some businesses with many products or services may brand each product or service separately. The business overall may want to be known for one thing that captures the essence of all the consumer brands. That may be why Procter & Gamble, while branding specific products with particular labels, states on its internet site that "two billion times a day, P&G brands touch the lives of people around the world."¹ "We want to be in touch, in the lead, and improving lives every day," says Diana Shaheen of Procter & Gamble.² Or why Kraft, through its many branded products, makes an overall brand claim of "helping people around the world eat and live better."³ And when Anheuser-Busch, while marketing its distinct products in distinct ways, places everything under an umbrella of "making friends is our business."⁴

4. BRANDS ARE ULTIMATELY COMMERCIAL.

Businesses do not have brands just to have brands. They have brands because brands help them sell.

A brand is the shortcut to your process, as a customer, of choosing. To make it easy for you to base that choice on a sense of experience, reliability, reputation. To limit other choices you might consider. To move you directly to action.

As you consider the lessons of brand, you need to look at brand as shorthand for choice. A shortcut to action. A brand that does *not* lead to choice—the right choice—may entertain but it will not succeed. It will not make a difference to the business. And brand is all about a customer making the choice a business needs.

Brands are not passive. They do not merely appear. They are about action. Doing something. Choosing something. Believing

something. They motivate people to buy. To choose. To vote. To commit. To recommend. To connect. Looking at any issue through the prism of brand forces us to think commercially.

So a well-branded company, like Hallmark, realizing the importance of keeping its brand alive and relevant, says to employees in a company publication, “The Hallmark brand sets our company apart from the others. As Hallmarkers, we enhance the value of our brand each time we uphold our brand promise of enriching lives. The action doesn’t have to be complicated or even plum colored. What if we simply focus on enriching lives every day? Think what a difference we can make.”⁵

5. BRANDS INFLUENCE CUSTOMER CHOICES AT EACH TOUCH POINT.

Every customer experience is a series of touch points.

A brand promises a specific experience at each touch point that you, as a customer, have with a product, service, or message a business delivers. A touch point occurs every time you come in contact with what a business offers. And at each touch point the brand can comfort or irritate, assure or frighten, satisfy or disappoint.

As a consumer you see this every day. You view brands through the touch points you experience. The foods you select. The restaurants and hotels you choose. The airlines you endure. The places you visit. The products you rely on. Brands assure you that a product or service you select will be functionally reliable to get the job done as well as to deliver an emotionally satisfying experience.

At each touch point you test the authenticity of the brand promise. Every time you touch a brand, you ask, “Am I getting what it promised?” And if you experience disappointment, you may wonder, “What other brands may be available that may deliver the same thing?” As UPS announces to its employees in a special brand publication, “living out the brand doesn’t come solely from mission statements. Or product differentiation. Or lower prices. Or snappy logos. It flows from the intersection of culture and people. It flows from the living, breathing brand.”⁶ This lives every day at UPS. “Our promise,” says Tom Pizutti, corporate employee communications manager, UPS, “is that we will make each customer feel as if they are our only customer.”⁷

6. BRANDS DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Brands paint the picture a customer steps into.

Every day, in every corner of the world, customers make choices. Some choose to buy. Others to avoid. Some recommend a particular brand. Others complain. Some complete a transaction; others engage in a relationship with the business that produces the product or service.

As a consumer you look to the brand to define the experience you choose. You expect Ritz-Carlton to offer luxury because that's what the brand promises. You expect to "have it your way" at Burger King because that's what you repeatedly hear. You look for the friendly skies because the brand says that's a fair expectation. "The consumer is boss," says P&G's Diana Shaheen. "Our purpose is to improve lives in small but meaningful ways every day."

The brand promise frames what you expect and defines what the product or service—and the business—should deliver. As you use what you purchase, you ask yourself if the product or service lives up to its promise. If the promise foretells the experience. If the experience ultimately lives up to the expectations the brand sets.

Brands adapt as customer experiences change. Take, for example, what's happening today on the Internet. This new dimension of the customer connection intensifies the experiences a brand defines. For example, as a customer, you can sit in front of a computer to shop for a car. Once upon a time, you would go from dealer to dealer to kick tires and consider options. Now it can all be done online, transforming the car-buying experience from potentially confrontational to fully informational. You can use a myriad of consumer reports and reviews, sites like Yahoo! Autos, to compare *before* starting to shop. You call the shots with the click of a mouse. It's no surprise that, in response, the automaker must dramatically change how it presents its brand. No longer is the televised image the only way to convey the look and feel.

7. BRANDS CONNECT CUSTOMERS TO A "BIG IDEA."

Brands do not simply sell. They capture the essence of a mission.

The power of brand doesn't stop with a specific choice or transaction. It doesn't end with *functional* and *emotional* connections.

The potential for brand can create a “halo effect” for the entire business *if* it delivers more.

A brand is at its most powerful when it reaches beyond the product to represent an idea emerging from the soul of the business. When purpose reaches beyond the sale to advance the relationship—to engage you, first on a *functional* level for being reliable and then on an *emotional* level that will touch your feelings. Real brand power occurs when the brand reaches you *inspirationally*; when you connect with the “big idea” the business and brand stand for. When the brand reveals what happens *inside* the core of a business, giving you a glimpse of what makes a business tick. What the business believes in. Its values. Its heritage. Its icons. And a bit of its soul.

Why else would Apple, so brilliantly, make you believe you participate in a cause, not simply that you buy a product? Or Disney make you feel, as parents, that childhood without a visit to the Magic Kingdom will not be complete? Or Whole Foods make you feel, as you buy organic peanut butter, that you are somehow helping to keep the world healthy? Consider the “creative impulses of young storytellers” that are “bits of magic stored in Crayola brand crayons, markers, paints and colored pencils, or unleashed in the pliable potential of Silly Putty.” Or how, “for nearly 100 years Hallmark has believed in the very best of human nature” and how that belief stirs a passion “you see and feel in everything that bears the Hallmark name—in a store, in your mailbox, on the internet, on your television.” As CEO Don Hall remarks, “We are invited to give voice to people’s feelings—of joy and grief, of compassion and healing. We provide ways for people to express themselves” and “help them reach out with words of hope and encouragement every day. These are enduring human needs, which is why I have such confidence in the future of our company.”⁸

A brand can connect a customer to what a business is all about—its character, personality, and values. To be remembered, a brand can give a face to a business. And to be revered, a brand can create a sense of comfort, a degree of security, a spirit of hope. It can symbolize the larger meaning of what a business stands for—the idea, experience, or relationship. The way Disney “is dedicated to making the dreams of families and children a reality”⁹ or how the Body Shop is committed to “passionately campaign for the protection of the environment, human and civil rights, and against animal testing within the cosmetics and toiletries industry.”¹⁰

8. A GREAT BRAND WILL STAND THE TEST OF TIME.

The power of brand is not simply for the short term. A great brand is in this for the long haul. It will last through fads and fashion, trends and styles, economic ups and downs. Articulating a core that will not change with the times, even as products and services adapt. Standing on values, not just current offerings. Think Coca-Cola. Pepsi. General Electric. Wells Fargo. Great brands become (and remain) essential to what you need, not only through products and services, but through value systems. What would you do without Starbucks coffee? Or Kleenex? Or GE light bulbs? Or Colgate, with its claim to “offer products that allow global consumers to improve quality of life for themselves and the ones they love”?¹¹ These brands are relevant not only for what they do but for the business ideas and experience they represent.

To stand the test of time, a brand must stand for something. And for most that something has to be more than simply selling more. The brand can provide a glimpse into what thrives at the core of a business, why it must exist, why a customer must emotionally invest in its success. So it's no surprise that brands often commit to big ideas, such as Pfizer's commitment to “improve the quality of life of people around the world and help them enjoy longer, healthier and more productive lives.”¹² Or Wrigley's claim that its brands of chewing gum “have been a refreshing part of everyday life for more than 100 years.”¹³

To stand the test of time, a brand must project a personality of a business beyond the marketing. That personality, more than the color of the product or packaging, projects what differentiates the business from its competitors. Marc Gobé puts it this way: “To realize their full potential, brands must recognize from the outset that their emotional identity is not only a result of ads and products but also corporate policy and stances.”¹⁴ So it's no surprise that, to create this link, real and imagined characters are cast in the brand drama, even after they die. Try to imagine Wendy's without the image of Dave or Disneyland without Walt or fried chicken without Colonel Sanders. They continue to be the most surprising icons, proving that brand power is not hampered by logistics. No wonder that Kellogg's, perhaps with an image of Tony the Tiger in the background, claims “you can't beat being part of a company that's like a family.”¹⁵

To stand the test of time, a brand must celebrate its heritage and honor its heroes. Salute its legends as a business passes the core of the brand from generation to generation. Think of Herb Kelleher creating the first route map for Southwest Airlines on a cocktail napkin. Hewlett and Packard inventing in their garage. Estée Lauder or Mrs. Fields creating in their kitchens. Michael Dell dreaming in his dorm room. David Filo and Jerry Yang starting Yahoo! from a trailer on the Stanford campus, procrastinating to avoid completing their dissertations. Stories that live in the hearts and minds for generations and emotionally connect customers to the origins of the business. “We are proud of our heritage,” says P&G’s Diana Shaheen, “and the consistency from generation to generation helps drive pride.”

9. BRANDS CREATE EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS.

At their heart, brands touch the soul, excite the mind, satisfy the need, and motivate the action.

Emotion is at the core of a brand’s power when a brand represents what you, a customer, *aspire* to be and *can* be by connecting with the products, services, and experience the brand represents. Advertisers paint pictures of what it can mean to experience the product or service the brand delivers. They connect with your aspiration of what your life can be if you follow the impulse to choose and buy. They show happy, fulfilled people using a product or service. Spokespersons who positively describe an experience. Words and images that connect what the brand can deliver with what you picture for yourself. Whether that is sitting in the driver’s seat of a car, dining at a restaurant, taking a vacation or using a type of medication. Marc Gobé suggests that such emotional branding “focuses on the most compelling aspect of the human character: the desire to transcend material satisfaction, and experience emotional fulfillment.” The brand achieves such an emotional connection when “it can tap into aspirational drives which underlie human motivation.”¹⁶

Smart brands base this emotional connection on what a consumer looks for: a personal impact. They paint the picture of a lifestyle. They enable a customer to consider more than just the relevance of the product or service. They try to make customers revel in every difference. Especially if it makes sense to you, the

customer—appeals to you, taps into you. As you consider any brand, you set the requirements a product or service must meet before you will take steps to seriously evaluate a purchase. You look closer only if it makes sense in terms of what you want and what you need. And if you are satisfied, you may come back. As Hallmark remarks to employees, “brands succeed because they establish powerful emotional connections with consumers. In an intensely competitive marketplace that offers a wide array of choices—people buy brands.”¹⁷

10. THIS EMOTIONAL CONNECTION IS AT THE HEART OF A CONSUMER’S RELATIONSHIP WITH A BRAND.

A brand is only as strong as the emotions it generates.

The emotional connection with the brand is the foundation for a relationship with that brand. And like *any* relationship, this connection has many dimensions. If you trust the brand, you may want to tell others about the business, brand, products, and services. You may feel a part of what the business is all about. That is what makes Disney more than theme parks or mouse ears. Nike more than shoes. Starbucks more than coffee.

“I believe that it is the emotional aspects of products and their distribution systems that will be the key difference between consumers’ ultimate choice and the price that they will pay,” writes Marc Gobé. “By emotional I mean how a brand engages consumers on the level of senses and emotions; how a brand comes to life for people and forges a deeper, lasting connection.”¹⁸

Your relationship with the specific product or service is the first step to a sense of relationship with the business. You may become loyal, devoted, committed to the business behind the brand. And you may be willing to experiment with new products and services from the same source because you believe in the overall brand. Why else would Hallmark say it pursues a mission “to enrich lives” as it expands its product line?¹⁹ And why else would those loyal customers of Harley-Davidson, who join the company-sponsored Harley Owners Group, celebrate their loyalty to the brand at events across the United States?²⁰

As Jeff Swystun and Larry Oakner remark, “building a distinctive brand is at the heart of long-term relationships between

company and customer.”²¹ Such an overall relationship extends to many products. Like Estée Lauder’s claim to bring “the best to everyone we touch”²² and Nissan’s declaration of its “passion for making driving, and life itself, a little more enjoyable.” Carl Sewell and his “Customers for Life,” which transformed a Cadillac dealership into a national legend by setting a standard for customer service in the auto industry.²³ Krispy Kreme’s promise to “create magic moments.”²⁴ And Washington Mutual’s pledge to “make things better for customers, employees and neighbors” while offering the most entertaining of all ATMs.²⁵

11. BRAND LOYALTY IS “THE HOLY GRAIL” OF ANY CONSUMER’S RELATIONSHIP.

Anyone who manages any brand dreams of brand loyalty—that magical experience when a customer simply follows the lead.

Achieving brand loyalty frees the business to introduce new things, experiment with new ideas, and develop new products, with the assurance that you, the loyal customer, will give the new offering a fair shot. And if you like what you experience, if it meets an unmet need or enhances your life in some way, you may try to influence others to try it out.

True brand loyalty occurs when the brand transfers ownership to you, the customer, to make you feel the brand is your own. Perhaps that’s why the Gap promises to “create emotional connections with customers around the world through inspiring product design, unique store experiences and compelling marketing.”²⁶ IKEA claims to be all about creating “a better everyday life for many people.”²⁷ PepsiCo issues customers an invitation to “taste the success.”²⁸ These brands simply become part of people’s lives. As Gobé puts it, “Consumers today expect their brands to know them, intimately and individually.”²⁹

This magical connection may be what makes a customer looking for healthy food choose Kashi, products of a business with a mission “to provide great tasting, all natural and innovative foods that enable people to achieve optimal health, wellness and weight management goals.”³⁰ Brand loyalty is the emotional pull that makes people pick one brand of soft drink over another, schedule a hotel stay at one brand instead of the other, or decide to go

to work at one business and not another. It's why Intel describes itself as "the preeminent building block supplier to the worldwide digital economy"³¹ or McDonald's as "our customers' favorite place and way to eat."³² Brand loyalty defines how a brand attracts. Captivates. Stimulates. Motivates. Connects. As Pam Danzinger, president of Unity Marketing, comments, "In today's hyper-emotional marketplace, where marketers use every trick in the book to push consumers' hot buttons and stimulate an emotional reaction, brands have become the medium and the message."³³

As FedEx articulates its "purple promise," it clarifies that "FedEx is a lot more than moving packages or freight, it's about serving people."³⁴ And its competitor UPS also maintains "Our brand is the promise we make to our customers. And customers see that promise every day."³⁵ But brand loyalty can affect a new product launch. You don't like it when your favorite brands violate expectations. Just think *New Coke*. Customers revolted against the product because it violated a perceived brand promise. The failure of the product did not tarnish the overall brand of the business, and in fact Coca-Cola remains a brand powerhouse. It was the number-one brand for 2005, according to the *BusinessWeek/Interbrand* annual ranking of the 100 Top Global Brands.³⁶

Despite such challenges, brand loyalty is critical to a business because of the competitive landscape any business confronts. Every business—no matter its product, service, or experience—must attract new customers. It's not enough to simply keep the current ones happy. Customers die. Or go away. Perhaps change their minds. Or simply choose something else. To replace the ones who leave, the brand must actively attract new people to "try out" what it promises. The brand appeals to customers to "try it out" based on the merits of the product or service as well as the emotional appeal of the overall brand, which has everything to do with what the business stands for. It's as if the customer evaluates and decides, "If I am OK with what the business is all about, what the brand is all about, then I am willing to try the product."

But you, the customer, may not have room in your life for more brands. So something *must* catch your attention. Perhaps it will be an advertisement for a product or service. Or what others say about the offering or, perhaps, the overall brand itself. Eventually you

determine what the brand promises. And begin to consider whether it could be relevant to you. The brand *engages* you in this experience, moving you from initial consideration to steadfast loyalty, ultimately creating its own *evangelists*—people who, on behalf of the brand and the business, create the buzz.

12. A BRAND IS AN ADHESIVE.

A brand has an amazing ability to store memories.

Every experience you have with a brand, product, and service will stick. The good, the bad, and the ugly. In fact, you hang on to the negative much longer than you remember the positive. The soap that doesn't clean. The blouse that falls apart after the first washing. The restaurant that disappoints. The airline that disengages. One negative experience is all it takes to undermine all the dollars spent to promote the brand. One unenthusiastic employee can counter all the positive advertisements. Brands create strong memories.

A brand collects all the experiences you have. "We have the opportunity to win at the first moment of truth, in the store, and the second moment of truth, when the consumer uses the product," according to P&G's Diana Shaheen. For any business, the brand reflects how you store memories of products and services in your own consumer bank. And this memory addresses more than just the brand name of the product. The adhesive extends to the overall brand of the business that creates the products. A brand simply never loses the memories you have attached to it. That's why a business goes to a lot of trouble to create the *intentional* brand it intends to imprint, through promotions and advertising, even as it recognizes that a significant part of brand memory consists of what may be *unintentional*—that which the business *cannot* control. As Hallmark remarks to employees, "collectively the millions of positive impressions we've made in the past serve as the underpinning of our brand today."³⁷

"As organizations' offerings become increasingly similar," writes Clare Dowdy, "the brand is sometimes the only differentiator. Which means it's down to experience. If customers don't enjoy the experience of purchasing or interacting with a brand, they won't come back."³⁸

13. BRAND IS A LANGUAGE THAT SIMPLIFIES THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN YOU, THE CUSTOMER, AND THE BUSINESS.

A brand is beyond a strategy—it is a language all its own, rooted in customer choice.

Brands train you to buy. They teach you what to buy, how to buy, when to buy. From an early age, you identify with the brands you choose, from your clothes to your ice cream to your toothpaste. All you have to do is look for a label on a piece of clothing or a nameplate on a car or the name of a hotel. No matter the specifics of the product or service, you know what the brand will deliver. Imagine the possibilities when Restoration Hardware says, “We want to surround ourselves with what we love. We want to inspire laughter as well as thought.”³⁹ Or when The Body Shop says it wants to help customers “feel good—naturally.”⁴⁰ That’s how “leading brands communicate their promise to the market,” writes Chuck Brymer, “encouraging customers to purchase the product or service.”⁴¹ Again, as Hallmark describes to employees, “To understand the power of a card, just think of the day’s mail and how you feel when you discover an envelope with a familiar name on the return address and the Hallmark logo embossed on the flap.”⁴²

As a result of this commercial focus, brands naturally crystallize the meaning of an entire business into a few words. They paint a detailed picture of what it means to connect. To buy the products, endorse the services, believe in the big idea, and perhaps invest in the stock. The brand communicates everything a business needs to tell—its mission, vision, values, offerings, promises, results—in a small number of words and images. Who can forget the power of such phrases as “Imagination at work” or “there are some things money can’t buy, for everything else there’s MasterCard.” Brand gives business a way to communicate, and differentiate, in a way that is relevant, compelling, and consistent. “A lasting connection with the customer requires much more than a name and a logo,” says Deborah Kania. “Customers must know the brand so well that they can recite in their own words what the brand means—brand attributes, brand promise, value proposition, etc.”⁴³

Buzz is an ultimate result of brand—that magical experience when people talk about a brand in a “must have” manner. The way

people in the 1960s had to drive a Mustang or, in the 1970s, had to own a Pet Rock or, today, have to listen to a certain personal music player. Buzz occurs when a brand reaches beyond the attributes of the product to celebrate a need that the product fills. And more often than not, buzz happens when a brand fills a need you never knew you had. Imagine. How many of you realized, before purchasing your first iPod, that you needed all your CDs stored on one device? Or knew, before DIRECTV created the NFL Sunday Ticket, that you had to be able to watch all the NFL games on a Sunday? Or felt, before TiVo, that you had to be able to access recorded copies of your favorite television shows without suffering through the commercials?

But buzz is never a substitute for a real emotional connection with a brand. For buzz may come and go just like the Pet Rock, but a real connection will last through the fads and trends. Ultimately, “brands are about choice,” Brymer continues in *Marketing*; they force a business to reach beyond the buzz to “continually work out what makes them special to so many people and discover how they can continue to innovate and meet their needs.”⁴⁴

14. A BUSINESS HAS A BRAND AS A PLACE TO WORK, TOO.

Brands live inside the business, too.

And every lesson you learn, as a consumer, directly applies to your work in employer brand. The essentials of brand are the same, inside or outside a business.

Ninety percent of people online looking for jobs consider it very important or important to be able to support a company’s brand and products. That’s what Yahoo! Hot Jobs learned in a 2005 poll of its users.⁴⁵

Consider how UPS explains to employees how its brand “defines how we want to be perceived by internal and external audiences” and is “supported by four core attributes that differentiate UPS and form the basis of our brand personality: human spirit, operational excellence, intelligence and innovation.” And how it wants “customers to see us as one company striving toward a single vision of providing complete, integrated solutions. We also have to think of ourselves and how we interact with employees in the same way.”⁴⁶ Tom Pizutti of UPS explains, “We strongly believe in doing what’s right for the employee.”

Every business has a brand as a place to work, just as it has a brand as a place to buy. If for no other reason, then because every business is known for something as a place to work. Perhaps it has a reputation for fun. Or job security. Or career development. Or hard work. The business could be known for grooming future CEOs. Or for offering excellent pay. Or likable coworkers. Maybe its good working conditions create the buzz. All of these attributes add up to what you, as an employee, expect to experience, in the same way the attributes of a customer brand add up to those expectations. And that is precisely what a brand, as a place to work, is all about. When you, as a consumer, bring your retail mindset to the workplace. *Your* brand dependency teaches you how to evaluate what you experience. And you do that on the work floor as well as the store floor. Brands teach you how to judge a business as a place to work. And you judge what you experience *with* each experience.

As GE's Linda Boff remarks, "Without an employer brand, some organizations could succeed. But great brands and great organizations can't succeed without great employer brands."⁴⁷ And Eric Jackson—vice president of worldwide corporate communications for FedEx Corporation—observes, "When done right, and consistently delivered, an employer brand elicits an emotional response from customers that's very powerful. For us, this emotional response feeds our employees' desire to do whatever it takes to satisfy our customers."⁴⁸

Just as you do on the outside, on the inside you experience a touch point each time you access something the business offers, hear a message the business sends, use a product or service the business delivers. And at each touch point you ask yourself, as an employee, "Am I receiving all that the brand promised?" If disappointed, you may wonder, "What other brands may be available to deliver the same thing?"

Just as on the outside, the brand of a business promises what you should experience on the inside. You expect working at Southwest to be fun because the brand says so. You expect Nike to empower employees to "Just do it!" because the brand is so encouraging. You expect Disney to be a magic kingdom because Mickey says so. And Donald.

And, just as on the outside, more and more people look for businesses they can believe in and proudly tell others they work for. You respond to values and traditions. No surprise that, inside many

businesses, stories about legends of the business pass from person to person as if to preserve the humanity of the legend. And what the brand stands for. Imagine how it must feel to read these words from BMW: “If you love mobility in all of its many guises and want to get ahead, then the BMW group is just the place for you.”⁴⁹ Or these from Dell: “Winning is in our DNA.”⁵⁰ What we learn as consumers can direct what we create in a business for employees.

Everything you learn as a consumer, on the outside, can teach you what employees on the inside will expect, the choices employees make. Any employee creating an emotional connection with a business will be more willing to understand what the business is about, believe in what the business is trying to do, and do what it takes to help the business advance. And the brand can help. Any employees will be willing to trust until something happens to undermine that trust; until they are somehow clued in that everything the brand communicates may not be so. Although one business or another may become “the place to work” for a period of time, if that business doesn’t do what it takes to create a real emotional connection with employees and sustain that relationship of trust through business upturns and downturns, brand preference will be just about impossible to sustain.

15. BRAND IS A PROCESS THAT CAN SIMPLIFY HOW BUSINESS ADDRESSES PEOPLE ISSUES.

The power of brand, the simplicity of brand, is not just in what people experience. It’s in the simplicity with which it can frame how people work through issues.

So what is your business facing? No matter the issue, looking at what you must confront through the lens of your brand can simplify the steps you take to address the challenge. That’s because approaching an issue through your brand forces you to consider the commercial realities of your business as well as to simplify what you consider. Brand is all about choice. Working through your issues, as you keep in mind the choices people will ultimately make, can save you a lot of unnecessary steps that lead nowhere. Brand can keep a business focused on what really matters: how to emotionally connect with the people who determine the business’s destiny.

Little did our mothers know, when they pointed out the name brands on the grocery shelves, how we would ultimately use such

lessons from young life in our, well, older life. But few other lessons compare to the lessons of brand.

And, today, the stakes are too high for any business to leave brand delivery to chance—especially businesses who find themselves fighting for market share, introducing new products or services, trying to turn a business around, or pursuing a merger or acquisition. They must exceed customer expectations on the outside. And that means they must look on the inside, at the experience they create to motivate employees to deliver the brand.

We believe in the emotional connections brands can create. That power comes right from the core of who the business is and what the business believes in. Because what goes around, comes around.

Our mothers probably taught us that, too.

Five Essential Steps

1. List your earliest brand memories. What do you remember? What is your favorite brand? What does it promise? What big idea does it represent? What customer experience does it promise?
2. Remember some of the lessons you have learned about brand over the years. What have you learned that can help you use the power of brand to create a positive reputation about your business as a place to work? What have you learned about the emotional connections of brand?
3. Consider the relationship of your business with your customers. How do your customers perceive the reliability of your products and services and the authenticity of your brand and the ideas your business stands for? What clues can this relationship provide for how to create a positive reputation for your business as a place to work?
4. Think about how your business can try to maximize the brand loyalty of your customers. Is it by distinguishing the products and services you offer? Or articulating the “big idea” that the brand of your business stands for? Or creating a sense of intimacy with your customers?
5. Imagine how the brand of your business can emotionally engage your customers—what it is about the core of your business that your customers are attracted to. And what clues this offers on how to engage your employees, too.