



The How of Great Brands. Start with why, but it's your how that matters most.

I'VE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to work with many leading brands over the years, and I've also watched purposeful, passionate organizations struggle for significance. I've seen dedicated religious leaders lose their ministries to apathy, while others swelled their church attendance into the thousands. I've witnessed friends start businesses to change the world and ultimately fail, while self-interested, financially motivated ones continue to thrive.

As much as I would have liked to (and believe me, I've tried), I have not found an individual's or organization's 'why,' its purpose or cause, to be the basis for success. Even though it feels good to make that connection—to think in terms of intent instead of execution—it's clearly not the case. And for one simple reason: People don't buy 'what' you do or 'why' you do it. They buy 'how' you do it; the unique and compelling way you bring your idea to life for their benefit. It's your 'how' that creates engagement, adoption and devotion.

Did Steve Jobs and Apple believe more passionately in elegant product design than Sony? Jobs was inspired by Akio Morito and fascinated with Sony products. Did Martin Luther King Jr. have more passion for equality and civil rights in America than Howard Thurman? Thurman enlivened King and served as his spiritual advisor. How about the Wright Brothers? Were they more stirred to fly than folks like Gustave Whitehead and Lyman Gilmore? Of course not. But they did conceive a patented control system, which is still used in modern aircraft today.

Don't let your feelings fool you. Intentions carry

weight; they help inform decision-making, inspire like-minded people, and sustain motivation during difficult times. But they only matter if you bring them to life in a bold and memorable way. What matters most in today's marketplace is timing, guts, and creative execution. It's the combination of domain expertise, strategic value creation, and an obsessive attention to detail—especially with regards to others' experiences—that gives rise to great brands.

What propelled Apple to its cult and Wall Street status? Steve Jobs' powerful strategic vision and uncompromising sense of 'how.' Why do we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.? Not because he cared deeply, but because he inspired us to care with his carefully crafted experiences and expertly delivered oratory. What accounts for the rapid growth of companies like Hyundai, Standard Chartered Bank, and Chipotle? Their 'how,' pure and simple.

Picasso had it right when he wrote: "Success is a very important thing! It has often been said that an artist should work for himself, out of love for art, so to speak, and hold success in contempt. But that is wrong! An artist needs success. Not only to live but to be able to create his art."

What 'why'-inspired organizations need in today's hyper-competitive marketplace is strong leadership to keep people constantly focused on the 'how.' Without a strategic obsession on the external needs and feelings of your audience, your 'why' will slowly fade as more 'how'-driven organizations attract away your customers, members, volunteers and donors. And, like you, I'd really hate to see that happen.