



# Fusion

## How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

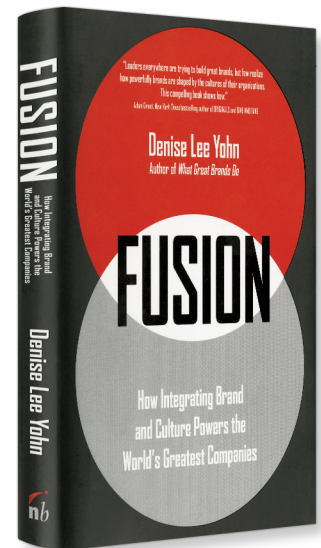
Independently, brand and culture are powerful, unsung business drivers. But when you fuse the two together to create an interdependent and mutually-reinforcing relationship between them, you create organizational power that isn't possible by simply cultivating one or the other alone.

In *Fusion*, author Denise Lee Yohn describes how leaders at the best companies succeed by aligning and integrating their brands and cultures. Through detailed case studies from some of the world's greatest companies, exclusive interviews with company executives, and insights from Yohn's more than 25 years working with world-class brands, *Fusion* provides readers with a roadmap for increasing competitiveness, creating measurable value for customers and employees, and future-proofing their business.

*Fusion* is indispensable for readers interested in workplace culture, brand management, strategy, leadership, employee engagement, branding and organization development. Learn how to unleash the power of brand-culture fusion to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and new growth.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why culture and brand are the biggest drivers of great results in business.
- Brand-culture fusion and the key strategies for achieving it.
- How to identify your organization's purpose and core values.
- How to operationalize your desired culture.



by Denise Lee Yohn

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: FUSION

by Denise Lee Yohn

**The author:** Denise Lee Yohn is the go-to expert on brand-building for national media outlets, an in-demand speaker and consultant, and an influential writer. She is the author of the best-selling book *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest* and the e-book *Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do*. News media including FOX Business TV, CNBC, *The Wall Street Journal* and NPR call on Denise when they want an expert point of view on hot business issues. She is a regular contributor to *Harvard Business Review*, and her keynote presentations have inspired business leaders around the world.

Summarized by arrangement with the publisher and author: *Fusion* by Denise Lee Yohn, published by Nicholas Brealey Publishing, an imprint of John Murray Press ©2018 Denise Lee Yohn, Inc. 228 pages, \$29.95, ISBN 978-1-4736-7698-5.

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## Introduction

In nuclear physics, fusion is the reaction that happens when two atomic nuclei come together. Nuclear fusion releases large amounts of energy — it's what powers the sun. When fused, the two nuclei create something entirely new.

In the same way, you can unleash great power when you fuse together your organization's two nuclei: your culture — the way the people in your organization behave and the attitudes and beliefs that inform them (i.e., “the way we do things around here”) — and your brand or brand identity, how your organization is understood by customers and other stakeholders.

Until recently, culture and brand were often seen as the “soft stuff” in business, often relegated to human resources and marketing efforts, respectively. Today, many leaders are starting to recognize what astute ones have known all along: Culture and brand are the nuclei of their organizations, the biggest drivers of the hard results they must produce every day.

When Herb Kelleher, founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, was asked what differentiated his airline — which had posted 44 consecutive years of profits while never executing a layoff — from other companies, he pointed to Southwest's culture as its key competitive advantage. “Our competitors can get all the hardware,” he said. “I mean, Boeing will sell them the planes. But it's the software, so to speak — the people — that's hard to imitate.”

Fully integrating and aligning your brand and culture produces meaningful, powerful results that affect your whole business. First, brand-culture fusion aligns your

workforce, increasing the efficiency of your entire organization and the quality of your outcomes. Your people are less likely to function at cross-purposes or to use conflicting standards when working toward a clear, common goal.

Second, fusing together your brand and culture improves your organization's competitive advantage because it enables you to produce intangible value that is difficult to copy. Competitors may be able to match *what* you offer to customers and employees, but it's much harder for them to embody the unique *why* and *how* of what you do.

Brand-culture fusion also ensures the authenticity of your brand. Customers are more savvy today. They want authenticity — brands that live up to their promises and stated ideals.

Finally, and perhaps most important, brand-culture fusion allows you to move your organization toward its vision more successfully, since it provides a common motivation and focus for everyone in your organization.

When you align the values and behaviors of your employees with what is expected and experienced by your customers, you attract and retain employees who feel an emotional commitment to your company *and* brand.

## PART I: THE FOUNDATIONS OF BRAND-CULTURE FUSION

Just as you can't build a great building on a weak foundation, you can't build a great organization without a strong foundation that's established by setting your purpose and values, understanding the current state of brand-culture fusion in your company and taking charge.



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### Set Your Sole Purpose and Core Values

To make brand–culture fusion happen, you must articulate a single overarching purpose and one set of core values to drive, align and guide everything your company does internally and externally.

#### Overarching Purpose: Your “Why”

A company’s purpose is its *why* — *why* it does what it does, *why* it exists. Having a meaningful purpose or being a “purpose-driven” company has become a popular notion in business today, and with good reason.

In today’s cluttered, ultracompetitive, choice-overloaded world, each company must have a clear reason for being. You need to play an invaluable, irreplaceable role in people’s lives, and you must live out that purpose convincingly, or your customers can easily be lured away by any one of your more deliberate competitors.

The purpose of your business and the purpose of your brand should be seamlessly integrated, tightly aligned and articulated as a single overarching purpose.

To identify your overarching purpose, go deep and think big. What difference in the world are you being called to make? What do you want your organization’s legacy to be?

Sometimes it’s helpful to go back to your company’s founder and revisit why he or she started it in the first place. And consider what would be missing — or how the world would be worse off — if your organization no longer existed.

To codify your company’s newfound purpose, craft a purpose statement that describes the impact you want to make on others — inside and outside your company. Your overarching purpose statement should be clear, pithy and externally oriented.

The purpose statements that drive some of the world’s most admired brands reveal how a short, powerful phrase can aptly convey a company’s reason for existing. These companies’ aspirations are bold and inspiring yet definitive.

- **Zappos:** To deliver happiness to the world.
- **Sony:** To create technologies that inspire people to dream and find joy.
- **Apple:** To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind.

#### Core Values: Your “How”

Core values are the essential and enduring principles and priorities that prescribe the desired mindset and behavior of everyone who works at your company.

Your values should describe the collective attitudes and beliefs that you desire all employees to hold, translate those into specific actions and decisions that they should make, and then in turn show how those behaviors produce customer experiences that define and differentiate your brand.

Once you’ve drafted your set of core values, here are some simple questions to ask yourself: “Do these core values capture the essence of our culture and brand?” “Do they set us apart from companies like us?” “Do they help our employees understand how they are expected to think and act?” It’s critical that you establish the desired behaviors or behavioral norms associated with your values so employees know what your values look like in action.

While individually a sole overarching purpose and a set of core values can help you realize some gains at your company, together they help create a high-functioning organization that is poised to produce significantly better business outcomes. ●

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### Assess Your Brand-Culture Fusion

Leaders of great organizations have tremendous clarity about their brand identity and about how to cultivate an organizational culture that enables them to achieve it. To get that kind of clarity, you must determine the kind of core values and culture — your desired culture — you should be aiming for to successfully support your brand identity.

#### Determine the Values You Need

Start by identifying the brand type that your brand falls into. Although no two brands share the exact same brand identity, there are only nine general brand types, including disruptive brands, which challenge the current ways of doing things and introduce new concepts that substantively change the market, and conscious brands are on a mission to make a positive social or environmental impact or enhance people’s quality of life.

Once you know the type of brand you have or desire to build, the next step is to identify the kind of culture required to deliver on it. Each brand type requires a specific organizational culture to thrive. If you want to be an innovative brand, for example, then your culture

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must encourage a test-and-learn mentality among your employees. You should determine the three top core values that correspond to each brand type. Inventiveness, experimentation and continuous improvement are the key core values needed to support an innovative brand. These core values serve as a starting point for designing your desired culture. You should design the other aspects of your culture to align with, build on and reinforce them.

### Assess Your Organization

Once you know the types of core values you're aiming for, it's time to examine how well your culture and brand are aligned and integrated today. When culture and brand are completely in sync, their alignment is manifested visibly in four primary areas:

- 1. Purpose and values integration.** Purpose and values integration is the extent to which your overarching purpose and your core values are woven into your business and organization.
- 2. Employee experience-customer experience integration.** When your culture and brand are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, there is a strong connection between how employees experience every aspect of work life during their tenure in your organization — from being hired to going through training, from working in a particular space to having tools for and information about their jobs and the company — and how customers experience your brand.
- 3. Internal brand alignment.** Internal brand alignment is the extent to which your people are aligned with each other on brand strategy. For your culture to be fully aligned with your brand, everyone in your organization must share one common understanding of your brand identity.
- 4. Employee brand engagement.** Employee brand engagement is the extent to which your people are aligned and engaged with your brand. General employee engagement is manifested in employees' relationships with their managers and co-workers, their view of their job responsibilities and their participation in work activities. Employee brand engagement, meanwhile, shows up in personal and emotional engagement with the brand, day-to-day engagement with the brand and engagement in your company's strategy.

Take the free online Brand-Culture Fusion Assessment (<http://deniseleeyohn.com/fusion-assessment/>), which

takes you through the above steps and produces a personalized report to help you pinpoint the strategies in Part 2 that you should focus on. ●

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## Lead the Change

The next step is to take leadership responsibility for cultivating your desired culture. It's imperative to align what you and your top executives say and do with your desired culture. The degree of alignment of those two factors determines the viability of brand-culture fusion more powerfully than any other factor.

**Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Strong communication is well recognized as the key to great leadership. The keys to successful leadership communication are consistency, simplicity, storytelling and relevance.

- **Consistency.** When it comes to cultivating your desired culture and weaving it into the daily ethos at your company, you must first consistently and relentlessly communicate your company's overarching purpose and core values and why they're important.
- **Simplicity.** Keep your communication as simple and straightforward as possible — but that doesn't mean you have to “dumb it down” or make it boring.
- **Storytelling.** Illustrate your message with engaging stories. Giving examples and telling stories helps people relate to abstract ideas like culture and values.
- **Relevance.** Make your communications relevant to your organization's overarching purpose and core values. Carefully choose what to talk about because it can speak volumes about the kind of culture you're trying to cultivate.

**Actions speak louder than words.** What you *say* matters, but just as important, what you *do* provides models of action for your people and telegraphs how committed you are to aligning your culture with your brand. As a leader, you must be a paragon of your desired culture. Sometimes even a leader's seemingly small actions speak volumes. After Marvin Ellison took on the task of turning around JCPenney in August 2015, he chose to wear clothes bought at the company's stores, signaling to employees, customers and the public at large a strong endorsement of the brand's quality and style.

**Engage every leader.** Organization-wide alignment is critical to integrating your culture and brand. Executives at the top of an organization must hold accountable their direct reports for cultivating the desired culture, those

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managers in turn must do the same for theirs and so on. The adage “people leave managers, not companies” speaks to the central relationship between direct managers and employees — particularly for frontline employees who rarely interact with their organization’s top executives. Leaders in the middle layers of an organization’s hierarchy, like department managers, store managers and program leaders, wield the most influence on an employee’s daily experience and therefore are a critical group in any culture transformation effort.

**Reinforce your culture with the right people decisions.** People decisions — who to hire, fire and promote — are perhaps the most visible way leaders can build their culture and align it with the company’s brand identity. When it comes to hiring employees, companies that are committed to cultivating and maintaining their desired culture don’t simply use their core values to screen potential employees — they prioritize them.

When you rely on your core values to make people decisions, you make sure the right people are on your bus — and you send a powerful message to your organization about the importance of its values. ●

### PART II: FIVE STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE BRAND-CULTURE FUSION

The roadmap for your journey to brand-culture fusion comprises strategies to nurture your desired culture by infusing it with your brand, or vice versa.

## Organize and Operate On-Brand

To tap the full value and growth-creating potential of your desired culture — one that is fully aligned with your brand — you must operationalize it through strategy, management, communication, employee experience, organization and operations.

Your organizational design (the units, hierarchy and roles in your organization) and your operations (the different business functions and day-to-day processes and practices at your company) are critically important because they undergird all the others. If your organizational design and your operations aren’t supporting and advancing your desired culture and brand, they’re probably detracting from it. You send mixed messages and dilute efforts by not aligning the two.

Your goal should be an organization that’s designed specifically to cultivate your desired culture — not someone else’s — so that you can ultimately achieve brand-culture

fusion. With this goal in mind, consider how you might use the three primary elements of organizational design: structure, standards and roles.

**Organizational structure.** The structure of your organization — its hierarchy, divisions and organizing logic — determines who works together and how. The renowned Cleveland Clinic is organized into different specialty centers focused on diseases such as diabetes, cardiac care, etc. Harvard Business School professor Frances X. Frei explains that this structure fits the unique demands of the organization. Because Cleveland Clinic attracts the most severely afflicted patients, its doctors operate in challenging environments that require innovative solutions. She observes, “Organizing into disease centers rather than narrower, more traditional lines of specialization (such as kidneys or blood) sets the stage for cross-disciplinary collaboration — and thus for novel perspectives — within those centers.”

**Organizational standards.** These are rules that are applied company-wide when forming departments, units, work groups or teams. For example, the leaders of Google implemented “the rule of seven” throughout the company. Knowing that smart creatives are oriented to getting things done and need direct access to decision-makers, former CEO Eric Schmidt and former SVP of products Jonathan Rosenberg encouraged managers to have a minimum of seven direct reports — instead of adding layers between smart creatives and decision-makers — to produce less managerial oversight and more employee freedom, the kind that allows smart creatives to thrive.

**Organizational roles.** When designing your organization, you should also carefully consider how creating certain roles can advance your desired culture.

### Align Your “What” With Your “Why” and “How”

When it comes to fully integrating and aligning your culture and brand, how you *run* your organization is just as important as how you *design* it. If you craft them the right way, your operations can help your organization cultivate the right culture.

For example, if you want to undergird your performance brand identity with a more competitive organizational culture, give employees access to the company’s key performance metrics and competitive intelligence, and enroll them in a process of regularly engaging with that information.

When assessing the alignment of your company’s current operations with your desired culture, consider the following: What do your product processes convey about

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your culture? That it is agile, original or predictable? How about your sales process or your annual planning and budgeting process? ●

### Create Culture-Changing Employee Experiences

“Creating a compelling employee experience” was named by *Forbes* as the No. 1 HR trend in 2017, and 70 percent of executives around the world surveyed by Deloitte’s Human Capital Group said employee experience (EX) was an important or very important trend.

You must imbue the core values of your desired culture in the daily experiences you create for your employees so that they can soak them in and reflect them back with their behaviors and attitudes. You can apply the same methods and tools that produce successful customer experience (CX) to the design of your EX. There are four main steps to follow:

**Step 1: Segment your employees.** Segmentation enables companies to understand and prioritize their customers. Like customers, different employees have different needs and desires and contribute different value to the organization. Identify and profile the most relevant employee segments in your organization by the role that work plays in employees’ lives; by the value that employees contribute to the organization; by how aligned employees are with the company’s strategy and goals; or by the degree to which employees adopt strategic change.

**Step 2: Identify priority employee interactions.** It’s impossible to provide an excellent experience for every employee and for every interaction he or she has with the company — nor is it necessary. Instead, you should focus on designing experiences that address the needs and wants of employees who represent the most value to your organization and those interactions that have the most potential to advance your desired culture.

**Step 3: Adopt an EX design model.** Once you know the interactions you should prioritize, determine the categories of elements you will include in each experience. Consider this three-category design model:

- Environment — elements of the physical workplace plus everything else that employees see, hear, touch, taste or smell.
- Tools — technology and other instruments or materials that employees use.

- Intangibles — elements that impact the way employees think and feel, including communications, leadership styles and policies.

**Step 4: Design experiences that support your desired culture.** Now apply the design model to each priority employee segment/interaction intersection that you identified in Step 2, and determine the experience you should design and deliver. Let’s say you’ve prioritized designing a new recruiting experience for the segment of employees who engage with customers face-to-face on a daily basis. Using the three-category design model (environment, tools and intangibles), determine the elements of the experience for each of those categories. Imbue each element with the core values and other unique aspects of your desired culture. ●

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### Sweat the Small Stuff

To nurture your desired culture, you also must focus on the smaller, tactical but equally significant aspects of your organization: (1) rituals and artifacts — things your organization regularly does or creates to commemorate or symbolize what’s important to it; and (2) employee policies and procedures — the codes of conduct, rules of engagement and other instructions that set the tone and guidelines for working at the organization.

To identify appropriate rituals for your organization, start with your core values and determine which ones need to be promoted or reinforced the most. Then think about shared experiences that you could create around them, or identify special events or dates that you could turn into celebrations of those values. Consider important moments at your organization such as critical customer presentations or other high-stakes meetings. How might you use rituals to prepare your people to take on these challenges?

Chevron employees reinforce the company’s core value of safety by opening each meeting with a “safety moment,” whether to report on an accident that was avoided due to safety procedures or to simply encourage people to use handrails in the stairways. The key is to identify those routines and activities that interpret and reinforce the specific elements of your desired culture.

Artifacts — symbolic objects or other physical items that either make the organizational culture visible or that commemorate a milestone — can play a similar role as rituals in cultivating your desired culture. To determine how to use artifacts to solidify your employees’ commitment to

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your culture and guide their daily behavior, ask yourself, “What are the crucial memories or associations that we need to trigger internally?”

Then consider how to link those memories and associations to tangible objects, including elements of your physical environment, the language your organization uses, technology and tools, artistic creations, expressions of style, and communications and publications.

At Siebel Systems, the CRM software company, customer satisfaction is a core value. To subtly reinforce it, all the artwork on the walls comes from customers’ annual reports, and all the conference rooms are named after customers.

### Promote Your Culture Through Policies and Procedures

Follow these steps to leverage company policies and procedures to cultivate your desired culture:

**Step 1: First, establish policies and procedures that are right for your organization and that reflect the uniqueness of your culture.** Start with the overarching purpose of your organization. What strategies have you set to pursue it? And which of the company’s core values would support those strategies? Once you’ve identified these strategies, you can create guidelines and procedures to achieve them and support your values.

**Step 2: Design a compelling employee handbook or guide.** The next step is to codify your policies and procedures into a guide or handbook that is designed as if it were a communications piece for an external audience. If your guide is high-quality and designed to engage, employees will be more likely to read and regularly refer to it. Be sure the tone and manner of the guide or handbook aligns with your brand.

**Step 3: You must then disseminate the guide and train employees on the policies and procedures in it.** Engage new employees with your guide right from the beginning during their on-boarding process. You should also engage your employees with your guide by keeping it up to date. Whenever you make policy changes, use the occasion to renew employees’ attention to your guide. ●

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## Ignite Your Transformation

Employee brand engagement involves engaging employees with their emotions, actions and intellect. Even if your employees know your brand strategy, it is not enough. As Gregg Lederman explains in *Achieve Brand Integrity*, employees shouldn’t just *understand* your brand and the

behaviors required to deliver on it. They must be *committed* to doing them, and then they must actually *do* them.

That’s where brand engagement and the following three tactics come into play:

**Stage great employee brand engagement experiences.** Employee brand engagement experiences are vibrant, thoughtfully designed programs and initiatives created either to launch a cultural or brand initiative or to reinvigorate it after a period of time. When launching brand-culture transformation efforts within your company, these experiences can help you explain to all employees where you’re taking the organization, why and what role they play in that transformation.

When launching a cultural transformation, you should stage an employee brand-engagement experience for every single employee, either by bringing all employees together in one venue for a single event or by holding sessions for separate regions, departments or groups over a period of time. Either way, the experience should be multidimensional and experiential and include a mixture of elements, such as a presentation by company leadership, hands-on exercises, facilitated discussions, distribution of tools and instructions, and department- or role-specific content.

**Carefully craft communications campaigns.** The same standards you use to communicate with customers should apply to your employee communications. After all, your goals — to get people’s attention, appeal to and engage them, and prompt them to action — are the same for both groups.

- Be clear. Convey the information you want employees to know and what you expect them to do as a result without any jargon or nuance, which are often confusing.
- Be explicit, even prescriptive. Don’t assume people will interpret information in the same way.
- Be creative. Like customers, employees are human beings, emotional creatures, so communications must touch them emotionally. Design your communications to inspire as well as teach.

**Develop toolkits for ongoing engagement.** A brand-engagement toolkit is a collection of materials and tools that employees can access and that help them connect with the brand on three different levels: their heads, hearts, and hands and feet.

To engage employees’ heads, for example, a toolkit might contain flash cards or quizzes employees can self-administer to test their own knowledge or use with others.

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To engage employees' hearts, a toolkit might contain videos featuring customer stories or letters from customers along with corresponding worksheets for employees to note how the videos or letters inspire them to change their attitudes and behaviors to improve the customer experience.

To engage employees' hands and feet — their actions, that is — a toolkit might contain decision guides, process flowcharts, workbooks or mobile apps containing role-playing exercises or other activities that help them easily align their decisions and actions with your desired culture. ●

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### Build Your Brand From the Inside Out

In some situations, you're actually better off allowing your culture to lead your brand. If your culture is well established, you may achieve brand-culture fusion by using it to shape or reshape your brand.

Unilever, the consumer goods company behind the household brands Dove, Lipton and Surf, among others, shows how some corporations look to their core values to sharpen their corporate-wide brand identity.

Responsibility is deeply embedded in Unilever's culture. When CEO Paul Polman arrived at the company in 2009, he launched the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP). As a part of the USLP, Unilever reduced the amount of saturated fat in its Flora and Becel margarine brands and then used those brands to encourage customers to be proactive about their heart health.

It built its Lifebuoy soap brand into a platform for teaching millions of people across the globe how to stop the spread of disease simply by washing their hands effectively.

And it promotes the development of young girls' confidence through the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, reinforcing that brand's identity as an advocate for women and their individual potential for being and feeling beautiful.

Chief marketing and communications officer Keith Weed explains, "The USLP is of course a way of doing business, but it's also the reason to believe, the differentiator ultimately of the Unilever brand."

If you want to elevate your core values to drivers of your brand identity as Unilever has done, you must make them salient to customers and other stakeholders. You must focus on and perhaps increase your communications about your values. You must show customers and stakeholders clear proof that you are operating by your core values.

And you must ensure these values translate into benefits for your customers — either directly through improvements to the customer experience or more transcendently through alignment with their personal values.

Companies in categories that are highly commoditized, like airlines and fast food chains, or where it's hard to discern the difference between products offered by different brands, such as professional service firms or banks, may find that their organizational culture is more distinct or meaningful than their brand. If that's the case at your company, you can use your culture to differentiate your brand.

REI, the outdoor retailer, provides a powerful example of how launching a campaign with a bold message rooted in your culture can bring attention to your brand and set it apart. Its decision to close its doors on Black Friday and allow its employees to enjoy the outdoors — the company's cultural tenet — became the #OptOutside brand campaign in which the company encouraged customers to do so as well. The campaign has clearly established a differentiated position for REI, not just among other retailers and sporting goods companies but also among lifestyle brands in general. ●

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### Conclusion

Whether you are starting with a thriving culture or a broken one, whether your brand is already strong or needs to become more powerful, ask yourself if you aspire to greatness. Do you want to align your organization with a single goal so that it is not just productive and efficient but operates with excellence? Do you want to future-proof your company by creating value that is sustainable and inimitable? Do you want to have a truly authentic brand? Do you want to galvanize your people and move toward your vision?

If your answer is yes, seize the opportunity to become great. Engage the power of brand-culture fusion. ●

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