

# Stand for Something

The Power of Building a Brand People Authentically Love

by **Brian Burkhart**



## Contents

The Most Valuable Real Estate on Earth

Page #2

Not What or How, But Why

Page #2

The Cognitive Psychology of Core Beliefs

Page #2

Getting to the Root of Belief

Page #3

Congruence and the Core Belief Filter

Page #4

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Stand for Something*, Brian Burkhart breaks down not only the importance of organizations and business leaders finding their core beliefs— but how to act on those beliefs in a powerful and meaningful way.

Inspired by decades of work helping companies find their why and let it guide their how and what, Burkhart brings dozens of real-world examples of companies that have succeeded or failed in establishing and living their core beliefs. Through these examples and his own insights, Burkhart breaks down exactly the process companies can take to identify their core beliefs, give them power, and begin acting on those beliefs from the top of the organization down.

From identifying the most important elements of core beliefs to identifying the best people who will help you serve those beliefs, *Stand for Something* will help businesses and brands in every industry transform the way they approach everything they do.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What core beliefs really are, and why companies that follow them are more successful than those that don't.
- Practical processes for exploring, narrowing down, and identifying the core beliefs that guide your company.
- How to move forward with new purpose once you've established your guiding core beliefs.

### The Most Valuable Real Estate on Earth

Core beliefs are at the heart of every organization, whether those organizations realize it or not. In their ad focusing on the importance of a car's backseat in caring for people's most precious loved ones and life moments, Subaru did what most organizations won't. They not only discovered their core beliefs, but shouted them out loud in a profound way that's easy to communicate and even easier to understand. They stand for something. The process they executed so effectively in their new campaign is the heart of what connects people to companies.

It's what will make people fall in love with yours.

Imagine the power of selling your services even while barely mentioning how they work, how it's done, what they cost, or what your experience and background are.

Unfortunately, there are no classes taught on finding your company's core beliefs. No one forces your organization to list it out in a form. But like every block of stone that the sculptor Michelangelo believed held the sculpture underneath, the core beliefs that can drive your company are already there— even if they're hiding.

Your core beliefs hold a sacred spot in your company's operations, and sometimes an even more sanctified place in your customers' psyche. And that is the most valuable real estate on earth.

---

### Not What or How, but Why

Simply put, your core belief is whatever you believe in and stand for. Most fundamentally, your core belief is why your organization exists. Right now, you don't have the words for your core belief. But those beliefs are there.

As a business leader, it's vital that you actually take the time to stop, question, and wonder why you do what you do to discover your core belief. If you get the why right, your customers will figure out the what.

Our brains are wired to have deeply held beliefs, but you most likely don't challenge those beliefs often or even consider why you hold them. But if you can tap into them and get a clearer picture on what you believe, as well as find others who believe the same things, you're in business.

Here are some of the key elements that define core beliefs:

#### Authenticity

You have to be authentic. Be true to who you are, not just who you wish you were. How do you find your authenticity? By looking to your founding.

#### Founders' Stories

Often, a founder or founders story holds the key to the company's core beliefs. For small and new companies, this task is relatively easy as the founders are likely still involved in the company. For large and longstanding companies whose founders may have left or passed away, it can be more difficult. But taking the time and making the effort to find out what inspired the founders of your company can go a long way in defining your core beliefs.

#### Distinctiveness

In addition to being authentic, your core belief can't be generic, vanilla, benign, or safe. If you develop core beliefs that could apply to literally any organization, then you're not distinctive. To build a brand people actually love, you have to stand for something and break from the herd.

Once you've found your Why, you can let it guide your what and how. When your core beliefs impact everything you do, they give you and your organization direction.

---

### The Cognitive Psychology of Core Beliefs

Beliefs are not actions, but there is a clear, causal relationship between the two. Your beliefs lead your actions. In the largest context, that's what cognitive psychology theory dictates.

It's time to become extremely honest with yourself. How much time have you and your organization taken to codify your core beliefs and assess how they guide actual actions? If you're like most businesses in the world, the answer is probably very little time at all.

If you were to ask a room of 15 people from around your company what their core beliefs are, would you get 15 completely different answers? This is a sign that your company's core beliefs are not being put into action consistently throughout the company.

And if you don't know what you stand for, how will you know what to tell the world? You won't know what to shout from the rooftops. And if you don't stand for something, how will your customers know who you truly are?

They won't. You'll be left in the dust, because you can't give them what you don't have yourself.

### You Can't Give What You Don't Have

Imagine you're the CEO of a firm. If you're already a CEO, think about your own situation. Now imagine that you don't know what your company stands for— maybe you do, maybe you don't. But for now, let's say none of us know our company's core beliefs.

In this hypothetical scenario, you institute a new initiative to boost sales. You order the HR department to actively search for a new head of sales, and you work alongside the CFO to develop comp plans for the entire sales team, as well as the CMO to develop a better message and main presentation deck. Now what happens? Every department you've ordered to do something is going to struggle.

They don't know what you believe in order to take these next steps. To take appropriate action, they need to know how their actions are supposed to bring them closer in line with the company's beliefs.

You can always teach people skills. But you can't teach people what to believe— that has to be deeply rooted in who they are. Simply put, you can't find highly devoted people unless you stand up and shout what you're devoted to first— no matter how much money you try to give them.

---

### Getting to the Root of Belief

To understand how to get to the root of belief, you have to think about what's known as the Golden Circle. It's simple—you have three concentric circles. The smallest circle at the center is why, the next largest ring is how, and the biggest outer ring is what.

The vast majority of companies start from the outside in, but the most successful companies start from the center out.

While this might sound simple, it can take some organizations or individuals years to uncover their why. It can also be deeply emotional, and sometimes feel frustrating.

To get there, you'll need to guide yourself through the process of deductive reasoning in order to reverse engineer your beliefs based on your actions. Reverse engineering is a process used to uncover information by working backwards from the finished product. For example, Allied forces reverse engineered the gas cans used by Axis armies to create their own version that was more efficient and effective than

what they'd been using during WWII.

Start by considering your behaviors—what are the things your company actually does on a day to day basis. Everything from core business tasks to peripheral ways of boosting morale.

Then, look at this list. What makes you do these things? When you think about doing them, how does it make you feel?

Your core beliefs may still be incomplete, and that's totally fine. Soon you'll be learning how to craft aspirational core beliefs that are distinctive and contour your organization's actions towards your intended direction.

### Aspirational Beliefs

If your core beliefs are impossible to nail down, it's conceivable that you can strive for something greater than what you already are. The aspiration has to be well within the framework of realistic possibilities.

Take Nikola, a company with bold, imaginative leaders who built and later sold technology businesses. They have engineers, designers and a slew of dedicated people eager to change the face of transportation. They don't have a manufacturing facility nor the skilled employee base to build them. At this point, however, they've sold 800 trucks to Anheuser-Busch based on a prototype and a dream. Now they're a billion-dollar startup. They decided to rally around a single, powerful core belief—to change transportation as we know it by building vehicles that run on hydrogen power—and moved from there.

Aspirational core beliefs can be game changers, but they have to be within the realm of realistic possibility. If done correctly, they are as good as any tool in your business to change the world.

### Missing the Mark

Why do people ignore or resist core beliefs? Often, people and organizations lack the awareness about why they exist and instead focus on the what and how. One of the reasons is that this is simply easier in terms of requiring less effort.

Another reason is that when it comes to initial results, core beliefs sometimes don't work. They won't immediately drive sales, increase productivity, or get the right associates in your company within a month. Turning core beliefs into measurable success takes time and patience, and many companies and individuals don't allow themselves enough of either.

For most, it's easier to dance with what you already know and not change for fear of alienating customers or employees. But if you don't get your core belief right at the top, the domino effect will keep you from getting it right at the bottom. How do you take control of your destiny? By implementing your core beliefs and putting them into action—the subject of the next section.

### Congruence and the Core Belief Filter

At first, putting your beliefs into action will be a conscious process. You'll have to force yourself to stick with it, making it feel awkward. But over time, you'll find that it becomes automatic. You'll simply make waves, or build relationships, or think different, or build from the backseat forward, or make soap without chemicals, or make tasty cheeseburgers—whatever guides your company.

The longer you embrace your core beliefs, the easier it will become. The processes necessary to implement your core beliefs and create congruence can be incredibly simple, as long as they're thought-out and intentional. In fact, in many ways, the most successful congruence processes are the simplest. If you're consistent with them over time, your core beliefs will permeate everything you do. You'll lead with your beliefs.

### How to Lead with Beliefs

If you want to lead with beliefs, you sometimes have to recognize that those beliefs will alienate some people around you who don't share them. You have to accept that the nature of standing up and standing out will mean you'll attract some and repel others. The only people who never alienate anyone are the only people who never take a stand or insist on a set of beliefs for themselves.

If you truly want to lead, you have to lead even when it becomes uncomfortable or difficult, and when others may not buy into the vision that you have for yourself.

### Work with Those Who Believe What You Believe

Get people on your side who believe in the same things that you believe in and are willing to take those risks with you in order to create something great. You have the power to change lives, including your own. Find a team that will support you as you stand up, stand out, and tell people what you're about.

If you want to make waves, you need to find those who are willing to stick with you when the water gets choppy.

### Break from the Herd and Shout Your Why

Authenticity isn't easy. It's being able to find true comfort in your own skin, and that means in your own beliefs. It means following the example set by individuals who fully understand the choices, consequences, and outcomes of everything they do. You might fully understand your core beliefs, but do you possess the necessary bravery to live authentically? To build a business authentically?

Life is too long to do anything other than what matters to you. For you, the most valuable real estate on earth is the series of places in your heart and mind where you hold your core beliefs. Own that space and speak from it, and you will become unstoppable.



Brian Burkhart believes in making waves. He operates multiple businesses as a founder, CEO, or partner, and takes an active role in building those brands. One of those companies —SquarePlanet— was named an Inc. 5000 company in 2018. A sought-after keynote speaker, Brian works with some of the world's leading brands, including Google, Red Bull, McDonald's, ZICO Coconut Water, Stryker, United Airlines, and Citibank. He's prepped ten firms that have appeared on TV's Shark Tank and worked with dozens of TED presenters.

*Stand for Something: The Power of Building a Brand People Authentically Love* © 2019 Brian Burkhart. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Lioncrest Publishing. 236 pages, ISBN 978-1544502588 Summary copyright ©2020 by Soundview Book Summaries®