

**THE  
SCIENCE  
OF  
STORY**

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A BRAND IS A REFLECTION OF ITS CULTURE

ADAM FRIDMAN

HANK OSTHOLTHOFF

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## Foreword

Why does story and purpose matter to you and your organization?

For that answer, we need to look to the storyline that has been emerging in the talent marketplace for over 20 years. In 1997, McKinsey launched the war for talent. We saw the forecasts that told us of a challenging future—that talent would become hard to find and even harder to hang on to. McKinsey predicted that there would be unprecedented talent shortages in the years to come. It was a time when you could interview in the morning and have an offer by the end of the day if you had the right skill set.

The War for Talent ushered in a conversation that was top of mind to C-suite leaders and Human Resource Practitioners. Talent was a top priority and not having the right talent was a significant constraint to growth. When the dot com bubble burst, it seemed like we went from a candidate market for talent to an employer market overnight. Companies pulled back, they were now in the driver's seat. There were takeaways, a significant attempt to adjust starting salaries to a lower level, some organizations reduced benefits, all in a market where jobs were hard to find and candidates were plentiful. Voices in the market at that time referred to it as the employers' revenge, or at the very least, a time to even the score.

People wondered, whatever happened to the War for Talent? It didn't go away, it just went underground for a few years. In fact, the advice from insightful companies wasn't

to abandon the focus on talent, but to take advantage of the downturn in the market by acquiring great talent at more moderate salaries. As a majority of organizations cut training and development budgets, companies with a clear talent strategy invested in developing their people. As a result, in many cases, their people investments paid big dividends in results and building their pipelines for the future.

We have seen many economic cycles over the last two decades. When we began to come out of the Great Recession of 2007/2008, we heard a lot about jobless recoveries as job creation lagged improved business results. But then, in 2010/2011 we started to see a gradual uptick in hiring that was built upon month by month, quarter by quarter. By the end of 2016, the economy had seen 75 consecutive months of job growth. So here we are (again): a tight talent market (we have 7.3 million unfilled jobs in the economy today, and roughly 3.3 million people quit their jobs every month to take a new role in search of something else). It is definitely a candidate's market for talent. There is a talent shortage predicted to be with us until at least 2050, and companies are looking for ways to find great people and hang on to them. While this may echo the War for Talent, things are more complex than they were in the talent market 20 years ago.

Today we have a multigenerational workforce that will be with us for the at least the next 30 years. People want more from work, with work being a place to express their values and make a contribution. They want to work in a way that expresses their beliefs. Technology is changing how we work, where we work, how we connect, our ability to collaborate, and the convergence of work and the rest of our lives. Values matter, purpose matters, people want to be valued not just

for what they can do but for who they are. Employees want to know that you care about them. Recognition and valuing the individual is important. People want to be developed not only for the job they are in today but also for the jobs they would like to grow into. The quality of the conversation has changed, employees want real connection that is meaningful. They want to matter and want to trust leaders that value who they are. This is where the Science of Story begins.

Culture is essential in a tough talent market. As you will learn in the Science of Story, working and living with purpose and intention helps you attract and retain great people. Having a compelling story for your employees is just as important and the one you tell your customers. The most important job of leaders is to translate their mission, purpose, vision and story for their employees and figure out how to live them every day.

Adam and Hank have offered a way forward in this book for every leader and every organization that aspires to create great results by engaging their people, living their purpose, and telling their story. Consider this a workbook for the soul of your people and your company. It is a field guide on how to create great cultures through developing compelling stories. It offers insight into how to build a culture and organization where people want to join and make a passionate contribution.

I wish you a great journey as you develop and live your story.

**Pamela Stroko**, Vice-President, HCM Transformation & Thought Leadership, Oracle Corporation

## Introduction

*“The two most important days of a man’s life are the day on which he was born and the day on which he discovers why he was born.”*

*—Rev. Ernest T. Campbell*

From religions to revolutions, from war to peace, stories are at the heart of human history. And in the last 50 years—particularly in the last 10—stories have become the name of the business marketing game. Budweiser isn’t just competing with Amstel Light on taste. They’re also competing on answers to questions like: ‘Where did you come from? Where are we going? Will you help me become a better global citizen?’ Inspire us—or we’re drinking Amstel tonight.

Today’s fastest-growing companies tell stories that position themselves as agents of change working toward a better future. The cult favorite, fast-casual chain Sweetgreen aims, “To inspire healthier communities by connecting people to real food.” A well-known financial services company announces in their values statement that: “Regardless of our growing size, scope, and reach, we must never lose sight of putting our customers first and helping them succeed financially.”

But awakening to the power of story as a marketing tool introduces a new temptation: telling stories that aren’t exactly, you know, true. In the case of that well-known

financial services firm, there was a disconnect between their stated values and their actual values. “Lions hunting zebras” is how the *New York Times* described Wells Fargo’s stealthy attack on client resources.<sup>1</sup> In October 2016, Wells Fargo became the largest bank ever to lose its accreditation with the Better Business Bureau. They did so by aiming to cross-sell eight accounts to every customer, even if that meant giving bad advice or flat-out lying.

The gap between presentation and reality in Wells Fargo’s case was extreme, but almost more concerning are the gaps between presentation and reality that exist in many, if not most, companies. And here’s the catch: it’s not their fault.

Up until recently, companies have succeeded or failed based on profit. The standard for success was simple: make money. But the rules have changed with dizzying speed. We’ve pivoted from the “Greed is good” mentality to “Conscious capitalism<sup>2</sup>,” a phrase popularized by Whole Foods CEO John Mackey. Businesses that make money by delivering a product or service to their customers at a good value could be undone if their customers decide they’re in business for the wrong reasons. They might find their profits start to tank.

And what are the “right reasons” to be in business? Today the “right” answer aligns with the greater good of humankind. Companies that thrive, “Serve the interests of all major stakeholders—customers, employees, investors,

1. Stacy Cowley, “Lions Hunting Zebras’: Ex-Wells Fargo Bankers Describe Abuses,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2016 <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/21/business/dealbook/lions-hunting-zebras-ex-wells-fargo-bankers-describe-abuses.html>.

2. Kate Lowery, “Conscious Capitalism: A New Book by our Co-Founder and Co-CEO, John Mackey,” *Whole Foods Market Blog*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/conscious-capitalism-new-book-our-co-founder-and-co-ceo-john-mackey-0>

communities, suppliers, and the environment.”<sup>3</sup>

Don’t panic just because you’re confused, or even resentful, of this new expectation that companies give back to society, as well as other key stakeholders. You might be unsure how to remain profitable while running an empathetic, inspiring company. Frankly, the transition from 20<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century values would induce vertigo in the hardiest of souls. It’s no wonder that there’s a gap between the stories customers buy and the reality under the hood—the reality of the way companies run, or the story that employees see.

In this book, we’ll teach you (as a curious and inspired leader/reader) to thrive as you pursue building a purpose-driven company that does more than blindly and slavishly pursue profit. We’ll also teach you to find a story to tell your customers that’s true, one that doesn’t feel like a charade. In other words, we’ll teach you how to put on the same face for your employees that you put on for your customers.

The first step is to identify your purpose—the non-financial, people-first commitment that will guide your strategy, culture, and marketing. We’ll also teach you how to passionately explain your company’s purpose to the members of your organization so they can fully embrace the concept and contribute at the maximum of their ability. Not only is it easier for leaders to marry their stated purpose with their actions—they must.

Humans are incredibly perceptive creatures. If you’re not sincerely excited about what your team is accomplishing together, your employees will know. If you treat your

3. King, Jeff. “Only Conscious Capitalists Will Survive.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 4 Dec. 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/onmarketing/2013/12/04/only-conscious-capitalists-will-survive/>