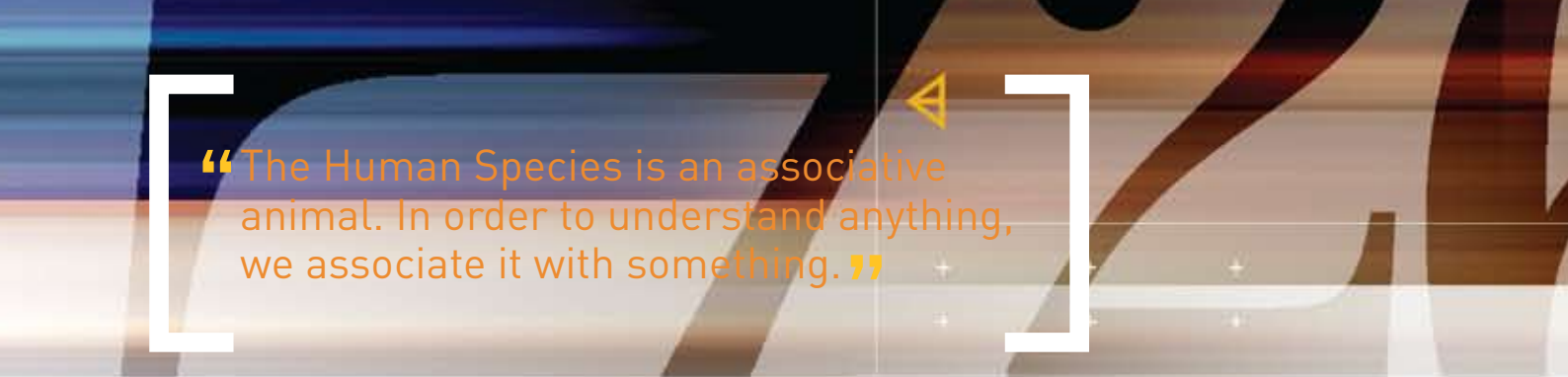




Effective Direction

According to Best Selling author Stephen R. Covey in “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, there are seven easily identifiable characteristics or habits that make a person highly effective in every area of their lives. Interestingly these same habits also ensure the effectiveness of brands.



“The Human Species is an associative animal. In order to understand anything, we associate it with something.”

The underlying idea is that if a person uses the universal and timeless principles of Character, Ethics and Values, they will achieve true “effectiveness” in their lives. In other words, highly effective people create long-lasting meaningful connections with other people by using what is common to all of us thereby communicating comfortably and ensuring an “effective” return.

This is also true of “effective” Branding Methodologies: What consumer would willingly align with or spend money on a company or product that has no character? That proclaims nothing? That is hard to distinguish and difficult to understand? That displays zero commonality and asserts no value? No consumer! The Human Species is an associative animal. In order to understand anything, we

associate it with something. Everything we think, feel and do has associations to our past, our present and our dreams of the future. An effective communicator (be it a person or a brand) understands this and uses what is common in all of us to deliver an effective message.

So, what are these 7 Habits of Highly Effective Brands?

1 HABIT 1. - Be Proactive.

Have a personal vision of where you want to go, be objective about your company/ product. Do not ‘react’ - respond.

Great brands have this kind of visionary quality. Often it’s allied to a visionary leader, such as Richard Branson at Virgin, Steve Jobs at Apple – or, closer to home David McKernan at Java Republic. But even without a media-savvy CEO, you can build a strong brand by having a consistent, clear and memorably implemented vision of what your brand stands for. Think of the experience delivered by Avoca in cafes, cookbooks and gifts. A proactive brand has a vision that is understood by those who deliver the brand experience, and is tangible in every encounter that your audience has with the brand. Every successful brand begins with a vision of what they want their brand to achieve. Virgin Airlines wanted “to grow a profitable airline that people love to fly with and where people want to work”. Nike wanted to bring “innovation and inspiration to every athlete in the world”.

2 HABIT 2. - Begin with the End in Mind.

Be results focused. Work towards what you want to achieve in the long term.

In the context of a business (rather than an individual), Covey says the true test of this habit is where everybody in a business is part of the development and sustenance of their organisation’s long-term goals. When we’re talking about brands, the same applies. Most brands only express their desired values when facing the public – and what goes on behind closed doors can be a different matter! Truly great brands come from organisations where everybody understands what makes their brand great, and works to reflect that. Our clients - such as Java Republic - work hard to sustain this kind of brand involvement from within. It helps that their coffee is hand-roasted, because that degree of personal care and attention at the start of their product’s life is reflected in the signatures of the master roasters on their packaging. But they don’t stop at just supplying great coffee beans; they run a “Barista University” to protect their unique flavour when clients use their beans to serve a cup of coffee.

HABIT 3. Put First Things First.

Having a core brand message – and making sure every activity and communication is aligned to that message.

Self Help is a non-government development aid agency with projects across Africa. They were founded on the principle that those who suffered from the effects of famine would be the best ones to solve their own problems in the long term. Building on the principles of the Irish co-operative movement, they've spent 20 years helping African communities to develop their own sustainable, long-term solutions. This core value that development work provides a permanent solution to the problems that emergency aid can only patch up - is at the heart of everything they do. Their methods have been recognised by the Irish government and the UN as being amongst the most highly successful models for effecting real change in Africa. Our work with Self Help, and the skills of their own in-house team, has ensured that this value is at the core of everything they do: From the projects they choose to undertake, right down to the gifts they sell in their Christmas Catalogue. Everything reflects and amplifies their key message that the Self-Help model of Development *works* in Africa.

HABIT 4. Think Win-Win.

If your Customer wins, you win too!

All too often companies forget the simple rule that if you are good to your customers, they will be good to you. Brand intelligence is all about giving your customers a positive experience every time they use or buy your product. A good brand promise is often built on mutuality: where the consumer appreciates and understands what they get from the brand as much as the brand's owners benefit from their custom. A well-known Irish brand that doesn't appear to follow this rule is Ryanair. They argue that the customer "wins" with low fares, but the cumulative effect of hidden charges, defensive customer service and a generally unpleasant consumer experience makes the customer's win feel like a pyrrhic victory - where the spoils of victory come at a devastating cost. Contrast this with the Southwest Airlines brand model. Their combination of low fares and fast turnarounds were the inspiration for Ryanair, yet they pitch their service with a funny, warm and genuinely friendly brand. Check out the employee of the month site for Southwest, and try and to imagine if Ryanair could ever talk about their employees this way! http://www.southwest.com/careers/stars/star_jul07.html

'High standards of service depend on having staff who are proud of the company. This is why the interests of our people come first. In the end, the long-term interests of the shareholders are actually damaged by giving them superficial short-term priority.' Richard Branson.

HABIT 5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.

Do not assume to know your Consumer.

The key to any successful brand is one that has a clear picture of what the market needs and then sets out to convey the benefits of their particular offer to that market. Amongst our own clients, Cloonacool Arctic Charr provides an interesting example. They saw the potential for locally sourced seafood to act as an alternative to expensive imported seafood like Sea Bass. The business behind the brand then set out to find innovative fish breeds that could be farmed to very high standards. This led them to farm an unusual fish called Artic Charr. Normally found at the bottom of arctic fjords, these fish are now being raised in organic conditions in artificial wells bored under blackout tents in Co. Sligo. Apart from a truly unique and very appealing flavour, Cloonacool Arctic Char is also a chef's dream as they can be filleted and portioned easily. This company understood that the restaurant sector wanted a locally produced high-quality seafood, and that innovation in breeding and farming techniques would ensure that they stood out amongst their competitors. The brand that we created for them made their unique differences clear and emotionally memorable to an audience who are difficult to connect with and even harder to convince.



HABIT 6. Synergize.

Brand loyalty, association and expansion.

Synergy is a word that has become much overused in the world of big brands but essentially means one thing: How can the brand experience that your customer believes in be leveraged to create new opportunities? Amongst our own client base, Freshways is a good example. A Kerry Foods brand, Freshways has built a solid reputation for reliable, honest and tasty pre-packed sandwiches. In recent years, there have been concerted efforts to increase the perception of quality and choice in the minds of their consumers. They are now in a position to capitalise on consumer trust in the brand with new products that compliment their core range, such as juices and smoothies.

Some brands overextend themselves by stretching the promise to new services or products where the fit just doesn't work. Others can make seemingly unconnected products (like groceries and petrol) work together because of a strong and credible brand message that transcends categorisation.

HABIT 7. Sharpen the Saw.

Never rest on your brand laurels: Truly great brands aren't just understood - they are lived.

At a local level, the Tidy Towns brand is one such example of a living brand. Originally created by the government in the 1950s to encourage community clean-ups, the competition is now used to foster the social capital that an increasingly busy Ireland is at risk of losing.

In the three years that DesignTactics has been working with the Tidy Towns unit, we've helped shift the brand communications to better reflect the spirit of the programme, rather than just encouraging and facilitating entrants. The departmental officials who steward the brand are continuously trying to extend their reach beyond traditional audiences, and to find new partners inside and outside government departments so that the spirit of Tidy Towns remains relevant and engaging for today's time-poor audience.

Monitoring and reviewing your products, your customers and your campaigns are essential. The Implementation of measurement systems will assist with brand development and guide your team towards a more focused and thorough execution, ensuring that your customers have an 'on-brand' experience every time.

If you're interested in developing a truly effective brand, get in touch with us. If you want to find out more on the original Seven Steps, visit www.stephencovey.com.