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- It's more than "Just Do It." A brand is the expression of your core genius, so get it right. **Rosemary Davies-Janes** and **Michael Bungay Stanier** examine how and why all coaches should take the time to build and communicate their brand.

The Branding Point: The Fusion of **Passion** *(Yours)* and **Desire** *(Theirs)*

In the previous issue of *choice* Magazine we introduced you to the Brand Onion and the three mistakes most coaches make with their brand. Why did we choose the metaphor of an onion? Both to wet your appetite (who doesn't know and love the smell of onions frying?), and to make you uncomfortable (who doesn't cry when cutting up onions?)

Enough tears! In this article we will set out five elements you can use to create a differentiated and lucrative brand by defining your Branding Point: the place where your passion fuses with your customers' desire. To illustrate our points we've used examples both from our own practices and from our clients'.

1. Get clear on what you offer

Most of us are not clear on our own *core genius*. As human beings, we come with blind spots that obscure our perception, no matter what our level of evolution or 'consciousness' may be. By utilizing a mix of formal and informal methodologies you can discern for yourself what is obvious to others.

Combine behaviour and temperament profiles (such as MBTI and DISC) with strengths and work-style assessments (such as Gallup's Strengths Finder and Kolbe's Work-Style Index). Conduct a focused micro market

research campaign that asks, "What is it about who I am and/or what I do that is unique, special and/or different?" These methods will deliver an abundance of useful information riddled with consistent personal patterns or themes. Measure these patterns against your personal values, preferences and past experience, and your core genius will become obvious.

Because this information comes from multiple sources (self reporting, other-reporting and assessment reporting) it is difficult to deny. However, people going through the branding process often express a yearning to exchange their genius (such as 'building strong interpersonal connections') for another genius that sounds more fun, cool, different or interesting (such as 'creating innovative solutions'). Accepting your brand is a process of surrender and acceptance. No matter how much you might like Butterscotch Ripple, if you're Vanilla, be Vanilla.

If you're Rocky Road — be the best Rocky Road you can be. Your self-awareness, acceptance and appreciation form the foundation of your brand.

2. Get under the skin of your target audience

Enough about you — most coaches spend too much time on "me" and not nearly enough time on "them" which leads to unbalanced and weak brands. It's time to get really clear on just whom you're targeting. You know less than you think you do.

“You know who it is you're targeting. The question now is: what exactly are you offering?”

Many of you know the arguments for defining your niche (bottom-line: appealing to everyone means standing out to no-one) and many of you feel the resistance this brings up. But this discussion is for another time, another article. For now, we'll assume that you're brave enough to target a niche.

Let's say it's "men who want to work less and play more." Not bad. But there's more to articulate. Get specific about how much money they have, what their patterns of work are, what age they are, where they hang out, what their favourite activities are, what they don't do, what are the important relationships in their life.

And now, get out there and start talking to these men. Test out your hypotheses. Challenge your assumptions. Find what really bothers them. Find out if what you suspect is a need really is a need or if you're just making it up. Find out what solves their problems for them now. If you must, you can begin to explore with them different services you could provide, but that's not really the point. You need to get deep under the skin of the people you want to target.

“By utilizing a mix of formal and informal methodologies you can discern for yourself what is obvious to others – your Core Genius!”

3. Create a powerful benefit statement

You know who it is you're targeting. The question now is: what exactly are you offering? Coaches, for the most part, are lousy at expressing this. They tend to rely on sample sessions, past client success stories and vague rhetoric about bridging gaps and achieving fulfillment, rather than articulating real benefits in clear everyday language.

The secret is to create a benefit statement. Benefit statements tell people WHAT tangible outcomes your products and services provide (not HOW they will achieve this result). If you help clients (for instance) "develop action plans that take them from where they are to where they want to be," then this is your process (the HOW). The benefit (the WHAT) may be landing a dream job, revitalizing a shaky relationship, or making a business more profitable.

As a Branding Coach, Rosemary's benefit statement is "I help people and organizations expose, expand and express their genius so that others get what they're all about, instantly." A lot of time with her clients is devoted to assessments, profiles, brand positioning and the development of branded marketing materials. But is that an appealing benefit? No! But do people want to identify their core genius? Distinguish themselves from their competitors? Attract ideal clients? Yes, yes and yes!

4. Discover what's actually working

Having done all that hard work, you now have a brilliant, polished and powerful benefit statement. At least, you think you do. And this is another moment of truth. Do you now throw your marketing weight behind this benefit statement and launch it to the world... or do you test it out? Here's a clue. The most powerful brands in the world spend millions of dollars each year on market research. Most coaches spend barely a minute.

Don't test it out with your friends or with coach colleagues. They're not the ones who will be buying your services. You need to speak to people in your target audience. If you trust them to tell you the truth, that's an added bonus. But above and beyond all else, test it out with your future customers (and of course, doing this is actually the start of a sales conversation).

When Michael developed his Box of Crayons brand, he first went through a series of brand names and positionings that he thought were quite wonderful — until the feedback came in. Michael had particularly liked Espresso Coaching, which for him was about intensity, depth of flavour and la dolce vita. The feedback? It was all about being brief, bitter, and overpriced.

A simple yet powerful format used by the leading market research companies is this:

- Insight/Need (The "A-ha, yes, that's me!" moment. For instance, "Do you feel that you're stuck in debt and can never get out?")
- Benefit/Reward (The WHAT. For instance, "No-Debt Coaching gets you out of debt and with savings in the bank.")

- Rationale/Process (The HOW. For instance, "The 12-step No-Debt Program gets you out of debt and into the black.")

What are your Insight/need, Benefit and Rationale? Create ten versions (variations on the Insight, variations on the Benefit) — and then test them with your core customers.

5. Build the experience

So now you have a brand and a benefit statement. It's a glorious fusion of your passion and your customer's desire. Hurrah! And the fun has just begun — you now have something to live up to.

Your challenge is to infuse your brand through every single point of contact you have with your customers. Michael Eisner of Disney talks about

5 Paths to The Branding PointsSM

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- 1 Get clear on your core genius
- 2 Know your target audience, intimately
- 3 Match 'what you offer' to 'what they want'
- 4 Test and refine your messages until they excite your target audience
- 5 Deliver a consistent full-circle brand experience

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the brand being “like a pointillist painting . . . everything you do for your brand is a point on the canvas. . . . If you want to be strong, each point along the way has to be as close to perfect as possible.”

Here’s an exercise. Write down every single step you take with your clients (and clients to be) from before meeting them through completing your relationship with them. Be specific and minutely detailed. For instance, some steps might be “client dials my phone number;” “client gets my voicemail;” “client listens to my message;” “client leaves a message;” “I call client back within 48 hours.” In total, you will have at least 50 steps. Then, for each one of these steps ask yourself: How can I make this single step outrageously different and true to my brand? What do I need to do? You’ll start by focusing on some steps before others, but to create a consistent brand experience, you need to be thinking about how each and every step reflects your brand.

As a specific example, do you send your clients a welcome kit? What’s in it? How does it capture the essence of your brand? How is it different from every other welcome kit in the world? If your welcome kit were playing at the maximum brand volume, what would it be?

So where do you go from here?

Building a brand is a never-ending journey. It takes courage, discipline and insight to get clear, take a stand and put it out to the world. It’s an

amazing moment when, much like solving the puzzle of Rubik’s cube, you hit the Branding Point and find that magical fusion of your passion and your client’s desires. ●

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Michael Bungay Stanier is a certified coach and a brand consultant who helps people get unstuck and get going. He is currently inventing coach-free coaching.

Brand Resources

- Eating the Big Fish*, Adam Morgan (1999)
- The Experience Economy*, B. Joseph Pine, et al (1999)
- The New Brand World*, Scott Bedbury (2003)
- A Purple Cow*, Seth Godin (2003)
- Authentic Personal Branding: The Self-Study Program*, Rosemary Davies-Janes (2001)
- www.miboso.com (Rosemary Davies-Janes)
- www.boxofcrayons.biz (Michael Bungay Stanier)



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