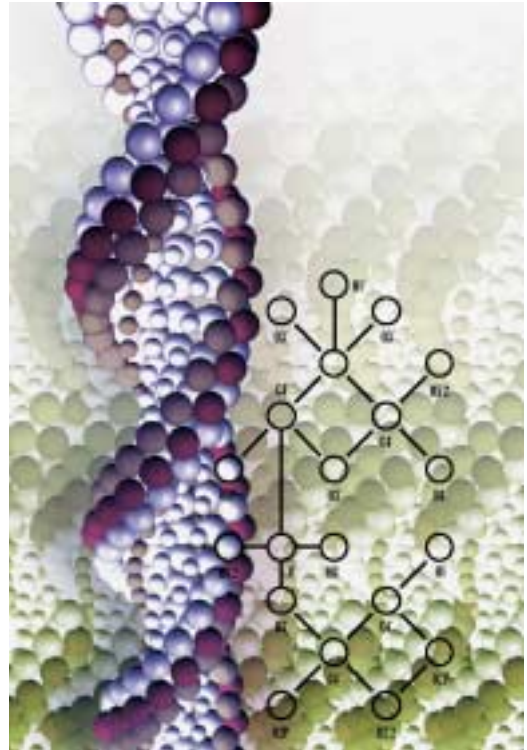


● Onions and Starbucks. Find out how they relate to creating a successful brand for your company in the first of a two-part series written by **Michael Bungay Stanier** and **Rosemary Davies-Janes**.

Branding Your Business:

Avoid being a Needle in a Hayfield



When it comes to standing out in the coaching world, you are probably as easy for clients to find as the proverbial needle in a hayfield. A Google search for “coach” delivers 15 million hits and “life coach” delivers over 5 million hits. And considering that the majority of life coaches don’t even have a website, it’s clear that there are a heck of a lot of needles in the life coaching hayfield! (Given these odds, hayfield is a more apt descriptor than haystack!)

So just who is making it as a coach? Leading the pack are good coaches with good branding and marketing. A close second are mediocre to lousy coaches with good branding and marketing. And trailing in (a distant third) is the huge majority of good, bad and mediocre coaches with non-descript or non-existent brands and marketing. Where are you?

In this article, the first of a two-part series on branding, we’ll tell you why most coaches approaches don’t produce the results they want. In part two, we’ll show you the five things you can do to take your brand from dull, meaningless and boring to powerful, relevant and resonant!

Brand components

Effective brands have three key components. The first component is a clear-eyed, precise understanding of your personal genius. Your genius is a composite of your natural strengths, learned skills, values and preferences. Secondly, you’ll need an equally clear understanding of your target audience; where they hang out, what they do, what they think about, what they long to achieve. Finally, you’ll need to build benefit statements that connect your genius with what your target audience thinks they want — as opposed to what they really need. A simple but powerful model that brings these key components together is the “Brand Onion.” We’ve used Starbucks as the model brand.

Mistake #1: It’s all about me!

Coaches commonly get hooked on their Key Values — to the exclusion of all else. This phenomena of collapsing your life purpose statement with your brand means a good deal of publicly flaunting key values (“Deep listener!” “Ruthless Compassion” “Living in Integrity!”) in lieu of providing traditional benefit statements. At worst, prospective clients run for the hills, at a minimum, they are just confused. Think about it! If you were looking for an Arbourist to care for your trees and shrubs and their marketing featured a string of key values (“Eco-Conscious!” “Well Grounded!” “Sincere and Caring!”) plus the requisite “What is tree care?” — would you hire them?

A brand is not a tangible entity. It is NOT your logo, your tag line, or your elevator speech. Your brand exists only in the mind of your customer. It’s the IMPRESSION that your customer has of your ability to deliver the rational and emotional benefits you promise. Your brand is either enhanced or damaged by everything you do, say or make public and also by everything that others say about you.

Mistake #2: Positioning yourself as “all things to all people” (or more accurately, “nothing to no-one”)

Coaches appear to have great difficulty in clearly expressing the benefits that they provide for their clients. A strong brand is focused and specific. It says, loudly and proudly, “This is what I deliver” and “This is the type of person I deliver it to.” While it is scary to step away from that most common of coaching niches — “anyone with a pulse” — that is exactly what you need to do to develop your brand and become a leader in your specialty area.