



On 29th November 2012 business leaders met at The Grove Hotel, Chandler's Cross, UK to discuss the kinds of strategy that can engage employees and inspire loyal fans. The lively, candid discussion focused on how culture, values and emotion underpin remarkable business stories, outstanding products and services, and sustainable, profitable growth.

Executive Summary:

There's more to it than money.

Investor-driven business objectives, like **increasing returns, growth, and share**, inspire neither employees nor customers. In fact, they appear cold and self-serving, creating a disconnect with those at “the customer end” of the business, the best of whom desperately want see their work as meaningful, and to have a positive emotional connection with their brand.

Great businesses exist to serve. Most businesses were created to profitably serve a **specific need of a specific community of people**. At its heart, a great strategy visibly embodies the Purpose and Passions on which the business was first built. They define the goals; shape the markets and focus the innovation effort on developing truly remarkable products and services for their communities of customers. A commercially viable but **emotionally-led** strategy, transforms employee engagement and commitment, and drives innovation, performance, loyalty and growth.

It's about relationships.

Personality is a powerful differentiator. Personality is that combination of Values, Attitudes and Behaviours which makes individuals and organisations who they are. Projecting a distinct personality is fundamental to creating a relationship with customers which goes beyond the merely transactional. But more than that, a strong, consistent Personality is a prerequisite for inspiring “fans” – a strategic asset for businesses in this social age.

Consistent experience is a strategic imperative. In a world where perceptions are increasingly created through social media rather than broadcast marketing, it is more important than ever that the customer experience matches the personality a business projects. As Starbucks has discovered, the more emotionally connected the individual, the more shocked their reaction, negative their perception, and loud their voice, when reality jars with perception. Any business creating an emotional connection with customers must be consistent in all of its actions externally, internally and at all levels. Leaders must exemplify and reward the behaviours they wish customers to see.

And ultimately, it's about people.

People make a business: you can't change a business without changing people; and the wrong people can quickly undermine the right culture. The group had extensive discussions on hiring and firing, sharing innovative techniques for recruiting, and reflecting on **why we delay when people need to exit the business**. Whilst it may be harder for a leader to exit someone who has sound capability but poor cultural fit, it is welcomed by, and highly motivational, for the wider organisation. Conversely, retaining a counter-cultural individual, especially in a high-profile role, is de-motivating, culturally damaging and undermines belief in the integrity of the leadership.

“Soft things” are hard. The group shared stories and challenges in holding on to clear purpose, values and culture, particularly through integrations and in larger public and private businesses, concluding that the larger the business, the greater the challenge, but the more essential the goal.

Having a clear reason to exist and thrive, beyond just making money, creates a compelling story; attracts, engages and motivates employees and fosters remarkable innovation.

When combined with honest values and genuine behaviours it builds deep emotional connections, turning customers into fans, and producing profitable, sustainable growth: *the result, not the starting-point, of great strategy.*