THIS I

KNOW

MARKETING LESSONS FROM
UNDER THE INFLUENCE

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Contents

Chapter One

SLUDGE OR GRAVY
What Business Are You Really In?

What business are you really in? Don't answer that question too quickly. Most people get it wrong. Yet it's the most important marketing question you can ask yourself. Until you can answer it correctly, your marketing will always lack focus. A truism of business is that what you sell and what people buy are almost always two different things. Companies look to sell products, and customers look to buy solutions. While seemingly related, the definitions of each can be miles apart.

For example, Molson isn't in the beer business. Even though Molson's plants are designed to manufacture beer and every Molson delivery truck you see is full of beer cases, Molson isn't in the beer business. It's in the party business.

Look at almost any Molson beer commercial. It's all about having fun, being in groups, flirting, laughing and socializing. That is what the majority of Molson beer fans are really buying into when they put their money down. Molson is a savvy marketer and it knows the solution it offers is social lubrication. That presents a delicate communication task, because alcohol marketing is heavily regulated in this country. So the partying scenes are tightly controlled. The number of beers in a scene must equal no more than the number of people in said scene. Five people in a shot, five beers max. No one holding a beer can be involved in an activity requiring skill—like waterskiing or chainsaw carving. No one can appear to be underage. The activity of the participants can't be "over exuberant." I once had a beer commercial turned down by regulators because one of the actors toasted above shoulder level. The charge: too exuberant. The advertising can't suggest beer promotes sex. (I know, I know. It's the most elastic rule of the bunch). But say what you will, Molson knows what business it's in.

Michelin is not in the tire business. It's in the safety business. Its purpose is to offer the utmost tire safety for automobiles. Michelin once had the best tire tagline of all time. The company's TV ads showed a baby strapped into a radial, with the line "Because so much is riding on your tires." That's the business Michelin is in. Not vulcanized rubber. Safety. So if it just sold tires, it was in trouble. But if it sold safety, it was golden. (Why Michelin abandoned that line, I will never know.)

Häagen-Dazs isn't in the ice cream business, it's in the sensual pleasure business. Whitewater rafting companies aren't in the personal transportation business. They are in the personal transformation business. Starbucks isn't in the coffee business. It's in the coffee *theatre* business, with baristas, elaborate java machinery and five-word mocha-choco-lotta coffee names.

Apple isn't in the computer business. It's in the personal empowerment business. If you want to understand Apple's massive success, just draw a straight line back to late 1983. To Super Bowl XVIII. To late in the third quarter. To a TV commercial called *1984*.

Within the advertising business, it is arguably the most famous TV commercial in history (google it). This single advertisement positioned Apple for all time in the minds of the buying public. It showed a bleak image of George Orwell's *1984* future, where people shuffle in drab uniforms and listen to the hypnotic ranting of

Big Brother on a gigantic screen. But meanwhile, we see dramatic cuts of a female athlete, dressed in white and red, holding an Olympic-sized hammer, being pursued by a squad of futuristic police. She runs down a long tunnel into the gathering, stops, swings the hammer and lets it go with a scream—smashing the gigantic screen, to the amazement of the catatonic crowd. The message from Apple: "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984*." Translation: We're going to take the computing power that IBM has hoarded all these years and give it to you.

That single message—or contemporized variations of it, echoed ever since by everything Apple does and everything Steve Jobs has said—is why so many people buy so many Apple products. To put a finer point on it, you can google a photograph of Steve Jobs at IBM's head office, standing under its massive logo, flipping the bird. People loved that rebel stance. When Apple announces a new product, people line up overnight to be the first to get their hands on it. No one does that for Dell. People are drawn to Apple's promise of personal empowerment on a very deep level, topped with a little seasoning of "us versus them." That is what Apple sells. There are more powerful computers out there, and certainly cheaper ones, yet Apple has become the most valuable company in the world after Exxon. It accomplished this by completely understanding what business it is in.

Nike isn't in the shoe business. It is in the motivation business. The mantra "Just Do It" has been called the last great slogan of our time. While it may have motivated millions of people to step up and enjoy life, it was actually inspired by someone's death. Dan Wieden, co-founder of advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy, located in Portland, Oregon, coined the slogan. He remembered watching a news report on the execution of spree-killer Gary Gilmore in 1977. Gilmore, who had grown up in Portland, was being executed in

Utah by firing squad. His official last words to the warden were "Let's do it." Wieden was struck by the impact of that line. He thought it remarkable that Gilmore could face that much uncertainty and just push through it. It stayed with Wieden, and when he needed to come up with a tagline to tie eight different TV commercials together for his agency's first presentation to Nike, he remembered Gilmore's words. He simply changed one word and "Just Do It" was born. The rest is marketing history.

The power of that line cannot be understated. At first glance, it says, If you have a body, you're an athlete. But a quick frisk reveals something more profound. That phrase is the answer to so many of life's bigger questions. Should I tell the boss my idea? Should I quit this horrible job? Should I start my own business? Should I pop the big question?

The majority of the people who wear Nike sneakers don't work out. That should tell you everything. "Just Do It" is a line that ignites millions of dreams, only a small percentage of which are exercise-related. Nike knows what people are buying. It's not shoes. It's motivation.

Conjure up all the commercials you can for Molson, Apple and Nike. Nearly all Molson ads show people happy and partying. After the *1984* TV commercial, virtually all Apple commercials show an individual achieving something on a computer. Every single Nike ad you've ever seen shows pros and amateurs reaching for a dream. Good Molson ads don't tell you how the beer is made. Apple doesn't analyze gigabits. Nike rarely discusses sneakers.

You have to know what business you're in.

I once interviewed Playboy founder Hugh Hefner. I asked him this: If you were to stop wearing pyjamas to work and ceased dating twins, would it affect your business? He didn't hesitate. His immediate answer was yes. You've got to hand it to old Hef; he knows what business he's in. In order to keep the entire grotto-filled enterprise afloat, he has to sell the lifestyle. Men weren't buying a magazine; they were buying the fantasy of living the *Playboy* life.

If you are a company big enough to hire an advertising agency, then a smart one will help you uncover what business you are really in. But if you can't afford an agency, you have to do the homework on your own. Believe it or not, answering this question is not as easy as it appears. It requires sober objectivity, one of the most important things an ad agency can offer a client.

Agencies need to strive for objectivity because in order to appeal to a customer, you have to think like a customer. Not like a company. Most companies fall in love with their product. The passion you feel for your company is good, but that passion can be fuelled by your immersion in how your product is created—which, if you are marketing that product, is bad. You are lost in the weeds. Have you ever asked an Internet installer a question and had to stand through a thesis on routers and megabit-per-second download rates when all you really wanted to know was whether you could download an HD movie?

That's what I mean.

Smart marketers know when their nose is too close to the glass and their breath is fogging up the view. You have to develop the ability to leave your office and look back in through the windows. Ruthless objectivity is the key. Customers are drawn to a brand—be it a product or a service—for many reasons. But the most important, overriding reason is how it makes them *feel*. Price, location, colour and so on all rank well below this single criterion.

Remember the cola wars in the eighties? Remember the Pepsi Challenge commercials? We all sat at home and watched real people take the challenge of sipping two hidden colas, and choosing one, which, when revealed, was Pepsi. Coke's management all sat at home, too, watching the same commercials every night, and it made them nuts. Here's the important thing to know: Coke had an ocean of market share over Pepsi. It couldn't even see Pepsi in its rear-view mirror. But the sight of those commercials playing out every single night made Coke executives crazy. So what did they do? Coke actually changed its formula. If you remember, the reaction to that was so negative, so swift and so overwhelming, Coke brought back its original formula only seventy-seven days later. Can you imagine what that cost Coca-Cola? Untold millions. The company not only changed its packaging, and spent millions with Bill Cosby (!) marketing New Coke, it changed its entire manufacturing process.

But I maintain Coke should have been really happy about that. It proved how much people loved the brand. If they didn't, that change would have passed like a ship in the night. As one journalist noted, it just happened to be the most expensive focus group in history. Follow this math with me: In hidden taste tests, Pepsi beats Coke slightly. In taste tests where respondents can see both brands, Coke beats Pepsi decisively. Interesting, isn't it? Nothing has fundamentally changed in that scenario. But get this: in another taste test, where Coke was pitted against a hidden cola, in other words, where people could see Coke but not the other brand, Coke beat that other brand 99 to 1. Guess what that other brand was?

Coke.

Coke clobbered Coke.

Let's analyze what happened there. When people saw the branding information—the familiar Coke bottle and logo—they made an automatic assumption. Coke was vastly superior to whatever that other cola was. That's how powerful branding is. It can make a product taste better than itself in your mind. So how does Coke do this? With a century of smart marketing. Coke knows what business it is in.

Look at the one thing Coke sells in all its advertising: happiness. It's only sugared water in a bottle. Yet Coke is one of the most valuable corporations in the world. It has attached *happiness* to its product. Think all the way back to the famous *I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke* commercial in 1971.

Happiness.

That commercial was inspired by an interesting moment. When adman Bill Backer was flying over to London, England, to record a new jingle for Coke, his plane had to land in Ireland since Heathrow was fogged in. Pan Am didn't want to bus the passengers to a major hotel in a large city forty minutes away, because the airline wanted everyone nearby and ready to board on short notice in case the fog lifted. Instead, it sent them to a small, local motel. But it didn't have enough vacancies to accommodate two hundred passengers, so everyone was asked to double up. Having to share a room with a stranger put the passengers in an even worse mood. Some refused and curled up to sleep in the corner of the lobby. Others grouped themselves by nationality or sex.

The next day the passengers weren't allowed to leave the airport. They could only shop in the duty-free store, eat, snack and feel sorry for themselves. As Backer says, they had been placed on permanent standby. By midmorning, all the duty-free shopping that could be done was done. The second hand on the airport clock seemed to move once a minute. Passengers began collecting in small groups in the coffee shop. Slowly, the mood started to lift as people began having conversations. The common icebreaker was a bottle of Coke. That scenario was being repeated all over the restaurant—people who spoke different languages, from different countries, forced together by circumstance were enjoying each other's company over a Coke. As Backer watched this unfold, he realized that Coke wasn't just a liquid refreshment, it was a tiny bit of commonality. He scribbled, “I’d like to buy the world a Coke, and keep it company” onto a napkin, and stuffed it into his pocket.

When he eventually got to the recording session in London, Backer pulled the napkin out of his pocket, and that line he’d scribbled down became the heart not only of the jingle but also of one of the most famous TV commercials of all time. The original tune was sung by the Hillside Singers, an ad hoc group put together by jingle producer Al Ham. When the jingle became a sensation, Ham issued it as a single (with a slight tweak from “I’d like to buy the world a Coke” to “I’d like to teach the world to sing”). The New Seekers, who had originally been approached, didn’t think much of the jingle when they first heard it, considering it too syrupy and simple (“. . . apple trees and honey bees and snow white turtle doves”). But when the Hillside Singers had a hit with it, the group decided to release its own version. The melody was sticky, and the song contained a profound message of peace and harmony at a time when America was still wading through the swamps of Vietnam. Never underestimate the power of the right message at the right time. It sold twelve million records.

Don’t you think, in this day and age, that a competitive company could analyze a bottle of Coke and figure out its secret formula? Then manufacture a product that tasted just like Coke? The answer is yes. It’s been done many times, but those companies don’t succeed. Why is that? Because people aren’t buying sugared water. They’re buying Coke’s powerful branding and its consistent promise of happiness. Let’s follow that through to its logical conclusion. Why does Coke succeed around the world, across borders, with many different cultures, in spite of hundreds of competitors? Answer: because happiness is a universal emotional desire, and Coke has been masterful at linking its product to that emotion. Coke knows what business it’s in.

Molson makes people feel like partying. Apple makes people feel they can compete with corporations. Nike makes people feel they can achieve any goal. Hugh Hefner makes men feel they, too, could date twins, if only they had more time on their hands.

So when you look at your business, you have to divorce yourself from your product, from the manufacturing process, from the sugared water, the hops and the air soles. You have to think like a customer. To do that, you have to quietly observe what customers are really buying from you. They will tell you, but you have to listen carefully. I have always believed the best marketers are the best listeners. I once had a business partner who would ask a client a question about their company, then proceed to answer it himself. He would then look to the client for a nod in agreement. But two monologues don't make a dialogue.

When I ask a client a question, sometimes I already know the answer, sometimes I don't. But I always want to hear the exact words the client chooses in their response. That answer is like a suitcase; it's packed with insights and clues and tiny epiphanies. Many clients can't articulate what they want to say about themselves or their product in a short, concise way. So you have to read between the lines. It's the same with the buying public. Ad legend David Ogilvy once said that consumers don't know what they feel, don't say what they know, and don't do what they say. But with Presbyterian patience, you will see and hear the information you need. You have to ask the right questions that prompt the revealing answers. The clues to their true desires—what they really want to buy from you—are in their adjectives and their adverbs.

Customers are most forthcoming during two occasions: when they are knocking on your door, and after the task is completed or the product is purchased. For example, at Pirate, we produced the audio for radio and television commercials. Our biggest customers were the creative departments in advertising agencies. Copywriters and art directors would bring their radio scripts or film to us, and we would add the sound effects—every footstep, every bird chirp—compose the music and direct the voiceovers. We offered audio directors, music composers, sound engineers and line producers. In marketing Pirate to advertising agencies, we could have focused on any number of those things, as well as our beautiful studios, our state-of-the-art equipment, our exhaustive casting, our competitive rates, and so on.

But that's not what creative teams were buying.

When they came to Pirate, they wanted to leave with award-winning commercials. Period. Pirate had a long track record for winning awards, so that's how we marketed the company. We held annual daylong seminars to teach young agency copywriters how to create award-winning radio. We staged Lunch & Learns where we would bring a catered lunch into ad agency creative departments and play them award-winning radio commercials we had discovered from around the world, break them down and show creative teams the hidden building blocks of outstanding radio. We sponsored advertising award shows. We contributed scholarships for college marketing awards. When our work won awards around the world, we invested in public relations.

While Pirate was a honeycomb of features we were proud of, creative teams were really buying commercials that attracted trophies. Selling anything else was just talking to ourselves. Sure, there's a time and a place to break your company's features down and discuss them one by one. It just can't be the core of your marketing. People make decisions based on emotion, then rationalize that decision with details. Our advertising agency clients were after the emotional reward of commercials that won awards.

If you are an owner or founder of your business, you have an intimate relationship with the minutiae of your company's mechanics.

You built it from nothing. You may have struggled to build a unique internal blueprint. You may have pioneered a technique. You may have battled untold forces to streamline your systems. All of it is a badge of honour to you. But to your customers, it's a megabit-per-second lecture.

So, what business are you in?

A few paragraphs back, I mentioned that your customers will be most vocal about what they want from you when they first come knocking and when the job is done. Let me give you another example.

In my company, the first conversations with the ad agency creative team about a radio campaign revealed a lot. They were excited to show me the scripts. They would make references to other award-winning commercials: "We'd love to find an actor like the funny guy in the Volkswagen ad that ranked number one in the Super Bowl ratings" or "We loved the music in that CLIO award–winning radio commercial for BMW."

Now, those suggestions are not just about finding the right actor or sourcing a specific piece of music. Sandwiched between the lines is the creative team's desire to create an award-winning ad, because winning awards is how creative teams are judged. Yes, selling products for their clients is extremely important, but doing that with a high degree of creativity is the currency within the industry. Awards can be tallied. Product sales are fuzzy and result from many forces, only one of which is advertising. Knowing this, I listen carefully to the words the team uses to decipher their desires. I have to balance their personal goals with their client's objectives. That's why the words your customers choose are so revealing. The reason they are bringing their business to you is on display. They are telling you why they came to you. They are telling you the business you are in.

The next most important message from your customers comes when the job is done, the product is purchased or the service is rendered. Your customer will tell you how close you came to fulfilling their initial expectation. The middle bit—the process of fulfilling a customer request—is too fraught with the fog of screaming deadlines, problems, details, budgets and heavy lifting. The before and after is the richer soil. The general public only retains an impression of a brand. There is just too much information zooming along our cranial highways. Too much advertising congestion, too much data smog. So a mere impression is the thin document the public files in their mental cabinets. That impression is the business your customer believes you to be in. It is what they are buying and it is the reason they come back to you again.

True, if you are a new company, you have a wonderful window in time where you can actually plant that impression. In those early, important days, your image is net zero. But if your company has been around for years, that original core reason your business was founded may have faded in the sun or it may have hopped sideways. Or you may have lost sight of it internally because you are too laser-beamed into internal issues or running red-cheeked to keep up with a competitor. Either way, you have lost sight of your original purpose.

I don't think anyone has summed up this dilemma better than Simon Sinek in his book *Start with Why*. Sinek (don't read anything into that name) proposes that customers are attracted to companies who are fully aware of *why* they went into business in the first place. He maintains that the *why* is the most important asset of a company. It contains the company's original spark. Its driving force. Its unique mission. The trap most companies fall into over time is that they become fixated on the *how* and the *what*, how they create their products and what goes into them. Companies become more and more self-absorbed as time moves on. Especially if they are successful, because success can be a trap. Success can tempt a company to stand still and become resistant to change.

That inward focus then starts to manifest itself in the marketing. But people are only moderately interested in *how* and *what* goes into a product; they are much more drawn to *why* you are making it in the first place.

Apple is the classic example. Yes, the design of Apple products is sexy and what they enable you to do is limitless. But many tech companies can make that claim. What separates Apple from everyone else is *why* Steve Jobs created his company. He wanted to throw a grappling hook over IBM's walls, swing over the moat Big Blue had dug around its power, scale the wall and storm the castle. Then, when he caught IBM asleep in its jammies—and this is the important part—he wanted to lower the drawbridge and let everyone in. He wanted to give you the same computing power IBM had only previously shared with rich corporations. That was Steve Jobs's *why*. That *why* is the pivot point for Apple. Every ad Apple has created, from *1984* to the Apple ad you saw last night, shows a single individual creating things that only corporations could do back in 1983.

Not long ago, the president of a non-profit foundation was struggling to define its *why*. He asked me for help. I suggested he go back in time to the day the foundation began. I asked, "What did your founder say that day he banged his fist on the table and said, 'There has got to be a better way!'" In that moment is the best distillation of your *why*.

There are many reasons why corporations cut ties with their founders. Sometimes it's age; there comes a time when founders must retire or expire. Sometimes it's a business decision, when a founder must step aside to allow for a fresh point of view in a rapidly changing marketplace. But when corporations turn their backs on founders completely, I think a great disservice is done. By doing so, they are severing the connection to their original spark. That spark is a glowing ember inside most founders, and while it may dim, it's rarely extinguished. Almost categorically, companies lose the connection to their *why* when the founder retires or dies or is pushed aside.

Years ago, I was doing work for a string of KFC franchises in Hamilton. The Colonel had sold KFC back in 1964 but was retained as spokesperson and quality controller. The owners told me stories of how much they dreaded visits from Colonel Sanders. (The Colonel was actually living in Mississauga at the time, so it was easy to make surprise visits.) He would always be grouchy and complain about the way the franchisees were preparing the food. They rolled their eyes when talking about the Colonel. But in hindsight, I see what was happening. The Colonel started Kentucky Fried Chicken because he was passionate about his recipe and loved the idea of feeding people a Sunday dinner any day of the week. When he saw his dream distorted over time and miles and profit efficiencies, it just steamed his grits. He was testy because he was trying to preserve the initial spark.

In the mid-seventies, KFC did the unheard of and sued the Colonel. The corporation actually took its spokesperson to court for libel after he publicly described KFC's gravy as "wallpaper paste to which sludge was added." You gotta love that description—it was a right cross followed by an uppercut. In making that charge, Sanders wasn't driven by ego, he was driven by the pain of watching his *why* being corrupted. He had started Kentucky Fried Chicken for the love of good food. Now KFC was a massive corporation more interested in the *what* and the *how* of the fast-food industry. KFC lost the case, by the way.

Before I co-founded my company, I was a frustrated ad agency copywriter. Whenever I had to hire a director to produce my radio or television commercials, most of them would run roughshod over my scripts, sacrificing the marketing strategy in favour of the humour. The majority of the directors didn't have marketing backgrounds, they were talent directors. The resulting commercials might be amusing, but they sold little product. It was a recurring issue, from Toronto to New York to Los Angeles. Instead of having directors save my scripts, I ended up having to save the scripts *from* the directors. So we created the company I could not find. Pirate was to be a production company that created award-winning commercials while protecting the marketing strategy.

You just heard the sound of my fist hitting a table as I yelled out, "There has got to be a better way."

That was Pirate's mission. When we opened our doors, we were inundated with work. Clearly, I wasn't the only copywriter starved for respect.

Whenever we veered from that stated purpose, Pirate's business suffered. Whenever we got sucked into the internal workings of our business and confused it for marketing, we suffered. Like when we expanded to New York City. We spent a lot of money and time marketing that fact in Canada. No one cared. It was just Pirate expanding its business to the States. Whenever we got sucked into price wars with competitors, we suffered. Whenever we went against our instincts to please overly aggressive agency producers (who cared about budgets, not creativity) we suffered. And when we sold a piece of our company to an outside investment firm that specialized in the advertising space—hoping its Rolodex would help us expand our business—we suffered. That firm was bottom-line driven and had little sensitivity to our *why*. Ironically, our *why* was what attracted it to us in the first place, because at the time, Pirate was producing the majority of radio commercials in Canada. Then its corporate rigidity slowly seeped into our engine and put sand in the gears. Our original spark slowly started to suffocate.

All of which is to say, when I ask what business you are really in, it's the most important question in this book. Because if you don't know the answer, how can your marketing ever be relevant?

If you can't articulate why you're in business, how can you protect that delicate spark? And if you don't have a firm grasp on your why, how can you articulate it to your staff? A company needs one shared purpose, not a bunch of individual ones.

Recently, I found an old book titled *The Lasker Story: As He Told It*. Albert D. Lasker was probably the most fascinating adman in history. He built the Lord & Thomas advertising agency into the biggest agency in North America in the 1920s, and he did it by pioneering what was then called "reason-why" copy. Prior to that insight (giving people reasons to buy a brand), advertising was just news. Put another way, Lasker turned advertising into persuasion. This book is the verbatim speech Lasker gave to his staff over two days back in the twenties. He was giving the speech because he wanted his agency, which had grown substantially over the years, to connect back to its original spark. Over those two days, Lasker articulated the philosophy of Lord & Thomas, its principles, what he expected of his agency and his staff, and why he loved the advertising business so much. It wasn't about profit and loss, it wasn't about systems and it wasn't about accounting. Lasker wanted the agency to be of one mind, to move as one machine. It was about understanding what made Lord & Thomas unique. It was about his pioneering love of persuasion. It was about embracing the agency's *why*.

Fifty years later, ad icon David Ogilvy realized he couldn't be a constant presence at his sixty Ogilvy & Mather offices around the world. So he would issue letters and memos and print his speeches for staff, so they would stay connected to the *why* of the shop. Ogilvy instinctively knew a leader's job is to continually fan the vital flame. When he retired, his executives bound all his memos and speeches into a book titled *The Unpublished David Ogilvy* and presented it to him. It has since been published. I highly recommend it.

The key to articulating what business you're in is a purely emotional exercise. It was an emotional moment for the founder on day one and it's emotion that pulls in customers. When Michelin abandoned its powerful tagline "Because so much is riding on your tires" and adopted "A better way forward," the decision was completely lost on me. There is not a scintilla of emotion in the new line. It sounds like a slogan coined by Walter in accounting. Again, Apple is about thumbing its nose at IBM and tearing down the barriers between people and technology. Molson is about letting off steam with your friends. Nike is about getting off the couch and accomplishing something.

Not an accountant in the bunch.

Look at those previous sentences. They have power, they have thrust. "A better way forward" is stuck in neutral. Now, to make this exercise even harder, you should be able to sum up the driving principle of your company in one compelling sentence. It's an elevator pitch of sorts (more on that next chapter). Your core driving purpose cannot be a paragraph. No successful business ever points to the company paragraph. Sure, you can argue that many causes have been won after someone gave a rousing speech. But no one remembers the details of a speech, they only remember how that speech made them *feel*. That feeling is captured by the elevator pitch. That feeling is the business you are really in, and that sensation is what creates a repeat customer.

Remember, customers never want the product. They want the benefit of the product, and to purchase that benefit from a company whose purpose feels like a cavalry coming over the hill. Apple's cavalry hoists a pirate flag and attacks corporations from ingenious angles. Molson's troops say nine to five may belong to your boss, but 5:01 to midnight is yours. Nike's militia says go for it.

People don't buy ¾-inch drill bits. They buy ¾-inch holes.

I have used that line for over thirty years and took full credit for it until I reread a book written by Theodore Levitt and realized I had unconsciously stolen it from him. But it's a beautiful articulation of what marketing is all about. People buy benefits. Not products. Not features. And they buy those solutions from companies they can relate to.

That's why knowing what business you are really in is so imperative. The worst possible marketing scenario is when you keep selling tires but your customers are buying safety. With that kind of disconnect, the future of the company will get very difficult.

Smart companies sweat over this. But once you look back through your own windows, once you pull out a stethoscope to listen to the beating heart of your company, everything will change. Your marketing will be clear. Concise. Relevant. Not only that, but it will lend itself to more creativity. Think of the endless ideas "Just Do It" has inspired. Think of all the iconic marketing Apple has done for thirty years off the launch pad of its *1984* commercial. Coke's consistent "happiness" marketing has made it number four on the *Forbes* list of the World's Most Valuable Brands, a list that includes Apple, Microsoft and Google. Very telling—a brand invented in the late nineteenth century, still relevant and valuable near the top of that tech-heavy list.

More than anything, if you truly know what business you're in, you will be selling the right thing and solving the right problems. Your burning ember will be alive and well. Customers will ignore closer competitors with lower prices, drive across town and do business with you. Your staff will have a fixed North Star to follow.

All you have to know is what business you're really in and articulate it in one clear, compelling sentence. Which is fiendishly hard to do. But don't panic. Step into my elevator.