

THE ME-TO-WE CONTINUUM

WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT FROM EMPLOYERS AND BUSINESSES IN GENERAL, BOILS DOWN TO A SIMPLE IDEAL, THAT THEY: "MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE", AND "MAKE THEM FEEL THEY BELONG TO A LARGER COMMUNITY". TO COIN A PHRASE, "BRAND CITIZENSHIP".

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"Brands that rally communities and motivate behavioural change through connecting people who share values, will attract more loyalists"

Having spent three years researching brand leadership, good corporate citizenship and favourite brands, what most participants in the research expressed was the belief that business was better equipped than Government to address and solve problems - from the ordinary needs of daily living to the big issues of our age. Qualitative and quantitative studies uncovered that people want brands to span across a Me-to-We continuum of Brand Citizenship. But brands must first deliver value to individual consumers and employees - the 'Me' and then, depending on their purpose, move outward towards delivering added value to society - the collective 'We'.

Emerging from the grassroots up, here is a five-step model that embraces profitability and responsibility as harmonious concepts. The steps flow logically from one another: First and foremost, brands must deliver on their promises. Digital technology has made reciprocity one of five key requirements for fostering trust. SunTrust, one of the largest regional banks in the US, offers unexpected and worthwhile benefits that reflect its brand purpose through its online onUp program. Anyone, not just SunTrust customers, can join onUp and learn to become a good steward of their own money, no matter how modest their means. People identify more with brands that simplify routines, make mundane tasks less dull, and inspire daily life. The baby food manufacturer and public benefit corporation Plum Organics enriches parents - and their babies - with wholesome food, packaged in innovative, environmentally friendly ways. Its focus on nutritional intelligence, Parenting Unfiltered initiative, and The Full Effect®

social impact programme all cultivate a loyal following.

The pivot point between being a ME and a WE brand, is responsibility and begins with respecting employees. Participants in my research stated that they would only give a brand credit for the good it was doing through ethical supply chains or sustainability initiatives, for example, if it first treated its employees well. Waitrose, John Lewis Partnership's high-end grocery and food retailer, puts employees (partners) at the centre of its success. It simultaneously balances innovation with the needs of customers, its ethical supply chain, and other stakeholders as it adapts to remain relevant in a fiercely competitive market.

Brands that rally communities and motivate behavioural change through connecting people who share values, will attract more loyalists. The mobile operator Giffgaff has built a highly successful, award-winning brand in the aggressive telecom space by creating a community based on fair pricing, an online forum at the centre of its network, and reaching out to customers in a variety of creative, entertaining, and practical ways. Brands that actively participate in progressing society and sustaining the planet make people feel that they are contributing to bettering the world by association. Lush's fresh, handmade cosmetics is the outcome of its founders' determined journey to live their personal purpose and embody the positive side of activism. The brand continually expands its reach and how it connects loyalists to sustainable products, fair trade, and philanthropic causes.

As globalised sourcing, production, and sales have made long-term success dependent on meeting the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, the goal of doing good and becoming a sustainable business has become a practical and necessary investment. This is the new model; a holistic principle, equipping businesses to gain lasting credit for sustainability and corporate social responsibility initiatives, along a continuum of doing what you say you will, doing right by employees and the planet, and providing goods and services truly worthy of the public's time and hard-earned money. Step forward Brand Citizenship. ●

Anne Bahr Thompson is the author of, *DO GOOD, Embracing Brand Citizenship to Fuel Both Purpose and Profit* is published by Barnes & Noble.



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