

The story book.

(How to succeed
at competing.)

You have a story you tell when someone asks you about your company and your work.

Your story can be a strategic advantage for you and everyone in your organization.

But contradictory stories are a competitive disadvantage.

And no story?

Well, that means you're not even in the game.

This little book is about your story—getting it straight and telling it clearly—and why you should care about doing that.

Start by asking people across your organization three deceptively simple questions:

Who are we?

What do we do?

Why does it matter?

Now ask yourself three more questions:

Do their answers line up with each other?

Do they line up with your vision, your reason for existing, your guiding principles, your marketing, your products, your services, your partners, your prices—and everything else you do?

Do the answers make you, your people, and your customers care more, or less?

Why should I care?

If people don't understand who you are, what you do, and why it matters, they are less likely to pay attention to what you have to say.

Or to buy anything from you.

Ouch.

You need to tell
a clear story.

Why should I care?

If you and your people don't have a clear understanding of how you want to be understood, your customers never will.

You need to tell a
clear story *that is*
true.

Why should I care?

A good story's not enough. It has to be true. If it's not, everybody knows. Worse, it's an impediment to success for people in your company, and an impediment to purchasing for those outside.

You need to tell a clear story that is true *and that is different.*

Why should I care?

Unless you are (by far) the leader in your marketplace, you must be different—or resign yourself to being an also-ran.

When your customers can't tell you from the other guys, you force them to make a decision based on other things—usually price. Then you pay for not differentiating with lower prices and lower profits.

To get people's attention, make them care about what you have to offer, and make them willing to pay for it, two things need to be different about your story:

- 1. What you tell.*
- 2. The way that you tell it.*

You need to tell a clear story that is true and that is different *and that you can remember.*

Why should I care?

If your story is complex, it presents two insurmountable barriers:

- 1. Your ability to tell it.*
- 2. Your customers' ability to understand it.*

You need to tell a clear story that is true and that is different and that you can remember *and that makes people care.*

Why should I care?

If you don't care about your story, why should anyone else?



(pause)

How do you
do all that?

1.

You do the work that most people are far too busy to do.

Why should I do that?

You can count on your competition having all the same excuses for not doing this.

The first step to creating a real competitive advantage is to force yourself to stop, think, debate, rediscover, and articulate who your company is, what it does, and why that matters. You'll find you're examining the things you care most passionately about and believe in most deeply.

2.

You get your 10 best people in a room.

Why should I do that?

You know who your best people are. And they're not all on your executive committee. They're smart. And they're not afraid to tell it like it is. Your story must first be true and compelling to them before it can be true and compelling to the rest of your people and, of course, your customers.

3.

You engage
your brain.

You engage
their brains.

Why should I do that?

As it turns out, getting your story straight is determined by your intuition, your experience, your knowledge, and your aspirations; not rigorous research, comprehensive analysis, and rigid process.

It will not happen unless you engage your mind and the best minds around you (and don't forget to bring your sense of humor).

How do you
know it's working?

Keep asking yourself
and your people
the three most
deceptively simple
questions in
business:

Who are we?
What do we do?
Why does it matter?

You'll know you're getting your story straight when surprising things start happening:

Your plans line up with your vision better.

Your policies line up with your actions better.

Your people, products, and services line up with your customers' expectations better.

You're more confident about your company.

Your people are more confident about your company.

And just about everything you say at every level of your company is more clear and more confident.

Your customers pay more attention.

Your potential customers pay more attention.

And, because they're paying attention to a clearer story and more confident people, they're considering doing more business with you.

Which is what competing is all about.

Which is *really* why
you should care.

If you're not very happy with the state of your story, we'd be happy to talk with you.

We're in the business of helping companies get their stories straight, so they can use them to compete better.

Our practical, reasonable approach makes it possible for companies and other organizations to better understand, use, and communicate their reasons for existing.

In a way that makes people care.

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