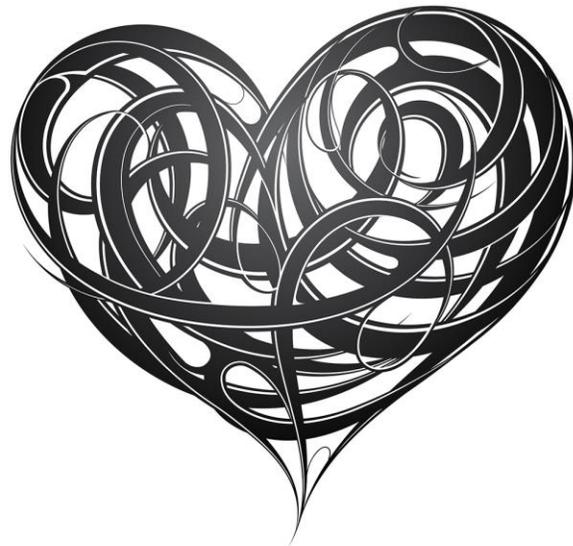


# HOW TO CREATE CUSTOMERS FOR LIFE



**7 Marketing Strategies from  
Cult Brands Like Apple,  
Harley-Davidson, and IKEA**

**BOLIVAR J. BUENO**

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## Chapter 1: The Power of Cult Branding

It was September 2012, and excitement was in the air. Media reporters were buzzing around, capturing the scene as crowds lined up in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco. The phenomenon was global. Thousands of people queued up, patiently waiting, in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Paris.

The average wait-time could be counted in hours, but some—the most enthusiastic, the most eager—were in line for days. The mood of the crowds were upbeat, there was a sense of low-key jubilation. Most people were smiling. When they were asked why they had gathered together and why they were so happy, everyone had the same answer: the new iPhone 5 was being released.

Apple is the embodiment of a Cult Brand: a company that commands fanatical loyalty from its customers. Apple's loyal customers—a group we'll call *Brand Lovers*—overwhelmingly tend to choose Apple products exclusively.

Apple's popularity is not due to low prices; Apple's Brand Lovers pay significantly more for their technology than they would if they chose comparable devices from another manufacturer.

It's not flawless performance that drives the Apple Brand Lover's overwhelming loyalty. Several Apple offerings have been buggy, especially the iPhone 4. People who bought the iPhone 4 reported a myriad of problems with it, including lackluster reception due to poor antenna design, limited search capabilities, reversed volume keys, an easy-scratch case, yellow discoloration on the screen, and a camera that worked sporadically at best. Despite all this, many people who'd been the first to buy the iPhone 4 were now lining up to buy the iPhone 5.

Apple's appeal is certainly not attributable to low prices; that's not it at all. Instead, Apple is offering their customers something else, something so compelling and irresistible that makes their customers overlook sporadically uneven performance and higher prices.

That's the power of Cult Branding. And Apple's not the only one using the power of Cult Branding.

## Welcome to the World of Cult Branding

We'll begin our journey together by differentiating what Cult Brands are and what they are not. Then, we'll explore the multitude of benefits Cult Brands enjoy so you can begin to see how beneficial the principles of this unique marketing method can be to your own enterprise.

### Cult Branding Works In Every Industry

It's important to understand that Cult Branding is not a tech-driven phenomenon. The list of Cult Brands includes companies that have absolutely nothing to do with computers or smartphones:

- Harley-Davidson is a Cult Brand. They make motorcycles.
- IKEA is a Cult Brand. They make furniture.
- John Deere is a Cult Brand. They make lawn mowers.
- MINI is a Cult Brand. They make cars.

Did you notice: In each of these examples, we explained to you what the Cult Brands do. In every instance, the explanation was very likely totally unnecessary. You don't need us to tell you what these Cult Brands do. They are so well known, so iconic that both their branding and offerings have become part of our cultural knowledge.

Simply saying these Cult Brand names evokes an understanding of the visuals and values associated with the brand. This is an understanding that transcends all of the barriers humanity uses to categorize itself into groups: socio-economic, cultural, even language.

It's important to understand that Cult Brands aren't born: they're made. All of the organizations we're talking about in this guide started life in relative obscurity. Steve Jobs planted the seed that eventually became Apple by selling computers he hadn't built yet in order to raise the money to pay for the parts he needed to build the computers. The first year that Harley-Davidson was in business, they sold three motorcycles. Ingvar Kamprad, the founder of IKEA, went into business with a handful of matches he'd bought cheaply in Stockholm. John Deere started with a single steel plow in Illinois. Whole Foods began life with nothing more than the enthusiasm of four Texans.

Lots of companies have humble beginnings, yet few make the journey to greatness. After an exhaustive study, we've determined the critical factors that Cult Brands have in common. These are the traits and practices that bring brands from obscurity to the most profitable spot in the world—centered in their Brand Lover's heart.

### The Benefits of Being A Cult Brand

Being a Cult Brand gives businesses significant competitive advantages:

- Cult Brands are perceived as being the high-value option within their industry; generally, they are the standard that their competitors are judged against.
- Cult Brands tend to command premium prices, which has an obvious positive impact on profitability.
- Cult Brands attract new customers at a higher rate than their competitors, and they keep those customers for a longer period of time.
- Customers tend to do more business, more frequently, with Cult Brands, and they enthusiastically recommend the brand to their family and friends.
- Cult Brands are the brands customers buy "automatically": in many cases, they are not only the default option, they are the *only* option in the minds of their customers. Cult Brands command such fanatical loyalty that when, for whatever reason, they are not available, a customer might wait rather than switch to another brand.

### Cult Brands Have Staying Power

Do you remember Beanie Babies? What about Mortal Kombat or TickleMe Elmo? Do Furbies ring any bells? What about America Online?

We're taking this trip down Memory Lane for a reason, and that's to illustrate the difference between fads and Cult Brands. People often get the two confused, but they're really two very distinct phenomena.

**Fads** are short-lived bursts of extreme consumer enthusiasm, generally for a specific product or product line. Fads are typically youth-oriented, appealing mainly to teenagers and young adults. Fads have short lifespans, ranging from a few weeks to a handful of years.

**Cult Brands** enjoy sustained extreme consumer enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is not tied to a specific product or product line, but instead tends to extend to the entire

organization, including their iconography and messaging. Brand Lovers can be any age. The appeal of Cult Brands endures. Many Cult Brands have been in existence for more than 40 years.

### **Cult Brands Are Not Infallible, But They Know How To Recover**

We've spent a lot of time talking about what Cult Brands are, but it's very important to understand what Cult Brands are not. Cult Brands are not perfect. To err is human, and business is fundamentally a human enterprise. Every brand we talk about, and look to as an example of how to do things right, has also done things wrong—in some cases, really, really wrong.

Harley-Davidson is a great example. If you're not a biker, you might think that Harley has always been a major player in the heavyweight motorcycle industry, and that they've always had the sterling (or perhaps chrome!) reputation that they enjoy today. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The sixties were a tumultuous time for America, and they were a terrible time for Harley-Davidson. There was a veritable flood of Japanese motorcycles entering the marketplace, featuring low prices and superior quality. At the exact same time, Harley motors, as a result of a cost-cutting sourcing decision, were becoming notorious for their poor performance and unreliability.

This was not a sustainable situation. Harley-Davidson was headed for that Great Big Junkyard in the Sky, but luckily for bikers everywhere, the brand had a strong core of Brand Lovers who were willing to step up and try to save the company they loved.

CEO Vaughn Beals, joined by a dozen of his colleagues, went all in to save Harley-Davidson. Their \$81.5-million leveraged buyout was a bold move, and a big gamble. Would they be able to make the changes the brand had to make in order to recover the customer enthusiasm that had been lost?

You know the answer to this question. Today, Harley-Davidson is a dominant player in the heavyweight motorcycle industry. They control more than half of the domestic marketplace, and a third of the global. The company's current valuation is \$12.4 billion. Not a bad return on \$81.5 million.

How did Harley-Davidson's leadership team create this turnaround? They followed the **Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands**.

Cult Brands don't do everything perfectly. It's impossible. Mistakes can and will be made by every organization. However, Cult Brands have a core of understanding and

values that allow them to recover from even the most grievous mistakes. It's by coming back to this core that Cult Brands build the profitable, enduring relationships with their customers that give their companies staying power.

### **Want to Be a Cult Brand? You Have to Let Go of the Merchant Mindset**

It's good to be a Cult Brand, very good, indeed. But we're not going to kid you: Transforming your organization means making some fundamental changes, starting with the way you think about your company and your customers.

Just as there are certain traits, qualities, and practices that unite Cult Brands, there are pervasive unifying tendencies that define companies that aren't nearly as successful. The big one—the stumbling block that sits directly in the middle of the path to greatness—is known as the Merchant Mindset.

(Star Trek fans, we can make this easy for you. Everything we're about to say in this next section can be summed up with a Star Trek reference. The Merchant Mindset = [The Ferengi](#).)

### **The Merchant Mindset**

An exclusive focus on the short-term bottom line is the hallmark of brands that will never be great. This is very important to understand. As long as your operation is too tightly focused on generating the next transaction, you're headed in the wrong direction.

### **Win the Battle, Lose the War**

There are people who will tell you that customer loyalty is a myth, a lie, a sheer figment of the capitalist imagination. These people (we hesitate to call them experts, because that implies a certain level of value in what they have to say) will tell you to do whatever it takes to squeeze one more sale out of your customer.

If that means cutting prices, cut prices. If lower prices necessitate lower quality, so be it. Customer service and support are expensive endeavors—operate both at bare-bones levels so you can be as profitable as possible. Nothing is off the table when you're battling for the next sale.

This is all really, really bad advice. [Sun Tzu](#) said it best: "If a battle cannot be won, do not fight it." If you're battling for the next transaction, you may win the day, but in

the long term, you will lose everything. *Customers who will choose you based on price will leave you for the same reason.*

Kmart is standing on that battlefield right now. The retailer is notoriously famous for their cost-cutting strategies. Historically, they invest less in the shopping experience than any of their competitors, and it shows in their stores. Kmart (and Sears, their parent company) are ranked #7 on [24/7 Wall St's](#) "Worst Companies To Work For" in 2013 list in part due to their low compensation and miniscule raises.

This cost cutting has resulted in prices that are comparable with Walmart. Yet, in market after market, customers have demonstrated that they're willing to drive past Kmart to shop at Walmart, even if that decision added as much as 20 miles to their trip!

### **Kmart has the Merchant Mindset. Walmart doesn't.**

Businesses with passion and heart build relationships with their customers. There are decision-making factors that far exceed price, selection, and location. A company like Walmart is masterful at connecting with customers and offering them an intangible benefit they can't get anywhere else.

Walmart made the customer its boss: this was founder Sam Walton's personal philosophy and it's been a fundamental principle guiding the company as it's grown. Today, Walmart is the world's leading retailer.

Kmart, on the other hand, isn't. The brand's market share has dropped off precipitously, going down faster than a Winnebago over the side of the Grand Canyon.

### **The Cult Brand Alternative**

A pivotal moment happens in the life of a company when its leadership realizes that the Merchant Mindset is no longer serving the best interests of the brand and the long-term value of the business. It takes courage, vision, and dedication in order to successfully change how your business operates. History has proven that it's a worthwhile investment.

### **A Cult Brand Is Born**

People have two parents; Cult Brands, however, are born from the multitudes. A Cult Brand is born when a group of individuals rally around a brand's lifestyle. This

group is drawn together by a set of complex psychological factors that psychiatrist Carl Jung called *participation mystique*.

## Understanding Participation Mystique

As human beings, we have many different kinds of relationships. The relationship you have with your boss is probably very different than the relationship you have with your romantic partner, and both of these relationships are different from the relationship you have with your favorite baseball player and the kid who was your best friend in third grade.

It's important to understand that not only do we have relationships with other people, but also with ideas and philosophies. Identifying yourself as a skeptical person or an Evangelical Christian, for example, will definitely impact the way you view and interact with the world.

We also have relationships with inanimate objects, such as cars or roller coasters. You've surely heard people proclaiming how much they love (or hate!) their cars. Space Mountain, one of Disney's flagship rides, is so beloved by some people that they have their weddings there.

Brands are a unique combination of a set of ideas and inanimate objects that serve as an ideal platform for relationships. When people feel bound to a group or community of shared beliefs around a brand where at least part of their identity is tied to the group, it's a phenomenon known as *participation mystique*. These brands spark a magical participation with their customers; they embrace a certain way of being, aligned to a specific set of beliefs.

## Expressing A Deeper Part of Yourself

Participation Mystique is a powerful psychological force. You can be a corporate attorney running frantically from meeting to meeting, but when you enter a Jimmy Buffett concert you morph into a Parrot Head; litigation, conference calls, and the stress of daily life slide into shadow. Now, life is all about taking it easy. The most important things on your agenda are burgers, cocktails, and connecting with friends in the paradise of Margaritaville.

Cult Brands are successful because they allow people to be who they want to be—not the person they're forced to be to meet the demands placed on them personally or professionally. Cult Brands provide a route to self-expression that feels natural and

intuitive to their Brand Lovers. Cult Brands provide an experience and a community where Brand Lovers feel like they belong.

## **Not All Cults Are Created Equal: Benign Cults vs. Negative Cults**

For some people, the word “Cult” is enough to make the hair on the back of their neck stand up. Thoughts of Jim Jones and David Koresh spring easily to mind. These renowned cult leaders certainly had their followers, but they didn’t lead them anywhere good.

It’s important to understand that there are both benign and destructive cults: benign cults don’t harm their followers; destructive cults do. The fanatical devotion exhibited by Apple aficionados and Harley owners exhibit behavior that is certainly cult-like, but no one is harmed as a result of their affections. Benign cults build their members up; destructive cults tear their members down.

We turn to [Rick Ross](#), one of the nation’s leading experts on cults, for a more in-depth explanation. For over twenty years, Rick Ross has studied cult groups and has helped rescue family members trapped inside cult compounds.

### **Destructive Cults**

Ross describes destructive cults as “groups with an absolute authoritarian figure at the top of a pyramid scheme of authority where there is virtually no accountability for that leader.” This is where you see the Jim Jones type of dynamic at play: the leader is a super-star who has absolute control. Cult Brands are different because it’s not at all necessary for people to know who’s in charge for them to form a relationship with the brand. Lots of people know Steve Jobs was at the core of Apple’s success, but the average customer doesn’t know who is at the helm of IKEA, Whole Foods, or even Harley-Davidson.

Destructive cults hurt, harm, manipulate, and often brainwash their members. The leader of a destructive cult really doesn’t care about the well being of its members. In fact, such leaders openly exploit and abuse their members, usually for their own personal benefit.

## **Benign Cults**

Benign cults have one trait in common with their negative counterparts: the intensity with which the cult members are attached to the object of their affection. Ross describes a benign cult as “any group of people that are intensely devoted to a person, place, or thing,” but where the relationship between the follower and the cult is harmless, benign, or even positive.

Benign cults are never destructive. They don’t harm or injure their followers either physically or mentally. Benign cults have leaders who are accountable to the group, and the leaders value the feedback of their followers.

Benign cults are inclusive. They welcome anyone who wants to belong. There’s no price of admission—you don’t need to buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle to be part of the Harley community: simply being enthusiastic about the brand is enough. This is an important point of differentiation from destructive cults, which are exclusive, shutting out anyone who doesn’t fit a specific set of criteria.

The important thing about benign cults is that they help fill the emotional wants and needs of their followers in a positive way. There are clear, easily identifiable, objectively observable benefits that are derived from membership in a benign cult.

## **The Intangible Benefits Cult Brands Give Their Customers**

The relationship between Cult Brands and their Brand Lovers is mutually beneficial. We’ve already talked about the increased profitability and competitive advantage Cult Brands enjoy, so let’s take a look at what Brand Lovers get out of the deal.

Brand Lovers enjoy a real sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and belonging from the relationship. Their self-image is enhanced significantly: these customers feel better about themselves—and they feel strongly that others view them more positively—due to their embrace of a particular brand-oriented lifestyle.

## **Cult Brands Build Self-Esteem**

Every decision we make as a human being is made in response to a need. When we’re hungry, for example, we need to eat, so we have a sandwich. When we’re cold, we need to warm up, so we put on a coat. When we’re lonely, we need companionship, so we go out to a club to meet some people.

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We have all kinds of needs. Some of our needs are physical, such as the need for food, water, and shelter. Other needs are emotional, such as the need for companionship or a positive self-image. Other needs are more philosophical, such as a need for beauty or the need to help other people enjoy better lives.

Cult Brands are successful because they meet their customers' needs on several levels. Particularly important are the emotional needs, especially esteem needs; these needs focus on how our customers see themselves, and how they think other people see them.

**People need to see themselves as good people, and they need to believe other people think they're good.**

The definition of "good" varies significantly from person to person, based on a range of factors including culture, gender, and social connections. Cult Brands make it easy for people to see themselves as good. They're welcomed and recognized by other Brand Lovers as one of the group, a member of the community. Within these coveted communities, you get to be who you really are—you are allowed to be happy, to be yourself, to be weird together and feel weird no more.

### **Cult Brands Provide a Sense of Belonging**

Fitting in is very important to human beings. From the moment we are born, we are partly defined by the communities we belong to. Even the smallest baby is part of multiple communities: she is part of a family, an ethnic group, even a nation. We identify ourselves by the communities we belong to.

The original elements of our identity are provided for us. We can't choose what family we're born into, our ethnic heritage, or our country of origin. However, as we grow and develop, we can and do make choices that expand our identity. We do this by joining communities.

We can join communities by our actions. Playing soccer, for example, gains us entry to the community of soccer players, and by extension the larger community of athletes. We can join communities by sharing a common belief: The conviction that one must make planet-friendly choices brings one into the community of environmentalists.

We can join communities by making purchases. That's the big secret behind Cult Branding: Cult Brands give their customers the sense that they belong.

Few authentic Cult Brands grace the business world, but we know who they are. Their customers make sure we do. Apple, Harley-Davidson, Oprah, Ikea, Southwest Airlines, Linux, Vans, Star Trek, Jimmy Buffett, WWE, and VW Beetle fans aren't shy about sharing their enthusiasm for their favorite brands. (Visit our website for [profiles](#) and [examples](#) of Cult Brands.)

These customers do far more than purchase the merchandise or services of their beloved Cult Brands. They wear apparel with the Cult Brand's logo. They make pilgrimages—sometimes thousands of miles—to [attend store openings](#) or special events. More than a few have even had their favorite brand's logo [tattooed onto their skin](#).

This doesn't just happen. Our decade of research and study of Cult Brands shows that great brands don't happen by accident. Unequivocal customer loyalty—to be chosen over and over by a core group of customers who refuse to shop at your competitors—takes conscious effort.

### **Embracing Your Brand Lovers**

Brand Lovers aren't born. They're made. Cult Brands are deliberately, continually engaged in building strong, meaningful relationships with their best customers. While brands that have the Merchant Mindset chase the next sale, Cult Brands chase the next conversation.

Cult Brands look for ways that they can play an integral role in their best customers' lives. They embrace their customers like members of a loving family, providing a safe community for them to be who they really are. These brands are bold and courageous—often disliked by many, but loved by a precious few.

### **A Precious Few Is More Than Enough**

A small legion of Brand Lovers will do more for the growth and sustainability of your business than all the transactional customers in the world. Not convinced? We've found that Pareto's Law (the 80/20 Principle) generally holds true. As little as 20 percent of your customers can drive roughly 80 percent of profitability. For many businesses, it costs five times more to acquire a new customer than keep an old one. Most importantly, the customers who love you the most—your Brand Lovers—spread the word and create new customers for you (just ask anyone who owns a Mac or an iPad).

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Before you can embrace your Brand Lovers, you need to know who they are. Are all of your customers contributing equally to your profits? It's unlikely. There are certain customers who choose you more often and purchase from you over a longer period of time (customer retention). These precious few are the lifeblood of your business.

Do you know who your best customers are? Without this knowledge, you can take yourself out of business or your competitors will do it for you. With this knowledge, you'll be able to start transforming your company into a Cult Brand with all the power and profitability that comes with that position.

## Chapter 2: Cult Branding Defined

### What is a brand?

Brands are funny things. You can't just go to the store and pick up a pound of brand. There's no brand app to download. You can't go to the Brand Store and buy brands to make your organization more appealing to your customers. Brands have to be created, and you might be surprised to find out that you're not the one doing the creating, at least, not the only one.

A brand is a relationship, formed and shaped by all the emotions and ideas that the customer associates with a product or service that create a distinct customer experience. The stronger and more unique the customer experience is, the more robust the brand becomes.

A brand is a *co-authored experience*—a mutual relationship that lives between the customer and the brand. The company sets the intention of the brand, and customers interpret their own meanings based on their experiences. The ultimate definition of your brand is determined and owned by your customers when they evaluate their experiences with you.

Your customers' perceptions of your brand are far more multi-dimensional than you ever imagined. Everything is in there, including all things real or perceived, rational or emotional, physical or sensory, thought or felt, whether in form or function, planned or unplanned. You could say a brand is all the good advertising you run, all the bad advertising you regret, your best and worst customer service stories—virtually everything that your enterprise does and the public's perception of those actions. This includes the good, the bad, and the ugly. Collectively, this conglomerate determines the customer experience and, therefore, the marketplace's perception of your brand.

You do not control your brand. You can control what your brand does, but how your brand is perceived is entirely up to your customers. Your brand's messaging and actions define the parameters of your customers' experiences, but your customers come to you with their own frameworks of education, experience, and emotion which

influence how they interpret your brand and feel about your organization. The combination of your actions and your customers' perceptions is your brand.

### **Consistency Counts!**

Successful brands are many things. To appeal to customers, organizations must be credible, with actions that are in alignment with their messaging. There must be no disconnection between what a brand promises and what it delivers. A brand must be meaningful, with specific relevance to customers' lives. Successful brands are unique, with a distinct identity in the marketplace. Successful brands are holistic, meeting customers' needs on multiple levels. Successful brands are sustainable, engaged in business practices they can maintain over the long term.

All of these criteria are important. But there's one factor that trumps all of these factors: Consistency. Successful brands add value to the customer experience across all touch points, and are trusted because they *consistently* deliver on their promises.

### **Why Is Consistency So Important?**

It's dinner time at your house. You've got a big juicy burger. The only thing that's missing is the ketchup. So you go to the fridge, take out the bottle, and give it a shake. After squeezing a good amount of ketchup onto your burger, you take a big bite.

Something's wrong. Instead of the intense tomato experience you were expecting, you've got a watery, bland mess on top of your burger. That's no good, so you toss the ketchup and buy a new bottle. This time, everything's great.

You use up that bottle of ketchup, and get another bottle from the store. This time, the ketchup's watery and bland again. It's time to go back to the store for another bottle.

Are you going to buy the same brand of ketchup again?

Chances are that you won't. Customers like predictability in their purchases. They want to know ahead of time what they're getting for their money. That's why companies like Heinz take great pains to deliver the same amazing taste of their product consistently—even when they're filling the small packet at McDonald's.

## What is a Cult Brand?

Successful brands need to be consistent. Cult Brands need to be consistently amazing.

Cult Brands understand that their brands belong to the customers, and only the customer's voice counts. Rather than engaging in a meaningless attempt to dictate to the customer what they should want, a successful Cult Brand embraces its customers by anticipating their basic human and spiritual needs. As a consequence, Cult Brands achieve a level of customer loyalty unprecedented in traditional business.

To help illustrate, let's map various brands on the *Brand Loyalty Continuum*:

### Brand Loyalty Continuum

**No Brand Land:** *No Brand Land* is wrought with challenges. Unfortunately, this is where most small businesses find themselves. Companies in *No Brand Land* are often stuck working *in* their business rather than *on* their business, and they don't ever develop a solid idea of who they are, what they offer or stand for, or how they can improve their customer experience. These companies tend to change what they offer—and who they are—at the first sniff of a new or different opportunity on the mistaken belief that they're changing for the better. They typically don't have any goals related to the customer relationship. Their business is typically “all about them” in their service offering, the “extra buck” they can make, or the new challenge they want to conquer, without regard for how it affects their niche in the marketplace. There's no relationship in place. These companies have a business, but they don't have a brand.

**Leaky Brand:** These companies have set up the basic brand identifiers. They have a name, a recognizable logo, a tagline, and the rudiments of marketing materials, such as brochures and business cards. They understand that these things are an essential part of doing business, but remain fairly clueless about how these tools connect them with their customers. Leaky Brands are bland: there's nothing distinctive, memorable, or ultimately necessary about them. They don't give their customers any reason to be loyal and, as a result, their customers don't hesitate for a second before doing business with someone else.

**Average Joe Brand:** The next rung up on the branding ladder is occupied by the Average Joes. This is the realm of business as usual, where large companies have marketing departments that actively advertise and sell to their customers. Average Joe brands are missing two essential ingredients for greatness: consistency and clarity. They often take their brand messages in too many directions, demonstrating a lack of consistency that dilutes their brand's appeal. Without a clear message about who the brand is and what it represents, it's impossible for customers to make a significant connection with the organization. This lack of relevancy is ultimately fatal. Average Joe Brands can be fundamentally good companies, but because they're ineffective marketers, they never thrive.

**Iconic Brands:** Iconic brands are all around us. We shop them and love them—they are part of our culture. They're easily recognized by their logo. These brands usually spend a lot of marketing money and are constantly monitoring their image and public perception. These iconic brands are *top of mind* brands and often dominate the market share of a category: McDonalds, Microsoft, Samsung, and Pepsi. Many national retail chains have loyal customers, but they don't occupy an irreplaceable position in the consumers' hearts.

**Cult Brands:** Cult Brands are in a class of their own. They have mastered the art of building lasting and meaningful relationships with their customers. In the world of Cult Brands, the customer is not only king, but is part of the family. When you buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, you are not just getting a bike—you're getting a membership into The Club. These brands have no competition. They rule their customer-defined category. There are no substitutes for Oprah, Vans, Linux, Southwest Airlines, IKEA, Harley-Davidson, Apple, Star Trek, Jimmy Buffett, and Volkswagen Beetle in the eyes of their customers. These brands are profitable even in the most adverse market conditions because of the powerful relationships they've forged with their customers.

### What Kind of Brand Do You Have?

Where does your brand currently reside on the Loyalty Continuum? It's important to understand that a company's position on the Loyalty Continuum is not fixed. If you

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don't like where your organization currently is, take heart from the fact that the situation can be changed.

Moving from one point to another on the Loyalty Continuum is remarkably similar to the Couch to 5K programs that bring people from a point of almost total inactivity to a reasonable standard of fitness. It isn't easy, and it doesn't happen overnight, but with the consistent application of a strategically-directed effort, meaningful and positive change is possible.

## Chapter 3:

### The Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands

You may be familiar with “The” Golden Rule that says “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” That’s not a bad starting point, but it’s not nearly specific enough for brand building purposes.

That’s why we’ve identified the [Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands](#). These rules are the fundamental tenets that all Cult Brands consciously or instinctively follow as they do business. Keeping these rules in mind makes it much easier to make operational decisions that will endear you to your Brand Lovers. You’ll also find that crafting appealing and compelling messaging is much easier when you follow these seven guidelines.

The Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands provide a framework for success. As you read through each rule, think about ways you could apply it to your own organization.

Integrating the [Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands](#) into your operations expands the number of ways you can connect with your best customers. Consistent application of these principles will strengthen the bond you have with your existing Brand Lovers, while simultaneously attracting new business. As your customers find more and more reasons to be loyal to your brand, your brand will grow larger and more profitable.

#### **Rule #1: The Golden Rule of Differentiation**

*Consumers want to be part of a group that’s different.*

“Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.” In less than eleven words, Margaret Mead summed up the challenge facing today’s marketers. Our customers are driven by two simultaneous desires that appear to be diametrically opposed to each other. On one hand, they want to stand out from the crowd and be a totally one-of-a-kind individual. On the other hand, they want—and need—to be part of the crowd, receiving the social support and approval of like-minded individuals.

Humanity is endlessly inventive, and we have found a way to reconcile these apparently conflicting objectives through some smart, if subconscious, social engineering. The Golden Rule of Differentiation states that we want to belong to a group we'd define as appealingly unique, often identifiably outside of mainstream society.

If you've got a home, you need furniture. The community of people who need furniture is, in fact, pretty huge. But the community of people who need furniture with minimalistic charm and serious organizational capacity (and enjoy quirky Swedish names) is smaller and distinct—just different enough to make IKEA irresistible to legions of their fans.

### **Rule #2: The Golden Rule of Courage**

*Cult Brand inventors show daring and determination.*

Cult Branders are like famous inventors and explorers: Even in the face of doubters and critics, they dare to be different—and succeed. They're willing to do things differently; they're willing to do things that have never been done before. Cult Brands are successful because they are wholly unlike every other company in the marketplace.

Cult Branders believe in themselves, their products and services, and their customers. They want to challenge conventional wisdom and obliterate it when given the chance. To really make your brand stand out in the marketplace and to attract a cadre of loyal followers, you must be willing to take significant risks. The people behind Cult Brands are fighters and leaders; they are not quitters or followers.

It's a lot easier to be brave after the battle's already been fought. Once a Cult Brand has proven that its idea or approach is successful and appealing, it will inevitably spawn legions of imitators who want to cash in on the next 'big thing'. When Whole Foods started in 1980, there were less than six natural foods supermarkets in the United States. Today, the natural and organic foods market is estimated at more than \$28.6 billion. However, dominant brands don't waste their time or energy worrying about who is following them. Their attention is focused on what they're going to do for their customers next.

### **Rule #3: The Golden Rule of Fun**

*Cult Brands sell lifestyles.*

Cult Brands are just plain fun. Their products and services make their customers smile and feel better about themselves. Not only do Cult Brands give their followers an escape from life's responsibilities, they help them fulfill their passions and dreams. In other words, Cult Branders capitalize on our human need for self-actualization by developing products and services that support high-level needs.

A company with a Cult Brand sells more than a product or a service. These companies develop and sell "the tools" that help their customers pursue their dreams and celebrate distinct, new lifestyles. They enhance and augment their customer's everyday life by adding deep, sustainable joy.

"Welcome to San Francisco International Airport. We'd like to apologize for the bumpy landing. It's not the pilot's fault. It's not the co-pilot's fault. It's the asphalt." Southwest Airlines' funny flight attendants have become legendary for adding a little levity to what is typically a not-very-enjoyable experience: the air commute. Empowering airline employees to share their wit hasn't cost Southwest a penny, but it has had an impact on their bottom line. Today, Southwest is the third largest domestic airline, commanding a 15 percent market share.

### **Rule #4: The Golden Rule of Listening**

*Listen to the choir and create Cult-Brand evangelists.*

Cult Brands focus on serving the wants and needs of the customers they have. They don't get sucked into the trap of building products and services to attract customers far removed from their bases. To do this, it's essential to listen to your customers: not all good ideas are generated internally. Cult Brands have the ability to listen to their customers' discontent and create solutions that build strong, enduring loyalty.

By listening, Amazon.com discovered that the high cost of shipping interfered with how often their customers made purchases. In response, they developed Amazon Prime, a program in which members enjoy unlimited free two-day shipping in exchange for a yearly fee. It's an initiative that has been more successful than anyone

could have ever imagined, with *Time* reporting that there could be more than 25 million Amazon Prime members by 2017. Considering that the typical Prime member buys as much as 150 percent more than Amazon's non-Prime members, this is a really big deal.

Respect your choir. Value their opinions. Reward them. Listen to them. Never ignore an enthusiastic follower of your brand. Remember that core followers all want to believe, but first they need to see miracles in the form of unexpected gifts and surprises. Do extraordinary things for your choir, and they'll become incredible brand evangelists.

### **Rule #5: The Golden Rule of the Tribal Imperative**

*Cult Brands always create customer communities.*

Simply put, Cult Brands always give back. They never forget that the relationship needs to be mutually beneficial. Brand Lovers need to get just as much (or even more) out of the relationship than the Cult Brand does.

With this in mind, the leaders of Cult Brands are adamant about continually finding new ways to show love and appreciation for the passion and devotion of their customers. Unlike faceless corporations, Cult Brands are humble and personable. They never take their customers for granted. They look for tangible ways to say thank you.

Cult Brands build strong, ongoing relationships with their customers by developing and supporting customer communities. Cult Brands aren't afraid to use today's profits to create customer communities for generating powerful long-term goodwill for their business and their brand.

This giving back can benefit the Brand Lover community directly, or it can support causes that are near and dear to the Brand Lover's heart. For example, Walmart knows that their best customers are extremely patriotic. Their pledge to provide jobs for more than 100,000 veterans generated tremendous goodwill among Walmart's best customers.

## **Rule #6: The Golden Rule of Openness**

*Cult Brands are inclusive.*

Cult Brands are incredibly open and inclusive. You don't have to earn your way into a Cult Brand by proving you're cool enough; Cult Brands take it as a given that you're already cool enough. They openly embrace anyone who is interested in their companies.

In fact, exclusivity isn't even in the vocabulary of the Cult Brander. Instead, Cult Brands welcome customers of all ages, races, creeds, and socioeconomic backgrounds with open arms. They don't discriminate against anyone who doesn't fit into an idealized customer profile. Everyone is welcome.

Cult Brands prove to their customers that they are indeed open and inclusive by helping to fulfill the deep human needs that we all share, including belonging and self-esteem.

Jimmy Buffett's fans self-identify themselves as Parrot Heads, gathering at his concerts and online to celebrate his music and their mutual enjoyment of it. The [Parrot Heads of North Carolina](#) define their experience this way: "For most Parrot Heads, there is a specific state of mind that comes with their condition. Age has nothing to do with it. Through his music and writings, Parrot Heads vicariously experience Jimmy's lifestyle: the party, the ocean, the sunshine, and a relaxed sense of freedom are a part of it. And that freedom is most appealing; it allows us to express our feelings and creativity in whatever manner we choose and allows us to escape from the rat race to our own little tropical paradise, if only for a little while."

## **Rule #7: The Golden Rule of Freedom**

*Cult Brands promote personal freedom and  
draw power from their enemies.*

Deep inside every human being on this planet is a need for freedom. According to humanistic psychologists, the feeling of freedom is a bridge to self-actualization: we want to be able to express our own unique identity and worldview without fear of consequences. Cult Brands promote underlying themes of freedom and nonconformity

with memorable sensory experiences, like holding Apple's sleek, cool products and packaging, or watching the Oprah show.

Cult Brands are empowering and expansive. When Brand Lovers engage with a Cult Brand, they come away feeling like they can do more, and do it more effectively. It is essentially a freeing experience. The Cult Brand removes barriers for their Brand Lovers. The would-be musician no longer needs to shell out thousands of dollars for expensive instruments and equipment. They just need to download the right apps onto their iPad, and they're ready to rock.

Cult Brands draw strength and unify their Brand Lovers by identifying and targeting an archenemy—an opposing brand, person, or group—that conflicts with the Cult Brand's values or goals. By identifying the voices that say, "You can't," Cult Brands are given the opportunity to say, "Oh, yes you can!" It's an irresistible message.

Hope sells. It'll be a long time before the chants of "Yes we can!" from President Obama's first campaign slide from anyone's memory. This message of optimism was enough to motivate legions of young voters, many of who were not engaged in any meaningful way with the political process before, to come to the polls for the first time ever.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Applying the Seven Golden Rules to Your Business**

Understanding the Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands is the first step. The next step is application, and it's here where things can get complicated. Execution really is everything: it is much better to do one thing very, very well than to do many things poorly. L.L. Bean built their brand by perfecting their return policy. A similar single-pointed route to success may exist for your company.

As you review the Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands, you'll find that certain rules will be more relevant to you than others. Focus in on those rules first, concentrating your organizational resources to make the changes that will build your brand.

To help make this process easier, we've provided a question section for each rule to help you clarify your thinking. You can work through these questions on your own, or with the assistance of your leadership team. Give yourself time to really dig into these questions. The insights can lay the foundation for the successful development of your brand.

## **Applying Rule #1: The Golden Rule of Differentiation**

*Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.*

Maslow identified one of our most basic human needs: the need to belong. We want to be part of a community that's appealing, special, and especially unique. This understanding gives us our entry point into the Golden Rule of Differentiation. Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.

The first step in applying the Golden Rule of Differentiation requires looking at your existing customer base. The best communities have an organic foundation of self-selecting individuals who are drawn to each other by their common traits. What are these common traits? How do these traits align or differ from prevailing social norms? The differences may be subtle, but they're critically important. You need to know what they are.

Examine the interactions your customers have with each other, both on social media platforms and in person. Harley-Davidson couldn't help but notice that their customers would come together to go for rides; this was the genesis of the now-iconic Harley Owners Group. Lots of people love to ride motorcycles. Harley delved into the specifics of what makes their HOG members feel like they're part of a special, elite community. There are many elements to consider here, from the visuals of black leather and chrome, to the extensive charitable work focused on helping kids and veterans—two causes near and dear to many HOG members' hearts.

**Your Turn:**

Why do your customers buy from you instead of your competitors? What unique attributes do your products and services provide?

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Cult Brands tend to have unique cultures that attract extraordinary employees. Are there qualities of your organization that attract unique people? List anything that makes your organization unique or different than others in your industry.

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Look at the place your brand occupies in your industry. How are you similar to your competitors? How are you different? How do your best customers differ from your competition's best customers?

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Now it's time to make your brand *insanely* different. List your craziest ideas that make you independent of the culture that runs your industry. Customers love to find groups that are different. How different can you be?

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## **Applying Rule #2: The Golden Rule of Courage**

*Cult Brand inventors show daring and determination.*

Southwest Airlines was the first to offer frequent miles program to its passengers. It was a simple offering that their customers appreciated. (Incidentally, Southwest was also the first airline to adopt a profit-sharing plan for employees in the U.S. airline industry.) Sometimes you have to defy the marketplace, break the rules, and disturb the balance of power.

Courage is a function of vision. You know where your company fits within its industry, as it exists right now. Your first step in applying the Golden Rule of Courage is determining where your brand would be if you had no limits.

Make your customers central to your thought process as you do this. If you could do anything to make your Brand Lovers happy, what would it be? Don't let reality slow you down at this point: remember, at one point in time, it was completely impossible to have the ability to listen to any song you wanted to, any time you wanted to, anywhere you wanted to—and then the iPod happened.

Sometimes it is easier to be courageous in the company of like-minded peers. Get together with the forward-thinking people in your organization (chances are you know who they are) and have a free-range brainstorming session focused on providing the ultimate in customer service.

**Your turn:**

What did you come up with?

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Coming up with the appealing, apparently impossible ideas is only the first step. Now you need to identify what it will take to make them happen. This is an exercise to bring forth your intellectual courage. Set aside thoughts of feasibility for the moment, and articulate the steps it would take to implement your favorite impossible ideas.

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List all the rules that run your category. How does everyone do it?

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Disrupt the balance of power. List every idea you can think of that breaks those rules.

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## How to Create Customers for Life

Now, identify the freshest, most inventive ideas—those that inspire you to push forward and be completely different from the pack.

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That which doesn't kill a Cult Brand makes it stronger. Write down your brand's marketing failures. Be honest. Learn from your mistakes.

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What's a marketing idea that your company decided was too risky to pursue? Write it down. Does it challenge conventional wisdom? Will it serve your Brand Lovers?

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### **Applying Rule #3: The Golden Rule of Fun**

*Cult Brands sell lifestyles.*

A smile is now, and always has been, the best sales tool mankind has had at its disposal. Cult Brands don't just sell a product or a service, they develop and sell "the tools" that allow their brand followers to pursue their dreams and celebrate distinct, new lifestyles. In other words, Cult Brands give their customers something to smile about.

Fun is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Some people define fun as laughing and joking around. Other people find fun in tracking down a really great deal on the sales rack. Other people are thrilled to use the right combination of coupons, discount codes, and timing of their shopping excursion to save big bucks. Still other people live for the thrill of lining up at 3 am on Black Friday. As you move forward, it's important to understand how your customer defines fun, both in general, and in the context of the business you provide.

The first step in applying the Golden Rule of Fun is looking at the experience you're providing to your best customers right now.

**Your turn:**

Is your brand fun? Does it make your customers happy and make them feel good about themselves? How can you help your customers have more fun?

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What are the passions and dreams of your customers? How can your brand help fulfill these wants?

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Followers of Cult Brands are buying into a lifestyle—not just a product or a service. What is the lifestyle your customers are really seeking? What would their everyday existence be like if everything was perfect for them?

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What would make your customers laugh out loud? When was the last time you tried to make your customer laugh? How successful were you?

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## **Applying Rule #4: The Golden Rule of Listening**

*Listen to the choir and create Cult-Brand evangelists.*

If you're going to grow your brand, you need to listen to what your customers want from you. This can be one of the toughest things you ever learn how to do as a brand steward. We're trained to focus on our own messaging, devoting a great deal of energy to creating messaging and trying to make our customers listen. It's a fundamental shift to stop talking so much and start listening more.

Luckily, our customers aren't shy about sharing their thoughts, feelings, and impressions. A number of tools exist to make it easy for you to become a more effective listener. Everyone who has a leadership role in your organization needs to spend face time with actual customers on a regular basis. There is no substitute to actual in-person contact and communication. This time will help your leadership team remain connected to your customers.

Social media is also a hugely valuable tool for brand stewards. Social media is a direct connection to your customers, and should be treated as one of the most valuable communication channels that you have. Ask open-ended questions of your customers, and be willing to listen to the responses you're given—even the negative ones. Devote the time and resources to making your social media presence an actual communication channel.

You're listening for a number of things, but the most important information you're trying to learn is your customer's driving needs. The brand that does the best job of satisfying its customers' needs is the brand that wins.

Cult Brands understand that customers have needs on a number of levels. For example, the need for warmth may lead one to purchase a coat, but the need to belong leads one to purchase the same coat that's currently considered the most stylish by one's peer group. Economic forces dictate how one prioritizes their needs, as do cultural and social factors. The more completely you understand the needs driving your customers' purchasing decisions, the better you'll be able to serve them.

**Your turn:**

When was the last time you actually talked with one of your customers? What was that experience like? What are you going to do to increase the amount of face-time you and your leadership team spend with your customers?

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Open-ended questions are a great way to start conversations on social media. Open ended questions can't be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No"—they require more explanation. Generate a list of five open ended questions you can ask your customers on social media.

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Take on your customer's worldview and create a prioritized list of their needs.

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## **Applying Rule #5: The Golden Rule of the Tribal Imperative**

*Cult Brands always create customer communities.*

Cult Branding is a reciprocal exercise. A brand can only achieve Cult-Brand status when it gives as much (or even more) to its customers than its customers give to it. The more giving the Cult Brand is, the more fervently loyal its Brand Lovers become.

To create the best, strongest, most enduring bonds, you want to give your Brand Lovers what they want the most. What do they want the most? A community they can belong to.

It's not enough to love your customers; you have to demonstrate that love, and always communicate your feelings. That's why the leaders of Cult Brands are so adamant about continually finding new ways to show their love and appreciation for the passion and devotion of their customers. Cult Brands build strong, ongoing relationships with their customers by developing and supporting customer communities. Cult Brands aren't afraid to put aside short-term profits in favor of creating customer communities that generate powerful long-term halo effects on their businesses and their brands.

Community creation is an ongoing endeavor. Cult Brands are extremely proactive about identifying and taking advantage of opportunities to create bonds between their customers. The party atmosphere that surrounds every [IKEA opening](#) isn't an accident. Every customer that waits in line together for the doors to open, only to be cheered like a triumphant champion upon entering, is participating in a shared experience. They've spent time together; they've gone through a range of emotions together; they can tell similar, if not identical, stories after the event. In a society where we're increasingly disconnected from each other, these experiences matter.

**Your turn:**

What opportunities are you providing for your customers to connect with each other? Identify what you're doing to build community for your Brand Lovers. (And if you haven't done anything, begin dreaming up ideas of how you can cultivate customer communities.)

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Milestone events, such as store openings, the launch of a new product or line of merchandise, or holidays can serve as the focus for community building. Looking at your calendar for the coming year, identify four events you can use to create a community-building event.

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Right now, size doesn't matter. No matter how small the group, the power of a group can make a significant impact on your business. Look around: are there any sets of customers that can form a cohesive group that you can support? List any group dynamics that you have observed.

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## How to Create Customers for Life

How do you communicate and stay in touch with your customers? Do you have a newsletter, a mailing list, or a fan festival? Digital engagement is increasingly important. How do you connect with your Brand Lovers via social media or your website?

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Customer communities are invaluable branding tools. What are some new ways you can build a “sense of community” around your brand?

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Cult Brands always give back. What are some organizations and causes that your customers would love to see your brand support? Remember that the causes you are personally passionate about may not be the same ones that your customers hold dear. What are you doing to inform yourself about what causes are most relevant to your Brand Lovers?

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## **Applying Rule #6: The Golden Rule of Openness**

*Cult Brands are inclusive.*

Cult Brands are incredibly open and inclusive. Everyone is welcome to their parties, no one is shut out. This approach fills the human needs of belonging and self-esteem. Cult Brands become giant support groups for like-minded individuals.

Cult Brands don't discriminate. They openly embrace everyone and anyone who is interested in their companies. Cult Brands welcome customers of all ages, races, creeds, and socioeconomic backgrounds with open arms. There's no price of admission to become a Brand Lover.

Harley-Davidson demonstrates this inclusiveness incredibly well. You're not going to get a brand new Harley for less than \$7,500, and it's easy to spend a lot more than that. But you don't need to buy a brand new bike to join the Harley-sponsored Harley Owners Group: you just need to supply a VIN from any Harley—even if it's a thirty-year old bike you bought in a box for \$200 and put back together yourself.

**Your turn:**

Remember: you don't get to define who your customer base is. Your customer base defines itself. To the best of your abilities, describe your Brand Lovers, not as you wish they would be but as they actually are.

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How does this description resemble or differ from any customer profiles your organization may have developed?

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How do these differences impact how effectively you connect with your customers? Is your own brand already open and inclusive, or have you focused only on targeting ideal customer segments? What changes might you need to make to your messaging and operations?

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## **Applying Rule #7: The Golden Rule of Freedom**

*Cult Brands promote personal freedom and draw power from their enemies.*

Cult Branders are daring, courageous, and determined when embracing their customers, in spite of doubters and critics. Believe in yourself and your products and services. Don't just challenge conventional wisdom, shatter it!

Be willing to take significant risks to make your brand stand out. Never fear failure. Deep within every human being is a pervasive longing for freedom. We want the power and the permission to be our best selves. Cult Brands provide that power and permission.

**Your turn:**

Consider your Brand Lovers. Understand that as free as they may be, there are areas where they feel repressed. What could they do if they were empowered to do anything they wanted? Who would they be if they were free to be their best selves?

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What does your company do now to help your customers feel freer? Identify specific strategies to help your customers move past the shackles and constraints placed on them by society and tradition.

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Helping people become freer is an inherently risky endeavor. However, with big risks often come big rewards. What is the biggest branding-related risk your company has taken in its history? In the past year?

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## How to Create Customers for Life

Define the competition and draw strength from your enemies. Every great brand that stands for something has an archenemy—something they fight against. Who or what is your brand's archenemy?

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How do (or can) you draw strength from your enemy?

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## Chapter 5: Your Journey Starts Now

The Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands are something that the world's best brands live with every single day. Understanding and following these rules helps keep the organization's focus exactly where it belongs: squarely on the customer. Putting customers first is an essential step on the route to becoming a successful Cult Brand.

If you haven't been putting your customers first, don't worry. It's never too late to start. And if you have been focusing on your customers' needs, but you're not sure if you've been doing so in the most effective manner, take heart. When you know better, you can do better, and now you know better.

Great brands are vibrant and growing every day. They learn from their mistakes and their victories. They execute and win often, though sometimes they pull the trigger too early or too late and fall short. There is no process in the world that can guarantee you results, but what you now have in your hands can help you create effective strategies for getting better results.

Here's what you need to do next:

**Step One:** At the end of this book, you'll find a nicely formatted list of the Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands. Download the rules and put them up in your office where you'll see them regularly. The more often you engage with the Seven Golden Rules, the more integrated they'll become into your thought process.

**Step Two:** Use the Seven Golden Rules as a guide. Every time you're faced with a decision, ask yourself: *What rules apply here? How is what I'm about to do—or not do—going to impact the way our Brand Lovers feel about our company?*

**Step Three:** Share the Seven Golden Rules with your leadership team. Depending on your corporate culture, getting buy-in to these principles may take time. Consistency is key. Keep bringing the conversation back to "How can we best serve

our customers?” and you’ll start to see results. Make things easy for yourself by sharing the [Introduction to Cult Branding](#) presentation with your leadership team.

**Step Four:** Share the Seven Golden Rules with your front line employees. Everyone who interacts with your customers need to understand how important they are, and how important the customers’ experiences are. Educated and empowered employees do better work. Your brand will go further faster when your team understands the [Seven Golden Rules of Cult Brands](#).

**Step Five:** Pay attention to how you’re doing. It’s easy to introduce the Seven Golden Rules; it’s much harder to make sure they’re consistently implemented over the course of time. Regular performance reviews are essential to keep on track. Make sure you’re talking to—and more importantly, listening to—your Brand Lovers all the time. As a brand steward, you should talk to at least one of your customers each week, and meet with customers en masse at least quarterly.

**Step Six:** Reward initiative, internally and externally. If one of your team members comes up with an idea of how to improve the customer experience, make sure that team member is visibly rewarded. This will inspire others to do their best to improve the customer experience. And if one of your customers comes up with an idea of how to improve the customer experience, do the same thing. Recognition is a powerful incentive. The more people you can get focused on making the customer experience better for everyone, the better the experience will be, and the better your brand will be as a result.

Onward!

## About the Author

**BOLIVAR J. BUENO (BJ)** is in an elite class of thought leaders as a dynamic lecturer and creative strategist, with interviews by CNN, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, and CNN en Español. BJ is the co-author of *The Power of Cult Branding* (Crown Business, 2002), a work which received rave reviews from leading mavens like Jack Trout, Al Reis, and Jay Conrad Levinson and *Customers First* (McGraw-Hill, 2012). As a board member of the National Retail Federation (NRF) and the Retail Advertising & Marketing Association (RAMA), and the founder of [The Cult Branding Company](#), a boutique strategic consulting and brand loyalty research firm, BJ advises companies like Kohl's Department Stores, Scheels, The Life is good Company, Turner Classic Movies, and LA Lakers on their retail, advertising, and marketing efforts.

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