

---

## ***The Moral of the Story***

*Creating a brand story that builds relationships with people*

---

Jeff Freedman  
CEO, Small Army  
jfreedman@smallarmy.net  
@smallarmyjeff  
617-450-0000

*Every brand has a story.  
It is what you see, hear, taste, touch and experience with the brand.  
Every purchase. Every visit. Every ad. Every interaction.*

*Deep within that story, there is a soul.  
But you can't define a soul - that is what makes a soul a soul. It is  
there, but you can't see it. You can feel it, but you can't touch it.  
And, when you connect with it, you want to be a part of it.*

*Just like the stories we read to our children,  
great stories have a moral.  
The moral gives the story its soul.*

## Discovering Your Moral:

---

**Storyteller:** Look deep within  
Get to know the heart of the brand

*Using the Toddler Principle, ask these questions to brand representatives.*

**1. In less than 1 minute, how would you describe [Brand] to others unfamiliar with this industry?**

This time limit forces them to try and be as clear and focused as they can be. In doing so, they highlight the one or two aspects that they believe are most important. It's also important to clarify that the description is for someone outside of the industry so they stay away from buzzwords and industry jargon. By asking everyone this question, you are able to get a broad understanding of how each person views the brand at its most basic level and then dig deeper to learn what matters most to them.

**2. In your opinion, what is the mission of the organization?**

Many brands have a mission statement. However, people rarely know what it is. In fact, many times people say, "let me just pull up our website." That's not allowed. If you have to look it up than you really don't live by it. This question helps you understand what the people representing the brand believe that they are ultimately there for.

**3. Why did you start/join [brand]?**

Whether it was a personal/family-related event, a situation with a former organization, they just "needed a job" or they joined the company as an intern 20 years earlier, the backstory will tell you a lot about the organization. This line of questioning can bring back many relevant memories. Let them go off on tangents - this is where the most unexpected insights and stories can come from. The answer to this question often serves as the premise for the entire brand story.

**4. What gets you most excited about coming to work each day?**

The response to this question can help you understand the priorities of the organization from a more personal perspective. Often times, these discussion start with high-level responses such as "I love helping customers solve their problems," or "I enjoy the collaborating with my colleagues." But, you need to go much deeper than that. Why do

they like helping customers solve problems? Ask for examples. Let them tell you stories. It can often take asking why 4-5 times, and listening to several stories, before understanding what really gets them excited.

### **5. What keeps you up at night?**

Fear can be a highly emotional motivator. Remember that this process is intended to get to the heart. While this is often sparked by positive experiences, it can also be revealed through negative ones. Here, it is not only important to discover what causes people to worry. But, why do those things cause so much angst?

**EXERCISE:**

*Have a partner ask you one of the questions and take notes.  
Make sure they apply the Toddler Principle.*

Question:

-----  
-----?

A:

Why

-----  
-----?

A:

Why

-----  
-----?

A:

*Why*

-----  
-----?

*A:*

*Why*

-----  
-----?

*A:*

**Audience: Consider all of them**  
*Discover how they share your beliefs*

Brands have many different audiences. Multiple different customer/prospect segments, employees, partners, investors and others. Speak with them, learn about their pains and pleasures and seek to identify how they express your core belief. The way in which they each express the belief may be different, but they all share the same one.

**EXERCISE:**

*Write down each of your core audiences. For each, write down why they would want a relationship with your brand.*

Audience	Why would they want a relationship with your brand?
Ex: Donors	To help make an impact in the fight against poverty.

**Believers**  
*(low hanging fruit)*

The stronger they believe in your moral, the higher the likelihood that they will be a good customer. Focus on this audience. Find them in the places

**Non-Believers**  
*(Stay away)*

If they don't believe, don't bother trying to sell to them. You are wasting your time. Move on.

**Undecided**  
*(Educate)*

This audience shows potential, but they may need some education. Do not sell - educate. And, give your customers (believers) the tools to help

**Environment:** Know what your competitors stand for  
*True differentiation comes from why you do what you do.*

What your competitors (and alternative options) do and how they do it are temporary differentiators. Examine why they have taken the path they have. This is where their true soul lies. Your soul is certainly different, but be sure to understand where the alternatives may reside.

### **EXERCISE:**

*Write down each of your key competitors (including indirect alternatives). For each, take a stab at the moral of their story.*

<b>Competitors/Alternatives</b>	<b>Implied moral of their story</b>
Ex: Big Banks	The more you have, the more you can give.


# Defining your Happily Ever After

---

## Your true North

### 1. Everyone in your story will want to go there

Your story is not all about you. Your brand's market share, competitive advantage and revenue growth may be critical business goals, but they are most often not where customers care to go. Look beyond your products and services and consider what happens when people engage with them.

### 2. It is reasonably achievable to get there

Your happily ever after must be achievable in the eyes of everyone who is part of your story. And they need to believe you can get there while you are together. While the Red Cross may dream of a world without suffering, their happily ever after is a world with less of it. This is much more attainable and, as a result, something that we can much more comfortably support.

### 3. It's a place we call all keep going back to

Your happily ever after must be reachable time and time again. If your happily ever after has a finite, one-time ending, your brand will find itself out of business when it gets there. This may be OK for a non-profit with a finite goal. But, for most brands, going out of business is not really a happily ever after that everyone wants to achieve.

### 4. It is clear and simple

There is no need to make your happily ever after any more complicated than it needs to be. It does not need to explain how you are going to get there. How you are going to get there will likely change over time. Your moral will guide you there.

## EXERCISE:

What are some potential "happily ever after's" for your brand?

---



# CRITERIA FOR A GREAT MORAL

---

You know you've found your moral if it meets these criteria:

❑ **It explains why the brand does what it does**

At a philosophical level, the moral to your story should help explain all major actions of the brand. Why do you develop that product? Why do you hire that executive? It may not be the only reason behind the action, but it should be a logical answer for it. Why does Red Bull develop an energy drink? Because they believe "it takes energy to live life to its fullest."

❑ **Your audience believes it and can be defined by it.**

You should not have to convince your audience to believe in your moral. They should already believe it (or at least, not disagree with it). In many ways, your audience can be defined by your moral. Life is Good believes that life is good. So does their audience. (People that believe "life sucks" are not likely customers of this brand).

❑ **It is unique to your brand.**

Brands have many beliefs. Therefore, at some level, competing brands may share yours. However, it cannot be the belief that drives everything they do. Microsoft may believe that simple is better, but only Apple lives by it.

❑ **It leads you to happily ever after**

Although there doesn't need to be a direct connection (ie., when you do X, Y happens). However, it should theoretically make sense that if you believe strongly in your moral, you will make smart decisions that could lead you to happily ever after.

❑ **It doesn't beg the question "why."**

If you continue to ask 'why', then you probably haven't found the core moral. Words such as "should", "would," and "deserves," often beg the question "why?" For example, the statement "People should not steal" begs the question why. "It is wrong to steal" is a much more definitive statement, and is a better moral (for a brand that is defined by it).

❑ **It causes others to assume your strengths.**

A great moral is that it causes people to assume your strengths. If someone told you

that they believe, “the harder you work, the more successful you will be,” you would likely assume that they work hard and are successful.

□ *A second grader can understand it.*

*Your moral must be easily understood by all your constituents - employees, customers, partners, investors, etc. Put acronyms, MBA jargon and buzz words to the side. The simpler the statement, and less room for interpretation, the more it will resonate with others.*

□ *You would be proud to hang it on the wall in your HQ lobby*

*If you're not confident enough to hang the moral on the wall in the lobby of your brand's headquarters, then it's not the right moral. You shouldn't be scared of it, or think it could offend someone that you need to impress (it's OK if it doesn't resonate with those that may not be appropriate for your brand).*

## Moral Considerations

### EXERCISE:

*What are some potential morals for your brand story?*

---

### BRAND EXAMPLES:

BRAND	MORAL	HAPPILY EVER AFTER
Trump	The direct approach is always the best approach	America is great again
Hillary	Experience is everything	America is stronger
Boston Medical Center	Life's greatest privilege is taking care of those around you	A healthier community
Red Bull	It takes energy to live life to the	Fulfilled lives

	<i>fullest</i>	
<i>Apple</i>	<i>Simple is better</i>	<i>Advancement of humankind</i>
<i>Tesla</i>	<i>The status quo is unacceptable</i>	<i>A more sustainable world</i>
<i>American Red Cross</i>	<i>It takes a village to make a difference</i>	<i>A world with less suffering</i>
<i>Google</i>	<i>Order makes sense of chaos</i>	<i>The world's information is usable and accessible</i>

MORAL OF THE STORY Why you do	HOW YOU DO IT/PROOF	HAPPILY EVER AFTER Why you are
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

## The Storytelling Platform

---

*"How you do it" is variable. It can evolve as your story develops and change by audience.*

## Your Brand Rally Cry

---

We (are all here because we) believe \_\_\_\_\_ [moral]

As we work to \_\_\_\_\_ [happily ever after] \_\_\_\_\_, that's what guides us.

It's why we \_\_\_\_\_ [how we do it] \_\_\_\_\_.

*And it's why we will succeed together.*

### EXERCISE:

*Write out your rally cry:*

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

---

Once you have your moral, let it guide you.

## Be True:

*Let your moral guide your voice and actions. Speak from your heart. Don't brag.*

*What would someone (with good values) who deeply believes*

*(moral): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ do?*

## Be Inclusive

*Your story isn't all about you. Show how others are involved. They will appreciate it greatly.*

## Be Empowering

*Your community likely has friends who share your beliefs as well. Help them make introductions.*

## Be Giving

*When you give unconditionally, people will not always be expecting you to ask for something.*

## **Be Demonstrative**

*Your belief extends beyond your products. Consider other interesting ways to demonstrate it.*

## **Be Consistent**

*Identify ways to express the moral in every part of the organization.*

## Notes/Sketches/Noodles

---

---