

# Council Post: Why It Matters To Add Meaning To Your Marketing

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/02/11/why-it-matters-to-add-meaning-to-your-marketing/#1ca5c6862eeb>

Feb 11, 2020, 09:00am EST



**Lynne Goldner** Forbes Councils Member  
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Leadership

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A few years ago, I worked with a local Habitat for Humanity chapter, supporting their public relations and marketing. The team was energetic and devoted, despite openly admitting to earning miserably low wages. I wondered how they could be so upbeat when paid, honestly, less than a livable amount.

“The mission,” several employees claimed. There was meaning in their work, which made their days fly by and every task shine with purpose. The stories we told as part of their marketing were passionate because they believed in what they were doing. They wanted to show up every day. And those messages were inspiring as a result.

American Psychological Association [research](#) reveals that when work is meaningful, workers are motivated, engaged and happy with their jobs. Meaning and purpose elevates our days and makes mundane tasks special. When we have a “why” behind what we do, the work is easier—and often more successful.

The same is true with marketing. So many companies today focus their marketing messaging on meaning and purpose. Because we have such a crowded marketplace, people want transactions that transcend mere purchasing. They want to buy meaning, and if a brand positions itself properly in the meaning camp, it can win more engagement and repeat business.

Today, taglines, messages, videos and images focus on storytelling with meaning at the heart. The message becomes that by engaging with a particular brand, your personal meaning, purpose and life satisfaction will improve.

Of course, focusing marketing on meaningful messages can't be a sales tactic. Meaning must be real, deeply held and shared throughout an organization if it is to work—not just for the people who represent that brand, but for anyone who engages with it.

We live in a time when most people don't truly *need* anything. It is a choice to buy, subscribe or enroll, and if doing so does not add value to your life, you're unlikely to engage.

Smart companies emanate messages of meaning because it's who they are at the core. Their *raison d'être* is to affect change, improve the community and leave a lasting legacy.

The only problem is, if your company wasn't founded on a mountain of meaning, how can you authentically infuse meaning into your marketing messages? It's easier than you think.

### **1. Reconnect with your origin story.**

How did your company come to be? Why do you do what you do? Who inspired its creation? Who led the charge? Who leads it today?

Reconnecting with the how-it-came-to-be story for your organization is a great place to start finding meaning. Someone believed they could do

something better, offer more value or otherwise improve the way things are done, which gave rise to the organization itself. Do some research. Interview founders and early employees. Dig deep to find your creation story.

## **2. Survey your people.**

Learning why people joined the organization, and why they stay, is a great source for meaning. Start with employees who've been there the longest, and then the most recently hired. Ask what brought them and what keeps them. See if they can define your culture. Take avid notes; you'll likely hear the same words uttered over and over again, which will get you closer to the meaning behind your organization.

## **3. Listen more than you speak.**

Customers, employees, anyone who engages with your brand has an opinion about it. Are you open to hearing them? We gain insight when we listen more than we speak. If we're planning our reply, we're not actually listening. Try simply taking in the feedback of those who engage with your brand, and take note of what they say. Kernels of wisdom, truth and inspiration live in that place.

## **4. Articulate your 'why.'**

There is inspiration, and there is purpose. One ignites the creation of a product, a path, an organization. The other keeps it going. The "why" leads people to show up every day, to come up with new ideas, to yearn

for customers to keep coming back. The “why” makes it more than just a job. Lurking within the “why” is that elusive meaning. Try to put your “why” into words. They may not make sense at first, but the more people you pull into the conversation, the clearer it will become.

## **5. Look at every role as marketing.**

This is perhaps the most important piece. Every single person who represents your brand moves it forward or sets it back. A teacher in a school hallway who is gruff with a parent waiting to pick up their child has just soured the parent’s perspective on the school. An erratic driver of an airport shuttle angers passengers who will choose another satellite lot next time they travel. A naïve intern who doesn’t do research before they call a client makes the firm seem incompetent. All individuals who present themselves as part of your company—on their social media platforms, when they wear company swag or when they down shots at a bar—affect your brand. Make sure they are steeped in the organizational meaning so they’ll move you forward.



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