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Kristy Short • Aug. 22, 2018

This article continues the series on creating a world-class marketing culture in your firm. In Part 1, we explored the definition of marketing and its centrality in the life of a firm. In Part 2, we examine the firm's brand—what it is, what it means to clients, and how you give it shape. [Read Part I of This Series.](#)

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Let's begin with a definition: Your brand is the impression and perception of your firm that people hold in their minds. As the late Peter Drucker said, "Your brand is what you own in the mind of the consumer." Marc Gobé, author of *Emotional Branding*, takes it further by proclaiming that the brand is an emotional relationship with customers and prospects based on the cumulative effect of all interactions between them.

So, if your brand represents an emotional relationship between your business and community, it should not be taken lightly—especially in a profession that relies heavily on building strong, trusting relationships to survive. And to be clear, this isn't just a reference to a firm's aesthetics, such as name, logo, slogan, advertising, website and embroidered swag. While these elements are important brand expressions, it's your staff who are the most powerful vehicle for expressing your brand. Every interaction your employees have with clients and prospects is a far more important and memorable touchpoint that contributes to that emotional relationship, Gobé identified.

Why is this? Your staff, at all levels within the firm, are a powerful expression of your

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Mission/Vision/Values Statement: This is the doctrinal cornerstone of your business. It spells out for everyone working in the company exactly why you do what you do, what you want to become in the future, and how you conduct yourselves when working and interacting with others every day—both in and outside of the office. You'll make a quantum leap in creating shared understanding and setting firm-wide accountabilities when you draft and adopt thoughtful language. The words of these statements will describe the collective beliefs and shape the collective behavior of your firm and will serve as the foundation for building your brand.

The Brand Promise: This is a straightforward piece of language that describes your ideal client, how you promise to serve them, and cites evidence or reasons they can believe your promise. Firms can use a basic formula to draft the brand promise:

“For [description of your ideal clients], [your firm] is the only [type of firm, e.g. accounting and advisory firm] that provides/delivers [unique benefit/point of difference], because we [reasons to believe.]”

In its raw form, this statement serves as an internalized frame of reference for training staff in client service. However, some firms also draft a client-facing version to share publicly. Before you share your brand promise with clients or prospects, you need to be certain everyone in the firm understands it and can be trusted to live up to the promises it spells out. Nothing devalues a relationship more severely than unfulfilled promises.

Your Example: Once you've committed the above items to paper, it's up to you to propagate them within your firm and grow a culture around them. Set an example for everyone for how to live your brand every day. Brand building and leadership are inextricably intertwined. Be a good leader, and you'll build a strong sense of brand identity and a strong marketing culture in your firm.

Building a strong brand doesn't happen overnight, and it takes dedication to

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