

Teresa Alpert. Talk Track for Brand Strategy Matters. November 2025

TITLE SLIDE: Brand Strategy Matters

TABLE OF CONTENTS: This deck will be yours — all the slides and my entire talk track. So sit back and let this wash over you — there will be time at the end for you to ask me anything!

HISTORY OF A BRAND STRATEGIST: So I've been doing brand strategy for awhile, and if I take a look at my past with a slightly revisionist lens, you could say everything I've ever done has led to this career. Right here at UW, I studied Special Needs and History and started teaching Special Needs in New York — where I learned everything about listening and understanding what people really meant. I made a pivot into a tech company and found the power of being a square peg in a round hole, learned about the speed of change and moving fast. Another career pivot took me into Advertising where I found my people and my niche — a potent mix of creativity and business — this is where I became a Brand Strategist.

LOGO SLIDE...Over the past twenty five years, I have done BRAND STRATEGY in every business situation. IN THE AGENCY WORLD (places like Ogilvy, DDB, McCann) working as a global brand strategist for businesses S, M, L and XL. AS A BRAND CONSULTANT running a small consultancy called Crimea River) and AS A CLIENT, Head of Brand Strategy for a huge software platform company called ServiceNow. I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE...

BRAND STRATEGY MATTERS — no matter what YOU do in life — marketer, fashion mogul, creator, maker, fixer, doer, teacher, artist, writer, business guru — BRAND STRATEGY MATTERS and will be central to your success, trust me! The principles, the fundamentals of a solid brand strategy help you think things through; arm you with the confidence to take a chance, to bust a move, to sit still and wait. That's why we're here today.

BRAND STRATEGY IS NOT A LOGO: it often gets reduced to a name or colour palette...BRAND IS NOT SIMPLY a colour palette or cosmetic afterthought, chasing the latest fad or trend, a catchy name or laundry list of attributes. And never has it been more important!

WARP SPEED CRAZY CHANGE: Because we live in a world of CONSTANT CHANGE and profound business and media disruptions. I have helped businesses and brands navigate ALL kinds of CHANGE — from birth of the internet and smart phones, during global market booms and busts

- Everything moves at WARP SPEED
- You are drowning in a DELUGE OF DATA
- With an ONSLAUGHT OF LLM'S and THE AI ARMS RACE
- ACCELERATED BUSINESS DECISIONS
- SHRINKING ATTENTION SPANS and FICKLE AUDIENCES
- PROLIFERATING MEDIA CHANNELS
- GLOBAL WORKFORCE, many of whom work from home

Coherent. Clear. Solid. Strong. A brand strategy gives you coherence, solidity in a crazy world!

Centre of Gravity. North Star. It serves as your centre of gravity. Your north star. And as counter intuitive as it may sound...Brand Strategy is often about coming back home, slowing down, having a good think, taking some time...and always thinking about the essence of what your business is all about.

PEOPLE MATTER: Brand Strategy = People

People Heart Slide: THEY ARE NOT CONSUMERS! Consumers are people who buy stuff! You want to think about people in all their glory, navigating the real world, not just thinking about stuff to buy! They have dreams and desires, fears and disappointments, families and friends and problems and triumphs. And the more you think about them as navigating a complex world — rather than just someone who might buy your stuff — the closer you will get to understanding, delighting, meeting a need, making life easier, making them happy.

WE ARE MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT treat people as individuals and find their commonalities. At one FIN TECH company that was small and scrappy, the leaders just couldn't get along, they sure had a lot of Titles & Egos — I leaned into that & let them talk about their own super powers, priorities and what THEY thought was driving the business into the future. Guess What? They had a lot more alignment around the brand & business strategy than they thought — we helped them warm their hands around the campfire together!

Ladies Who Lunch: Technology Experts in a world populated primarily by men. This was a session that came straight from the heart. Invitations delivered in a cute little tissue papered bag with gifts. Flowers at the round table. Everyone feeling special.

Cameras & Crayolas: If you want to know more about people, get them to do something on the other side of their brain — ask them to draw a picture or give them a camera. As part of the Ladies Who Lunch project, we invited the invitees to use the camera: “Tell me 12 things about yourself.” We messengered the camera, picked it up 10 days later and had the developed photos waiting for them at the lunch. It was a great way for the women to interact and get to know one another by sharing their photos and talking about them with the group. Another project with engineers, we asked them to draw pictures of complex tech “stuff”. Not only did it force them to lose the jargon, their drawings and stories led to great human inspiration and fodder for creative ideas.

TALK TO EXPERTS

You want to know about children? Talk to piano teachers, sport coaches, paediatricians. You want to know about launching (another) toothpaste? Talk to dentists, hygienists and parents. You want to know about pregnant women? Talk to a couple of OBGYN's with 20 years under their belts.

Ask a big juicy, open question (The fine art of conversation).

Wind them up. People love to tell their stories. On a scale of 1-10 vs. ‘How you feeling today?’ Give to Get: be willing to SHARE. The probe: Why is that? Have you ever felt that way before? Tell me more...BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE

LISTEN: your ability to listen carefully, tap into the zeitgeist, listen for the dog whistle, and really hear...

HELLO KITTY BIKE YAMAHA MOTORS: wanted to sell more motorcycles to ‘the other’ 50% of the population. THIS IS WHERE THEY WERE STARTING....

GIRL ON BIKE: We helped them think hard about women and they way they navigate the world. We started with an investigation that really tapped into women, straight from the heart — what held them back or spurred them forward. We talked to women who were commuting and getting around on bikes in Paris London Madrid to find the factors that were holding women back or spurring them forward. So they didn't just jump to the conclusion of “let's make it pink” and expect women to flock to the brand.

DATA GATHERING because data gathering, crunching numbers and using AI does not equal INSIGHT GATHERING. Maybe you can ride the algorithms target or annoy people...but you actually need some EMPATHY to craft the emotional truths and insights that will drive a successful endeavour.

HUMAN INSIGHT INFORMS BRAND STRATEGY: You can always find the data to ensure you are on the right track – but I implore you to go further -- because guess what? Everyone else is looking at the same data. What's more important is the emotional, human insight behind that data. Let me give you an example from a strategy I worked on recently.

Guy on bridge: In the B2B world of selling multi-million dollar deals to big shots, the impact of grabbing a single executive's attention can be monumental. 79% work on weekends...70% take work on their vacations. Fewer than 25% of CEOs and about 12.5% of CFOs in the sample could be regarded as digitally proficient. CEO Chief Executive Officer is Chief Empathy Officer, expected to post, pod-cast showing us "they are real people, too" CEO's have to PHYSICALLY manifest peak performance, too! Ribbed abs and power trips to the gym, extreme sports and with all that exposure, staying in shape is important

Audience Participation: Which one of these is an insight?

Hint: Stops you dead in your tracks.

Hint: "I never thought about that before."

That was a TRICK QUESTION. All of these pressures take a HUMAN, EMOTIONAL toll — we found another bit of data that told us 61% of CEOs feel like they are in it alone, that the pressures and concerns of the entire org were theirs to manage.

IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP we landed on this insight to drive the strategy for our brand... "It's lonely at the top" served as emotional glue for all brand activities. Emotional connection between a software platform company and the execs they wanted to woo. Inclusive circle, in-it-together, break out teams, confessional therapy sessions, the aim was for execs to feel affinity, support, a sense of community, that someone had their back. A feeling that they were not alone.

EMPATHY: the ability to feel, sense, touch and treat people like the emotional human beings they are — to behave like a journalist, an investigator, able to get closer and closer to real people who want to tell their stories...it's critical to success.

BUSINESS MATTERS: Your brand strategy cannot float over here on its own — it MUST work rooted in the business strategy. Because when it does, great things happen. BRAND = BUSINESS. Brand strategy stems from the source of business, creating desire in people to be closer to you, to buy into your product, service.

BRAND=BUSINESS

Look What Happens when BRAND=BUSINESS:

1. Revenue Impact: HBR, brands with strong market presence can achieve 20% higher revenue than their competitors.
2. Consumer Trust: Edelman 81% of consumers need to trust a brand to consider purchasing. Trust, cultivated through a solid brand strategy, enhances customer loyalty and retention.
3. Influence on Purchase Decisions: Nielsen reported 59% of peeps prefer to buy new products from brands familiar to them.
4. Market Share: Keller & Kotler shows brands more relevant in the market gain up to 10x their competition in market share.
5. Customer Loyalty: Harvard Business School study, customers who are highly engaged with their brand are 23% more likely to remain loyal than those who are not, indicating that perceived brand relevance directly impacts retention rates.

MATTEL LOGO: Businesses can change! Mattel went from TOY MANUFACTURER to INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY company after BARBIE. “Barbie helps us think, manage, and extend our business across all our toys.” Brand has to support the business, pivot with the business, move with the business.

FIND ALLIES: A great way to get smart about business you just landed in? FIND ALLIES, the people who really matter to the organisation. Sometimes they are inside the organisation, sometimes they are outside the company. Two places I urge you to explore — to jump start your strategic thinking and get you in touch with the business FAST are SALES and INNOVATION.

SALESPEOPLE will be your secret weapon. They care A LOT about Brand because it opens doors. Sales are always on the front lines of customer challenges, opportunities. They are driven by solving problems on behalf of people...because it helps them make money. They ensure you ALWAYS bring brand strategy back to BUSINESS.

INNOVATORS: Another Secret Weapon and Bestie are the Innovators and Creators, they care a TON about brand. They dream, scheme and know where the world and people are heading — they will help you navigate this crazy world, keeping your brand strategy flexible for CHANGE.

POV MATTERS: Having a POV matters. Just because you want to open a cafe or tailor sustainable vintage clothing you have to ask yourself — Why you get up in the morning. What do you stand for. What does authenticity even MEAN? Why should anyone care? How do I motivate people who work with me...and people who may choose to align themselves with me?

Where Am I? If you build it they will not come! Did you ever walk into a store and wonder where you are? They are selling candles/vintage and textile/slippers/napkins, and the smell of coffee wafting through. There is no POV holding things together — I am here to tell you if you build it they will not come, if you do not have a POV they will not come.

RALPH LAUREN: AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: This guy has been around for decades — can anyone shout out what who it is and what this brand stands for? Americana Aspiration—RL used that Centre of Gravity to drive his business over time — and he built an on-ramp for ANYONE aspiring to be part of his world:

- Purple Label (\$1,500-\$3,000+) Hand-tailored in Italy Finest materials
- Ralph Lauren Collection (\$500-\$1,500) The bridge between accessible and ultra-luxury
- Polo Ralph Lauren (\$50-\$500) The brand's volume driver sweet spot for aspirational
- Lauren by Ralph Lauren (\$100-\$300) wardrobe essentials with Ralph Lauren design
- Polo Sport/Polo Jeans (\$30-\$150) Entry-level pricing Casual, lifestyle-focused products

GAP: Gap has been on the economic roller coaster for decades. This COMEBACK sees a return to their heritage — a brilliant stack/layering of CULTURE CRAFT & COMMERCE — DEMIN at the heart of Gap CRAFT; a CULTURE capture with Katseye and the COMMERCE to follow. Brand strategy actually leads their business...this collab sees GAP restoring relevance to old customers while bringing in new people — craft, culture and commerce.

VOGUE: Anna Wintour has given VOGUE its POV for years and years. (audience participation). What do you think is going to happen to the Centre of Gravity with VOGUE? What does passing the torch from Anna to Chloe signal?

WRITTEN WORD > VISUAL
FROM MAGAZINE TO ART OBJECT
FROM frequency to artistry
FROM digestibility to quality/permanence
FROM always there to limited supply
FROM constant presence to cultural timing
FROM 12 issues to 6 collectibles

Based on the human insight that we are overwhelmed with content, they could be signalling an appreciation for real live humans who “crave content worthy of permanent ownership”

DIFFERENTIATION MATTERS — what is your distinction, what do you do better than anyone? What makes you special? This really matters so people ‘get’ you. Here are three examples about What Makes a few brands special.

EYEGLASSES This first example is taken from my ROAD — the next time you are in London, do visit Golborne Road. It’s part of Portobello Market and I am here to tell you there are THREE (count them three!) Hipster eyeglass stores within a 2 block distance. Ace & Tate, Cubitts, Taylor Morris — all three target the same people as Warby Parker, all on the same side of Golborne Road, they all do eye exams. honestly, not much difference in price point — it makes you wonder how come all three of you are on top of one another? Someone has not done their brand homework!

MEET BAJIL & FLAVIA: But then there’s Kensington Opticians who have REALLY carved out their DIFFERENTIATION — they are not bothered by the 3 hipster brands with in spitting distance. They know they SERVE THE ‘HOOD and are COMMUNITY MINDED. Bijal and Flavia have been on Golborne road a decade or two. They take their time, they take National Health patients and actually melt into our Golborne Road Community quietly and sweetly. This is where MY google review goes, thank you very much. Empathy meets Human Connection and a great strategy that will survive the interlopers.

JESS COLLETTE is a Milliner on All Saints Road in London, a cool, edgy neighbourhood. Jess is Authentic. Single-minded. True to her roots. She has created hats for The Royals, Jane Fonda, Pamela Anderson — and people like me who live the ‘hood. Jess is so busy creating she often doesn’t have time to work on Marketing. I helped her put together a simple 3-prong strategy to help her make decisions about who she hires, what she stands for, how she remains distinct and differentiated in a Fastfood Fashion World. 1. Play into the Britishness of hats; i.e., do trunk shows in Dallas! 2. Lean into fun and dress-up. 3. The emotional lynch pin to everything? A hat means you’re confident AND a hat gives you confidence! Jess and I worked together on a three-tiered pricing strategy (similar to Ralph’s but simpler) — top-tier creations (Royals, Jane Fonda, Pamela Anderson) the marzipan layer for weddings and occasions when people splash out and the entry level for summer straw boaters and fedoras.

PATAGONIA: I know you are familiar with PATAGONIA. In a world of disposable fashion and landfills, Patagonia has a Single-minded brand strategy: ***we are in business to save the planet.***

. **"Anti-marketing" marketing:** "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign: Black Friday 2011. Sales increased significantly following the campaign.

- **Rejection of consumerism:** The brand's messaging consistently encourages mindful consumption by emphasizing durability, repair, and reuse over buying new items.
- **Radical transparency and accountability:** Supply chain honesty: Since the early 1990s, Patagonia has been transparent about its supply chain, including investigating the damage caused by materials like cotton and polyester. The company

publicly shares information about its factories and sustainability efforts. Addressing controversies: human rights abuses or the use of plastic arose, Patagonia did not hide from them. addressed its own shortcomings to improve.

- **Product quality and circularity:** Patagonia designs its products for a lifetime of use. This focus on durability aligns with its mission to reduce waste. guides for DIY fixes, and selling used Patagonia products. This extends the life of garments and keeps them out of landfills.
- **Unapologetic activism:** Political engagement: debates and suing the government over environmental issues. 1% for the Planet: For decades, Patagonia has committed to donating 1% of its sales to grassroots environmental organizations. The company has shown that it can grow its business while scaling its positive impact.
- **Putting purpose over profit:** The ultimate expression of its single-minded strategy was in 2022 when founder Yvon Chouinard gave away his family's \$3 billion company. Ownership was transferred to a trust and a non-profit to ensure all future profits would be used to fight the environmental crisis.
- **Impact on the brand** By maintaining its single-minded focus, Patagonia has proven that a company can prioritize a higher purpose and still be successful. Its brand is not defined by its products, but by its core values, attracting a loyal customer base that believes in its mission and trusts its authenticity.

PEOPLE INSIDE MATTER — it's important to remember the folks who live INSIDE the org, employees and workers yearning for human contact

Great brands are built from the inside! The most important reflection of the brand is not a billboard it's your people. When Mgmt. is aligned around a common vision for the business and brand, when employees understand it, feel empowered, engaged and valued everyone rows in one direction.

SILOS: Also living inside orgs: there's a conspiracy of silos — the internet, work-from-home, large far-flung global organisations...sometimes it feels like everyone is sitting in their own world and operating independently. For any organisation, it's one of the biggest challenges and where a brand strategy can really help.

ELMER'S GLUE: like glue, a solid brand helps pull people together and stick together. Because even in small companies, it's important to get everyone onto the same page. For that, it's helpful to start at the top.

Start at the top: Here's a great example of glueing an org together: BAE systems, an international defence company who had gone to GREAT lengths to get into the business cyber security business. Before I took the job, I insisted that I deal directly with the ultimate decision-maker, the CEO. By the time I got there they had already changed their name — but I got them to go back to their original because I had the CEO's trust, I had him on my side.

IT'S NOT SECURITY, IT'S DEFENCE: This simple strategy — bought into by the TOP DOG — was super-differentiating in a sea of Cyber Security companies all saying the same thing. We were a defence company and we convinced them to go back to the company heritage.

SIMPLICITY MATTERS, LESS IS MORE. Hey, you know what? Sometimes we all need a dictionary for acronyms. Sometimes we need a good Jargon Detox.

Albert Einstein, arguably a genius, had a lot to say about the power of simplicity. "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complex. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction."

SHELL LOGO: I once had to sift through 114 segmentation studies for 114 countries — only to find "there are only 2 kinds of people in the world" — those who DIY and those who pay for someone to do it

CROWDED SHELF: WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE ABOUT MAKING THINGS SIMPLER FOR PEOPLE: An analysis by Raconteur: UL "streamlining entire product portfolio" to align with consumer benefit: smaller product range reduces the feeling of being overwhelmed by too many options.

"Five Levers for Change" model: ...barriers to purchase often include the mental effort of making a decision, which is central to the concept of choice paralysis.

Emphasis on brand purpose: building brand trust and purpose, Unilever provides consumers with a powerful and simple basis for making a decision, instead of lost in sea of product features.

Simpler, faster innovation: "bigger, better innovation", reduce complexity internally, which in turn simplifies the choices presented to consumers.

EXTRA VITAMINS: Here's a brand that takes simplicity to heart: Extra Vitamins — is a very single-minded brand in Brooklyn. They do silk screening. And they do it brilliantly. Their website couldn't be more clear. Building their business slowly and deliberately, they are just now expanding to more printers and silk screeners.

STICKY POST IT: The Sticky Post It — was my secret weapon in boardrooms. Before the meeting kicked into high gear, I would ask everyone to write down What Our Brand and our Business is All About — in other words, the brand strategy — on a sticky and collect them all. I read them aloud. Invariably, the answers were really different — you could then use this to make your job all about getting everyone to move in one, coherent direction.

AHA: And when you land the big centre of gravity — SLOW DOWN, HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE TELLING THEM...they are filtering a language, they are distracted, they are not waking up in the morning thinking about you, your product, your brand!

IN REAL LIFE MATTERS: Brand Strategy begins and ends with HUMAN BEINGS and HUMAN INSIGHT. Every strategic job I got, every spark of innovation, each glint of inspiration, came from face-to-face, hand-to-hand, in the flesh, in real life...human insight. IRL Matters

REMEMBER THIS? It's important to take time, to butter people up, to put their name inside the STAR on this chart, to talk to them like you really care and that their opinion matters to you. In all the time I've spent interviewing people and drawing them out — it always humbles and surprises me how MUCH people want to look you in the eye, tell their stories, be on camera, be recorded as they spill their guts about their hopes fears and desires.

YOU: You should never forget this! The object of every investigation, if you really want to get to insight, you have GOT to treat people like the stars that they are!

Talk to strangers, Talk to strangers, Talk to people you see over and over, Get onto someone's calendar, Talk to people you admire, Network, Join a club that scares you, Contact (it's a verb!), Meet up IRL, face-to-face, coffee, Ask a total stranger "hey, what makes you tick" Talk to people you know peripherally, friends, family, neighbours, write a postcard that busts through the virtual world & ask someone to take a meeting.

I HEART SURVEYS: Another way to make contact: circulate a survey. I did one before I got onto a plane, reaching out to people I know well and not so well — all of them business owners, C-execs, HR hiring folks, big shots, managing directors, other brand strategists. In other words, folks who have the potential to hire you. Here's what they said... They had a LOT to say but here are some of the patterns that emerged:

Listener > Talker Strategic > Tactical Problem Solver > Problem Admirer

THE OVERRATED: The over-rated skills were mostly about being “school smarts” and “inability to listen” — Technical. Smart. Data-proficient.

UNDER-RATED: The most under-rated skills were on the emotional side — being thoughtful, having a joyful attitude — an ability to get along with people and CHARM them. And without exception, bosses are looking for someone to make their life easier.

HOMEWORK MATTERS: NO PREP NECESSARY — because every person in this room has the raw materials to be an insightful, strategic, brand-centric person when you walk out this door and move on with your studying, schoolwork, career and life!

Homework:

- single-minded, juicy, high-minded brand position (think Patagonia)
- Name 3 things that make your biz/brand special (see Jess Collett)
- Who are your inside allies (sales? Creators? Who else? name names)
- Build three aha moments into your next presentation (shout it out)
- Talk to three strangers this week (TREAT THEM LIKE STARS)
- USE DATA/ AI, then find the HUMAN INSIGHT (SEE CEO STUDY)
- Do a Star chart on your BFF/have them do it on you (brutal honesty)

Ask Me Anything
You're Awesome
Teresa Alpert