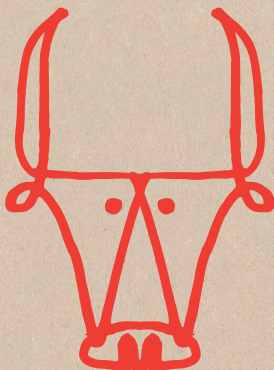


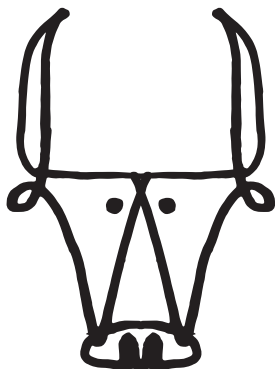
**BRANDING IS FOR COWS.  
BELONGING IS FOR PEOPLE.**



Break Free from the Herd  
and Make Stuff That Matters

CJ CASCIOTTA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

- 4 THE WAY TO SELL HAMBURGERS IS TO TREAT PEOPLE LIKE THEM.
- 12 BRANDING IS FOR COWS.
- 17 THE SWOOSH AND THE BÉLO.
- 24 TEAR UP YOUR MISSION STATEMENT. WRITE A MANIFESTO.
- 29 BELONGING IS FOR PEOPLE.

## **THE WAY TO SELL HAMBURGERS IS TO TREAT PEOPLE LIKE THEM.**

In the early 1920's, an Irishman immigrated to America and found work as a shift manager at a shoe factory in New Hampshire. His two sons, Dick and Mac, shared a common middle name, James. Perhaps bored with the harshness of the North East, or simply smitten by the lust of adventure, the two brothers decided to move West to California in their early twenties. They scraped together what little they had and opened up a hot dog stand in Pasadena. It was a typical drive-in of its era, where people parked their cars and carhops came to take their orders. In 1940, they closed the hot dog stand to open a larger restaurant in San Bernardino that served hamburgers.

The brothers began franchising their successful chain in 1953. They each had a goal to make a million dollars before they turned fifty. Their secret weapon: a standardized system for hamburger preparation that ensured every burger would taste the same in every restaurant, setting strict rules for franchisees on things like portion sizes, cooking times, and packaging.

The McDonalds brothers were onto something.

More than half a century later, McDonalds has revolutionized not only the way people consume hamburgers, but the way they consume products all over the world. Sociologist, George Ritzer, calls this phenomenon, “McDonaldization.”

According to Ritzer, McDonalds works because it offers consumers and employees things like ef-

iciency, calculability, and predictability. But there's a dark side to these benefits as well.

*For example, McDonaldization has produced a wide array of adverse effects on the environment. One is a side effect of the need to grow uniform potatoes from which to create predictable french fries. The huge farms of the Pacific Northwest that now produce such potatoes rely on the extensive use of chemicals. In addition, the need to produce a perfect fry means that much of the potato is wasted, with the remnants either fed to cattle or used for fertilizer. The underground water supply in the area is now showing high levels of nitrates, which may be traceable to the fertilizer and animal wastes. Many other ecological problems are associated with the McDonaldization of the fast-food industry:*

*the forests felled to produce paper wrappings, the damage caused by packaging materials, the enormous amount of food needed to produce feed cattle, and so on.*

*Another unreasonable effect is that fast-food restaurants are often dehumanizing settings in which to eat or work. Customers lining up for a burger or waiting in the drive-through line and workers preparing the food often feel as though they are part of an assembly line. Hardly amenable to eating, assembly lines have been shown to be inhuman settings in which to work.*

- George Ritzer, McDonaldization

McDonaldization will continue to spread its influence all over the world and reap the consequences, both positive and negative.



BUT WHAT  
ABOUT THE  
REST OF

US

---

?

As a new generation of culture creators, we need a different strategy for reaching others. People already have a place to go to be treated like livestock, to fall in line, be told what to do, and get the same predictable product every time. And let's be honest. Sometimes we want that. It's why brands like McDonalds, Starbucks, and Amazon are so successful. It's why Pop Tarts, Bagel Bites, and Hot Pockets exist. Sometimes we crave "instant" and even though we know it comes at a price, we're willing to make that sacrifice. But we've proven that culture can't thrive on instant.

On a human level, whenever we choose "instant" we say "no" to something better for ourselves, others, or the common good. Fast food kills our body while fresh food fuels it. Walmart offers low prices because they carry products made in sweatshops. Porn stands in direct contrast to intimacy. The list goes on.

On a strategic level, there's too much competition for "instant." It's not a viable option for the majority of us to create something that competes with McDonalds. If we want to get into the "instant" business we should prepare to take down giants. Unless you have access to billions of dollars somewhere, prepare for that battle to feel like a nerf gun up against an AK-47.

If you want to compete with "instant," this message isn't for you. It's for the growing community of movers, shakers, and makers who want to color outside the lines and make things that matter. There's much more opportunity for these types of people as culture grows more skeptical of "instant" and desires experiences that create more holistic value.

People aren't cattle. Once they've been burned,

they're smart enough to leave the herd. Those who wish to reach this emerging group won't do so by offering them a brand, but rather an opportunity to belong.

## BRANDING IS FOR COWS.

**Brand** /brand/

*noun*

A hot burned wooden stake.

*verb*

‘To brand’ means to ‘make an indelible mark of ownership’, especially with a hot stake or iron.

*This verb usage has been known since the Middle Ages.*

Search the internet for images of “branding cattle.” Even if you eat meat every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you’ll temporarily want to sign up for PETA. Branding happens to cows at a very young age (about 6 months old). The process usually takes two people: one to hold the calf down so it doesn’t escape, and one to singe the flaming hot branding iron into her skin.

For years, we've done the same to people we seek to reach. Think about the language we throw around in marketing conversations. When we want to influence a certain people group we say we target them. Usually you target things you want to shoot and/or kill. Just like it is for cows, in the world of branding, this process begins at an early age.

I remember when my daughter was first born. I was tasked with the overwhelming responsibility of buying her first package of diapers from the drug store, just a few days after we gave birth. After scanning the aisle for her size, I found the only option: a set of diapers with some well-known animals printed on them.

The duck, the dog, and the friendly mice-couple would be some of the very first symbols to impress upon her vulnerable and naked body, just days after

her arrival into the universe. And none of it was by accident.

Branding, by definition, is about imprinting our identity onto others. Traditionally, it's been about telling people, "if you want to be happy, first you must buy in."

THE LIE:

IF YOU WANT TO BE HAPPY

FIRST YOU MUST BUY IN

Belonging is different. It's about tapping into the identity that already exists in people and creating products, content, and communities that help them express that identity to its fullest potential, which makes their lives more meaningful. When we begin by valuing the identities of the people we wish to serve, we create a more powerful relationship than one solely based on transaction. People respond by saying things like "this helps me become who I want to be" vs. "this helps me be what society says I should be."

Society is always a moving target. Your image may or may not be relevant to people tomorrow. When you're in the business of helping others be who they want to be, however, you access something deeper and more permanent than their desire to just keep up, you access their desire to matter.



" I HOPE I'M  
NOT JUST ONE OF  
THE HERD. I HOPE  
I'M UNIQUE. "

- PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

## THE SWOOSH AND THE BÉLO.

To illustrate this shift from Branding to Belonging, let's take a look at two major companies. Both have had a significant impact on the way our culture behaves.

### JUST DO IT

Up until about a decade ago, the idea that belonging is actually a more important concept than doing would have seemed preposterous to our Western culture (though commonly accepted in others for thousands of years). At the epicenter of the American Dream is the notion that the more you do and the harder you do it, the more successful you'll become, the more assets you'll be able to accumulate, and the more social status you'll achieve. You "do"

no matter what the cost associated is as long as that cost yields a positive return on your investment. A Return on Investment is the carrot dangling at the end of the stick that kept the “doing” culture going for centuries in the West. It led Irish immigrants to risk their lives building the Erie Canal if it meant a shot at land, independence, and security. It compelled thousands of men to spend their lives underground digging for coal all the while poisoning their lungs for their family’s sake and the sake of those born after them.

There is something undeniably romantic about all this. We look back fondly at it and refer to it as “The Golden Age.” We’re thankful for the freedom we possess as a result of these men’s and women’s relentless pursuit of “Do.”

Today, however, we find ourselves well acquainted

with the downside of “Do.” While the rest of culture began exploring all things 3-D, the Return on Investment we received from “Do” seemed disappointingly one-dimensional.

On top of all this, those leading the doing culture misled us in other ways as well. We put our trust in a house we were told we could pay for and would appreciate in value. We were encouraged to invest money we didn't have into an education learning a trade we could practice once we graduated only to find those trades had evaporated.

It turns out the cost does not come close to justifying the kind of Return on Investment we were hoping for, because the investment we were hoping for was fixed on the future, at the neglect of the present. It was 100% focused on doing without any regard to “belonging.” By the time we grasped the

carrot at the end of the stick and held it up close, we found it to be a mass produced phony that tasted nothing like the real thing.

As a result, we're starting to grow our own carrots. Using our own tools. In our own backyard. With our own bare hands.



If there's one company that captures the "do" generation it's Nike. Founded in 1964, Nike has built one of the most successful business models of the last century around the concept of performance.

To paraphrase their value proposition, "If you're unsatisfied with your current circumstances and

want to achieve more, our products will help you ‘just do it.’” In other words, “You should be doing stuff. Buy our products so you can.”

Even their logo mark has become an international symbol for “do,” a result of decades of brilliant advertising and message crafting.

## A UNIVERSAL SYMBOL FOR BELONGING

Now let’s contrast Nike’s call-to-action with a completely different kind of business but one that’s rapidly evolving as a globally recognized leader. Airbnb allows people to rent out their couch, spare room, or entire home to others with the click of a few buttons. The creative entrepreneurs behind the once fledgling start up have intentionally decided to position AirBnb not as a service, but as a movement in support of human belonging.

Where as Nike has built its platform for a generation motivated by doing, Airbnb is building its on the foundation on what it means to belong. In lieu of a traditional logo, they've developed something called the Bélo, a mark they hope in time will become itself, a universal symbol for “belonging.”



It's a pivotal move for a technology company. The digital world has brought us closer together than ever before, removing barriers, masks, and places to hide, forcing people to take a deeper look at their individual identity. We've now become a mosaic of cultures, intertwining and interconnecting over billions of sound waves and pixels with each of us contributing our own ethnicity, DNA, and person-

ality to the conversation. As a result we're focussed a whole lot less on "just doing" and a whole lot more on discovering how we uniquely belong in the midst of this great stew of innovation.

If you want to turn off today's emerging mosaic culture, tell them their identity is conditional on whether or not they buy your product or service. That's a paint-by-numbers solution. If you want to reach them, give them the opportunity to express and explore their own. Hand them the canvas, the drop cloth, the brushes, and the paint, but let them choose the colors and the strokes.

What better way to engage this mosaic culture than by giving people the opportunity to offer a night in their own home? Isn't this perhaps one of the most true and intimate expressions of someone's personal identity?



## **TEAR UP YOUR MISSION STATEMENT. WRITE A MANIFESTO.**

If anyone knows about belonging it's Patch Adams. There's this scene in the film, where Patch (played by Robin Williams) stands trial for practicing medicine without a license (even though he was helping countless people by doing it). The stakes couldn't be higher for him. To the outside observer, he has nothing to gain and everything to lose. If he wants any shot at graduating medical school or not going to jail, he had better play it safe.

But that's not what happens.

Instead, he begins to wax poetic on the principles and convictions behind his outlandish behavior, asking questions like "why are we so afraid of

death?” and making statements like “if we’re going to fight a disease, let’s fight the biggest one of all: indifference.”

When we see people express conviction on behalf of others it’s magnetic. We make films about these kinds of people, write books about them, repeat their story again and again to our friends and neighbors. And perhaps most compelling of all, we want to become like them and belong to what they’re up to.

Have you ever read a mission statement on a website or poster and thought it sounded a bit pretentious or hard to relate to? That’s because most mission statements are created in windowless conference rooms miles and miles away from the people they are actually intended to reach. In addition, many mission statements don’t follow a process. They’re

birthed out of guesswork and fruitless dialogue, often called “brainstorming.”

The result is cold and clinical. Any attempts to be unique, original, or compelling accidentally backfire, ostracizing the very people they are trying to influence. Without knowing it, many mission statements come off as a shameful wag of the finger from an ivory tower, declaring to one and all: “we know better.”

When we choose belonging over branding however, we get out of our swivel chair, climb down from our ivory tower and sit with the people we want to inspire. We stop talking at them and instead, start listening to their stories. Once we engage in this practice, our mission statements begin to pale in comparison to the hopes, dreams, and desires of those we long to reach. It's easier then to write something more potent

than a mission statement that lives on a website or poster and most people forget. Instead, what we now hold in our hands are the makings of a manifesto.

Manifestos are powerful, clear, and invitational declarations: powerful because they're written for the people by the people, clear because they followed an intentional process, and invitational because they focus on the common good.

Unlike most mission statements, a manifesto's life cycle doesn't end once it's put in a fancy frame or engraved on the next employee Christmas gift. A manifesto literally leaps off the page and causes action. Think about the Declaration of Independence or Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream." The words were just the beginning, but without them nothing else would manifest.

This brings up a major reason why many organizations run away from creating manifestos. Manifestos are dangerous. Developing one forces you to take a good hard look at what you'll stand for and what you won't — what kind of culture you wish to create for others and what you're willing to let go of in order to see that culture realized. People rally around manifestos for the long run because they strike a cord with who they are and what they want. People often forget mission statements shortly after they read them.

## **BELONGING IS FOR PEOPLE.**

Here's the point of all this talk about belonging. It isn't really about how we can get people to belong to our movement. It's about how we can connect to the movement that's already stirring inside them.

We don't need more personal brands. We need more brands to be personal. A coffee company can have a manifesto that's powerful, intentional, and invitational. On the other hand, a blogger can sing her ideas into readers without any regard for empathy or compassion. You can make hamburgers that move people toward their potential or just move them toward the "next window please."

BREAK  
FREE

FROM THE HERD  
AND GO MAKE STUFF THAT

MATTERS

WRITE YOUR MANIFESTO HERE:

Need help? Go to  
[CREATEAMANIFESTO.COM](http://CREATEAMANIFESTO.COM)



## ABOUT.

Hi, I'm CJ and I run Sounds Like A Movement, a company that helps people break free from the herd, discover what they have to say to the world, and make stuff that matters.

I've helped movements like The Red Campaign, UN Foundation, Whole Foods, and TOMS reach more people by focussing on belonging over branding. I'd like to do the same for you. There's a movement inside you. It's time to bring it to life.

Instantly access podcasts, films, workshops, and classes (including interviews with creative influencers, artists, explorers, and highly imaginative people).

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