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COACHING & CONSULTING

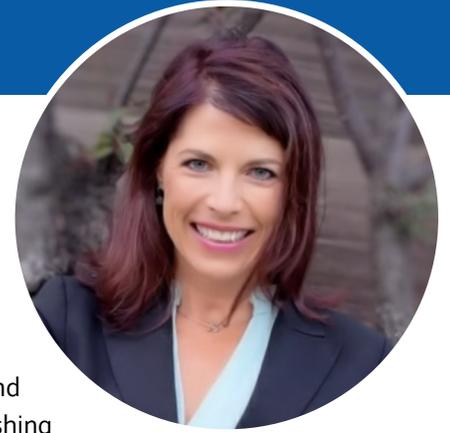


*Creating a Culture and Brand
That Makes and Actually Keeps
Brand Promises*

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*Helping
executives and
entrepreneurs
achieve results
through a
people-centered
approach*

Who Am I and Why Can You Trust Me?

I am Sara LaForest, an entrepreneur, consultant, coach, instructor, and author with comprehensive experience in the private, nonprofit, education, and government sectors.

I am on a mission to empower entrepreneurs, executives and leaders to grow their businesses and help them create flourishing workplace environments. If you share this mission, these articles will introduce my approach. I believe you will find them helpful and pragmatic.

For more than a decade, I have grown, managed, and nurtured my own companies specializing in leadership consulting, organizational development, and executive and performance coaching. My focus is on the critical—yet often overlooked—interdependencies of strategy, branding, culture, and talent necessary to foster and propel growth. My high-touch, personalized approach helps leaders improve company performance and team functioning at all levels, while facilitating a positive and productive workplace culture.

How am I different? What new perspective do I bring? My strength is combining company growth with an emphasis on the personal growth and well-being of the people with whom I work and serve. My deep-rooted commitment to human advancement is my advantage.

This article, along with many other national and international published works, was co-written with my retired partner, Tony Kubica. Our book, *Organizational Gravity: A Guide to Strategically Growing Your Company's Brand, Culture, and Talent*, is available on [Amazon](#).

To learn more about my services, publications, and speaking engagements, please visit [LaForestConsulting.com](#). You can contact me directly at Sara@LaForestConsulting.com or via [LinkedIn](#).

Improving Performance

Navigating Transitions

Accelerating Results

It's one thing to make a promise. It's quite another to keep it. Yet, businesses make promises every day. Some keep them. Some companies like AT&T, Bank of America and US Airways have good intentions, but can't keep them because their strong culture and strong brand are misaligned. And, worst of all, some businesses have no sincere intention of keeping them at all, regardless of what they say.

How are you and your business at keeping your promises?

Well, how you answered this question just **defined** your **brand** and your **culture**. Yes the two are connected, and this connection can be either:

- Strong and reinforcing – they are in alignment
- Strong but negatively reinforcing – they are competing or demonstrating dissonance
- Weak because they have not been defined and developed

Creating the Promise – Your Brand

To grow your business, you must identify your target market. This is the market niche you want to focus on and the position you want to hold within that market. You need to know and understand exactly:

- What products or services you want to provide to your market
- What you can do and what you do not want to do
- Your competition and why you are different

This provides the essential elements for branding your company.

Branding presents you to the marketplace. It defines you in the mind of your customers and prospects. **It creates the promise:** what your clients can expect from you when they do business with you. Think of Apple, Google, Zappos, Amazon.com, Nordstrom... We know what to expect from them, and we are rarely disappointed.

Branding expresses this promise in the:

- Logo
- Website concept and content
- Tag line
- Advertisements
- Marketing materials

All forms of internal and external expression/communication about the company.

There is a consistency that should carry over to all methods of interacting with the customer and the prospect. Regardless of how your prospect and customers enter your sales cycle, they should see, feel, and interpret who you are, what you stand for and what they can expect based on your branding.

So, you've got their attention with relevant and compelling branding.

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You're done, right? No, not so quickly.

Creating the Culture to Deliver the Promise

Now it's time to deliver: to keep the promise made in and through your branding.

Culture is the **way work is done** in your company. It's how people work together, how you build your teams and processes to deliver on your promise. It represents how strongly you believe in your promise and builds your repute.

Culture is grounded in the understanding and practices around the Purpose/Mission, Vision and Guiding Values of the company. It drives how decisions are made, how responsibility is assumed and your behavior in front of customers and within your group. It should be reflected in the standards and consistency with which you deliver your product or service.

One quick point: Are organizations with a strong positive culture and good brand expression perfect? Far from it. They are just much better than their competition, as they know how to course correct when required, and they know why they exist as a business.

Brand + Culture = Market Growth

Without a strong base (your culture and brand) it is nearly impossible to deliver consistent and high quality products and services to your market. (In this case, what you end up delivering are excuses.)

Companies with a strong brand and a strong culture are leaders in their market, whether it's a small local market or a large international market. It doesn't matter. A positive brand and cultural alignment is a powerful competitive strategy!

The greatest opportunity for performance improvement and growth is to concentrate on building a strong brand expression (the promise) and focusing your culture in delivering on that promise.

Identifying your market and building a strong base (culture and brand) to deliver to that market is a **competitive differentiator**. Why? Because many of your competitors (and could be competitors) will not take the time to do this. And your clients and customers will notice and will reward your efforts.