

## CAN YOU SING YOUR BRAND TO LIFE?

One of my favorite stories is about an apocryphal tribe where villagers say every child has a unique and special song. During a pregnancy, the mother-to-be and her friends go on their equivalent of a planning retreat—spending time in the woods until the unborn child has "taught" them his or her song. At birth, the entire village greets the newborn with that song, and it's repeated on every milestone occasion. In this society, there is no legal system. When someone is suspected of wrongdoing, the tribe simply surrounds that villager and repeatedly sings the birth song—believing that no one goes astray if they remember who they really are.



I love that story because it says so much about human identity. It also says a lot about the potential power of branding. **If you give voice to something that's deeply true about yourself or your organization, and that others can recognize as compellingly true for them as well, you can start to stand for something that's indelible and uniquely you.**

At the heart of a brand is an identity that's real and matters. I believe every organization, every individual—every product and service—has a unique and animating presence that defines what they're meant to stand for in the world. (Okay, is anyone humming "Make Your Own Kind of Music" yet?). Maybe this makes me a branding Pollyanna—and I'll certainly admit to being a branding Idealist—but wouldn't the world be a better place if people and organizations had an authentic sense of identity that shaped how they show up in the world?

So, how do you develop a "song sheet" for yourself or your organization? Since no one is going out in the woods to find it for you, you're going to have to do what Jennifer Warnes sings about in a song I often turn to for inspiration: go to "The Well" (listen on You Tube here: <http://bit.ly/2chXhfp>). If you look deeply enough, here are three things you'll find in your personal or organizational "well" that add up to a brand voice worth hearing:

**1. Know your own story.** You can't sing a brand to life if you don't understand the story you're meant to tell. Your story captures what's most meaningful and motivating to you—and what's most likely to draw others to you as well. If you want to explore this further, take the free story typing survey at this link on my website. It will identify one of 12 great characters you or your organization is most like: [www.storybranding.com/take-the-svss-survey/](http://www.storybranding.com/take-the-svss-survey/)

Defining a story is something coaches are uniquely prepared to do because it's based on a powerful question: **Who are you?** We don't ask this question enough of ourselves, and we certainly don't ask it

enough of each other. We spend a lot more time on another question: **What can you do?** The problem is that question shifts much of our focus to enhancing performance in ways that encourage people to leave their most important gifts off the table. When we focus on performance to the exclusion of presence, we leave half of ourselves behind (and much of what energizes and activates us).

**So finding an empowering story isn't just about branding (personal or organizational).** It's also a foundational component for developing leaders, engaging employees, building teams and creating cultures where people want to participate and contribute. That's because defining an authentic storyline captures what people have both the capacity and the will to do (and be).

**2. Explore your own unique combination of strengths and values.** Your brand “song” should always be based on what’s best and most distinctive about you—the strengths that shape what you can truly offer the world and the values that connect you with others. This is what makes for great stories in the first place. The characters in them use something they’re good at (their strengths) to realize something that matters to them (their values). It’s this dynamic combination that fascinates us and imbues a great story with both meaning and motivation. Brands that are built on this pattern do the very same thing.

**3. Articulate your purpose and your promise.** We all need inspiration and purpose to keep us invested in our journeys. Purpose captures our very reason for being; it offers the fuel to enliven and motivate us. So, after you’ve answer the question of who you are, you also need to explore why you’re here at all.

As coaches, we love to live in those first two questions. But there’s another one that matters a lot as well: What makes anyone else care? Every great brand needs to get to the happy ending; the outcome you can always be counted on to deliver that matters to someone else. It’s the energetic fuel that helps you engage others.

Ultimately, a great brand “song” captures your passion and purpose in a way that’s so alive others can feel it, see it and hear it.

If you want to create a brand that’s both inspiring and authentic, listen to yourself and also listen to the things that move you. Then deliver on a promise that helps those you’re meant to serve drink from the well also. As Jennifer Warnes sings, “The wild world is speaking, let’s go to the well.”

## The 12 Motivational Story Types

4 Key Professional Tasks  
12 Styles for Accomplishing Them

### Making Things Work

Inventing (Creator)  
Developing (Caregiver)  
Strategizing (Ruler)

### Getting Results

Performing (Hero)  
Reforming (Revolutionary)  
Transforming (Magician)

### Working With Others

Playing (Jester)  
Empathizing (Everyperson)  
Appreciating (Lover)

### Learning & Adapting

Believing (Innocent)  
Seeking (Explorer)  
Thinking (Sage)

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*Cindy Atlee is a coach, consultant and conscious creator who loves to help clients understand and express who they really are in the world. She's the principal of The Storybranding Group and co-author of the Professional Strengths, Values & Story Survey (SVSS).*