



**THE MARKETING FORUM**

## Avoiding an early grave for your brand

What we can learn from dead and dying brands....

**Gary Bembridge**

Vice President Beauty Care,  
Johnson & Johnson

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If your company went out of business would anyone notice?

What if these did? Friends Reunited – Reader’s Digest – AOL – WH Smith  
 Or these? BMW – RyanAir – Cunard – Colgate – John Lewis - Samaritans

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**Slide 2: if your company went out of business would anyone notice?**

Having thought about my own experiences of working on dying brands and (luckily, so far) turning them around, and then reading and researching brands that died or look to be dying, I realized that there was one good question to ask yourself about your brand. This may be the one key thought and action that you should take from this talk.

And this is the question: if your company went out of business, would anyone really notice or care?

If the honest answer is “probably not”, then you have a problem and you need to act. For if your customer can probably live without you then eventually they will.

Look at the selection of brand on the chart that died in recent times. Many of them you will recognise and many you will likely say “oh, yeah remember them”. But – like you – no-one really missed them when they were gone. There were alternatives, often better.

But what about these brands: Friends Reunited, Reader’s Digest, AOL, and WH Smith? These used to be powerhouses and seem to be dying. Would people really miss them if they died?

What about these brands: BMW, Ryanair, Cunard, Colgate, John Lewis and the Samaritans. Would people notice if these went? I think yes. These are vibrant and successful brands. People love and rely on them.

So I spent some time thinking about the 3 sets of brands and here are my thoughts on what we can learn and do to avoid an early grave for our brands.

## Some dead and dying brands.....



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### **Slide 3: Some dead and dying brands**

Let's take a look at some more dying brands: Mini, Apple, Cunard, Burberry, Harley Davidson and the brand I work on, the French skincare brand called RoC.

Dying brands? These are not dying brands today. But at some point in their recent history all of these were very much dying, and have been reinvigorated and are now seen as case book examples of exciting, modern and cutting edge brands.

I think brands like these show that it is possible to take a brand that has lost relevance and is heading towards the grave, breathe life into them and turn them into exciting, innovative and profitable brands again. So I also looked at these when looking for inspiration and insights.

Let me tell you briefly about RoC. This brand was on a high in 2005, but since then crashed down in the space of 4 years to less than half its size at this peak. When I took over the brand, declines were around 30% a year in almost all markets around the world. This year the brand is growing close to 50% in North and South America in every market we operate in, and we have seen growth starting to come through in our traditional continental European markets.

So as you can see, I have some scary but recent experiences to draw on. For confidentiality reasons, I will not go into great detail on RoC today but will refer to some key learning.

So let's look at my 10 learning point and tips!

## 1: Brands are created by visionaries.



**Estee Lauder**

"Put the product into the customer's hands, it will speak for itself if it's something of quality"



**Sam Walton**

"There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire anybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else"



**Richard Branson**

"A business has to be involving, it has to be fun, and it has to exercise your creative instincts"



**Walt Disney**

"All dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."

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The Top Entrepreneurs of the last 100 Years: Focus.com

### **Slide 4: Tip 1 Brands are created by visionaries**

This may state the obvious, but often in the day-to-day management of brands (especially in large corporations) it is easy to forget that someone one day created the brand. Understanding that vision and what they intended to create and build is important, and often brand that fade forget this.

Visionaries bring 3 things to the creation of a brand:

They see a gap, an opportunity, that is not being met by existing players

They have an idea, and angle that is different, unique or better to meet that need than others

They have passion, persistence and a philosophy and rallying cry to focus and motive and direct what they do. It is not constrained by the status quo that many markets settle into and existing players work to.

Let's look at 4 examples that I find really interesting:

Estee Lauder (cosmetics): "put the product into the consumer's hands. It will speak for itself if it's something of quality"

Sam Walton (created Wal-Mart, the largest grocery chain in world): "there is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire anybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else"

Richard Branson (Airlines and Virgin empire): "A business has to be involving, it has to be fun, and it has to exercise your creative instincts"

Walt Disney (movie and theme park empire): "All dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them"



## Destroyed by caretakers. Reinvented by a visionary



Rosemary Bravo



Marc Jacobs



Richard Teerlink



Carol Marlow



Howard Schultz



## Not by caretakers, committees or accountants

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### **Slide 5: Destroyed by caretakers, reinvented by a visionary**

The problem comes as the visionary moves on, or the business starts to grow and get listed. Then the money men and women take over, the focus is on incremental growth, margins, costs and less risk. Caretakers, Committees and Accountants slowly but surely tend to squeeze life out of a brand. As this happens slowly, it is often not really visible until it starts to be terminal.

One thing that is clear, unless a new visionary steps in, the brand will and does die. Caretakers cannot promote or cost cut you out of decline

Looking at many of the brands that have slumped and then been revitalized can be clearly identified and associated with one visionary who is brought in and creates a new or updates the original visionaries intention.

Look at these well documented examples of brands that were dying or starting to and were resuscitated

Rosemary Bravo took an ailing Burberry back into the fashion icon it is. A new CEO is taking it even further. This year at London fashion Week, it was Burberry that got most of the coverage and created the most excitement.

Marc Jacobs stepped into an ailing Louis Vuitton and went back to the heart of the brand, focusing on 13 core designs and recreated the desire, the premium and style again.

Richard Teerlink famously fought off the Japanese share advance into motorcycles by reinventing Harley as an appealing and distinctive brand of quality, targeted affluent men seeking adventure and escape.

Carol Marlow took Cunard from a failing, struggling cruise ship into a stylish, premium and desirable – and the most desirable and talked about cruise line in the world. Think of all the fuss and coverage the QM2 and just this week the Queen Elisabeth gathered. Even the Queen herself has become part of the brand experience!

Howard Schultz (Starbucks). This is an example of a visionary who created the original, having to come back to ensure the original vision and experience was restored to Starbucks after "caretakers and accountants" had watered it down, optimized and speed up service and other such things. More about this later!

It takes someone with a vision of the future and not someone concerned with maximizing and optimising the offer, and margins...

## 2: Have a belief.

People will forget what you said.

People will forget what you did.

But people will never forget  
how you made them FEEL.

Anna Farmery.  
TheEngagingBrand.com  
Maya Angelou. Poet

Hugh MacLeod. [Gapingvoid.com](http://Gapingvoid.com)

"We humans want to believe in our own species..And we want people, companies and products in our lives that make it easier to do so. That is human nature"

"It's no longer just enough for people to believe that your product does what it says on the label. They want to believe in you and what you do"

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### **Slide 6: Tip 2 Have a belief**

One key common factor with Visionaries is that in addition to seeing a gap and opportunity, they also understand that a brand is more than just a collection of benefits and features. They understand that to connect a brand needs to have a soul, create an emotional connection with customers.

A quote I found most relevant was one that Anna Farmery of The Engaging Brand blog and podcast quotes a lot and this is: "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel". I think this is important for all brands to remember. One can usually find an alternative that is cheaper, faster or whatever – and in the final choice we tend to use and chose brands that make us feel something about them.

Hugh MacLeod of [gapingvoid.com](http://gapingvoid.com) (worth checking out for his daily doodles and cartoons about strategy and marketing) explains this more when he says that is about understanding the way we as people think, and remember we are selling to PEOPLE with emotions and not just rational beings.

This is what he says: "we humans want to believe in our own species, and we want people, companies and products in our lives that make it easier to do so. That is human nature. It's no longer just enough for people to believe that your product does what it says on the label. They want to believe in you and what you do".

Let me show an example of how one great brand visionary proves exactly this.

## Having a belief drives employees and consumers

### Steve Jobs: What Apple believes



Steve Jobs to John Scully (Pepsi CEO): "Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come work with me and change the world?"

Interbrand:

"Selling products you are proud of is the number one driver of organizational pride"

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### Dr Lissauraque: What RoC believes



### **Slide 7: Having a belief drives employees and consumers**

I came across a video clip online about two years ago that I want to play for you to illustrate the point. It is of Steve Jobs talking to his employees about Apple.

In the video you are going to hear him say that Apple is NOT about making products to help people do their job (although he says they do that better than most) but he says those magic words: WE BELIEVE...

He says: **We believe that people with passion can change the world for the better**

**Text of his speech:** "For me, marketing is about values. This is a very complicated world. It's a very noisy world. And we're not going to get a chance to get people to remember much about us. No company is. And so we have to be really clear on what we want them to know about us. Our customers want to know "who is apple? What is it that we stand for? Where we fit in this world". And what we are about isn't about making boxes for people to get their jobs done – although we do that well. We can do that almost better than anyone else can in some cases. But Apple's about something more than that. Apple at the core, its core value, is that we that we believe that people with passion can change the world for the better. That's what we believe"

He then inspires all his people. For example, when he was trying to convince John Scully (Pepsi CEO) to join Apple, he famously said: "Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come work with me and change the world?"

On my Brand RoC, Dr Lissarague who created the brand in his Paris Pharmacy in 1957, had a belief and that was that if you challenged the accepted practices and beliefs even of professionals, you could give access to beauty to everyone, even those with the most delicate, sensitive and reactive skin. This led him creating the first Sunblock; he created hypoallergenic skincare and the definition of it including the first hypoallergenic make-up and many more firsts. That belief is still core to RoC and our NPD today

### 3: Avoid the stagecoach syndrome



- What you really offering?
- Who are you competing with?
- What is your real competency?

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#### **Slide 8: Tip 3 Avoid the stagecoach syndrome**

This may be a bit obvious, but it is still one that I think many brands that have died (or are dying) get wrong, and is probably the biggest and most common error a brand caretaker versus a brand visionary makes. And this is, being really clear about what you are really offering, who you are competing with really, and what your real competency is.

Stagecoaches were once the only and main way to travel from place to place. There were vast networks competing, and of course today the companies behind them are gone, all destroyed by alternative forms of travel.

A brand caretaker would have focused on how to improve costs, better compete in comfort with the other stagecoaches and so on. But they forget to think about what they were really offering (the fast, safe way to get from A to B?). The real competitor (railways? Other new forms of travel?) And what their real competency was (scheduling? Or whatever)

Compare that to Cunard. In the 1970s when jet travel destroyed all of the other transatlantic boat services, they focused on “the best way to cross”/ “crossing is half the fun” – and today have a growing fleet of premium ships and seen as an icon.



## What competing with? What is real Competency?



Polaroid: instant pictures



Alcopops: "Starter Drinks"



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### **Slide 9: What competing with? What is real competency?**

Let's look at a few examples of people that got it wrong, maybe getting it wrong and seem to be getting it right!

**Polaroid.** They probably defined what they were offering really well: instant pictures. But they did not focus well enough on who they are really competing with. So when digital came along, instead of them being the leader and first as it was the best example of how to reinvent instant pictures, they let it destroy them. Unlike Kodak who embraced and built a business in digital pictures.

**Alcopops.** Remember the explosion in these, brands and variants seemed to be launched every day. The category boomed, and then I believe pretty much died. While cider brands exploded. The reason I am told is that Alcopops forgot what they were really competing with and offering. Alcopops and things before them and now cider brands are competing to be the "starter drink of choice" for young people when they start on the rocky road to alcohol consumption. By focusing on out doing the next Alcopops, they did not stay focused on what the next generation of starter drinkers were looking for.

**Competencies.** I find this one of the most interesting. As we focus so much on brands and execution, we often forget to think about what is our real competency. I think this is a key reason why some companies flourish and others die over the longer term. 3 examples

**J&J Beauty** – our competency is not in creating beauty brands but in acquiring small brands with clear vision and clear point of differentiation and then making them huge in their home market and then globally expanding them across different business models and channels. 10 years ago we had no beauty business. Today we are the #1 skincare player in mass in the USA. All brands are 4 or 5 times larger than when we bought them.

**Whitbread.** Transformed from a brewer into a company without any brewing, focused on "eat, sleep and drink" with brands like Premier Inn, Beefeater, Brewers Fayre, and Costa Coffee

**Tate & Lyle,** the sugar company for generations, has announced it will soon no longer sell sugar – as no money to be made in it and its competency is in producing and selling staples and commodities and moving into more profitable and growing ones like starch.

## 4: Can't win a race by standing still



### Constant changing:

- Order winner?
- Order qualifier?
- Order loser?

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### **Slide 10. Tip 4 you can't win the race by standing still**

This is so obvious and again a common mistake. If you are running a race, if you stand still and the other competitors run ahead, you can't win. So why do so many companies and brands lose out here.

Usually it is because they do not think through the fact that things constantly change. The thing that won you the order or closed the sale today may no longer tomorrow. Someone may do it better, faster, or cheaper.

I am a fan of thinking through these 3 things: what is winning me the order today? What do I need to do to qualify to be considered today? What is losing em the order today?

What will they be tomorrow and how do I get there?

Let's look at some examples

## Order Winners, Order Qualifiers and Order Losers keep changing



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### Slide 11: Order winners, order qualifiers and order losers keep changing

Blockbuster recently went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the USA. The once mighty DVD rental chain has been losing vast sums in the USA although some of their global business is faring a bit better.

This for me is a classic case of standing too still in a race. First on demand movies on the TV came and offered more convenience, and also quality was guaranteed. Then the Netflix/ LoveFilm posting DVD service came along, with convenience and choice and not having to go to and from the shop. Then downloads and legal ones that are okay costs, huge choice and convenient.

They should have owned and created all of these, versus trying to optimize the shops and the costs.

RoC. In continental Europe there were 2 business models that worked in the Pharmacy channel we sell RoC. The dermatologist recommendation model, where they recommend to their patients brands who go to the pharmacy to buy. The pharmacist will encourage others then buy those. Then the TV and in-store display approach like a mass brand. The later worked well for RoC during the first half of the 2000s, and then we saw fall and fall in sales while new brands (like Cauadlie and Nuxe) came to the channel and did neither, but made the pharmacist and advisors love the brand, incentivised them, invested in their stores to build fixtures and displays, gave them samples and created CRM to build basket size. With half the distribution of RoC, in 3 years they became #1 anti age in France. We kept optimizing the model and standing still while the race moved on.

## 5: A success often breeds failure

Howard Shultz  
(Starbucks):



"We made a series of decisions that, in retrospect, have led to the watering down of the Starbucks experience, and what some may call the commoditization of the brand"

"The sheer success  
of a brand  
becomes its own undoing"

Chiranjeev Kohli  
Reviving weak & dead brands".  
California State University



**Success can lead to paralysis and inertia.  
Caretakers are rewarded and valued more than innovators.**

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### Slide 12: Tip 5 a success often breeds failure

When looking at most brands that stumble, or stand still in race, this seems to be one of the big factors contributing to it.

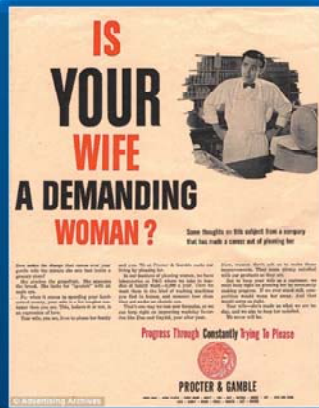
Often the leader of the brand will have got there on the back of some success, be it an ad campaign, a way of executing or by doing something a certain way. Politicians too all too often fall foul of this, with Margaret Thatcher having success with a certain approach and style but then, as it had worked, sticking to it.

There is report from California State University I read about this, and here is a quote from that study: "The sheer success of a brand becomes it own undoing". I have seen this first hand many times in my working career.

But first let's return to Starbucks, which lost it way badly a few years ago and really slumped in sales and share. Howard Shultz, the man that drove its success and returned after the slump, said: "We made a series of decisions that, in retrospect, have led to the watering down of the Starbucks experience, and what some may call the commodization of the brand". Success meant that people focused on the cost and how to speed up service, not on the experiential elements. Success meant they faced long lines and more competition, so they focused on cost cutting and speed instead of the brand and what it was offering

RoC. In 2005 a campaign broke for the one product in the line (Retin-ox) "10 years back", were women declared their age because they looked 10 years younger. It was massive success in getting trial, and was so successful. Then for 3 years after it drove everything as people tried to fit it across the range, were too scared to move from the claim – even when was clear women tried but not repurchase. It grid locked creativity for years.

## 6: The consumer is not a moron, she is your wife



- If your consumer can live without you, they eventually will.
- Treat her mean, won't keep her keen.
- You will only ever fool her once

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### **Slide 13. Tip 6 the consumer is not a moron, she is your wife**

This is a favourite quote of mine from David Ogilvy, who created Ogilvy & Mather ad agency. We need to always remember that our customers are not stupid. Though many dead and dying brands seem to have.

If she can live without you, she eventually will. If you treat her mean, she will not stick by you and you will only ever fool her once.

Let's look at some examples of dead and dying brands that maybe did not or are not following this advice.



If your consumer can live without you, they eventually will.



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**Slide 14: If your consumer can live without you, they eventually will**

Ratners. Famously Gerald Ratner in 1991 wiped £500 million instantly off the value of the company, and in 1994 the name was dropped. At the Institute of Directors, he said they “sold a pair of earrings for under a pound, which is cheaper than a prawn sandwich from M&S, but probably wouldn’t last as long”. And calling a sherry decanter they sold was cheap as it was “total crap”. Insulting your consumer will kill you.

MFI. Went bust as its products were not seen as good quality, a case made stronger when IKEA came along.

Compare that to John Lewis who have grown through the recession and the MD argues it is because they refused to compromise on quality and quality of service and would not cut the spec on their products and consumers valued quality in the end. Asda interestingly lost share even though they cut price, but by cutting quality and now have restage huge amounts of own label to put back quality. The consumer values VALUE.

WH Smith seems to be a dying brand. It is hard to work out why you go there, unless you in a railway station or airport for something to pass time on your journey. I read that most of their sales/ profit are now form cigarettes and top shelf magazines, but not sure if that is true. But hard to see why or what their role is, as you can get everything elsewhere better.

Dasani is a case of treating consumers as silly. This Coke owned water brand was due to launch when it was revealed it was water out of the mains then distilled and bottled. It died before launch

RoC. On one of our lead supported products, I found that 40% of users found it to irritate their skin. Not surprisingly the line died, and created a real challenge to overcome

## 7: Stand out at rush hour.



**Without differentiation,  
a company cannot charge a premium,  
nor can it sustain a brand**

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### **Slide 15: Tip 7 Stand out at rush hour**

You need to stand out. You need to be differentiated to succeed. Why?

Without differentiation, a company cannot charge a premium, nor can it sustain a brand.

If you are not differentiated, then price is the winner. Brands cannot win a price game in the end.

Let's look at some examples

## Differentiation.

2 most important words for brand visionary: only and unlike



Price elasticity sets in when commoditization starts...

Common signs:

1. From brand building to promotion
2. From info-orientated messaging to entertainment-orientated
3. From distinctive position/ attributes to essence & image

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### **Slide 16: Differentiation. 2 most important words for brand visionary: only & unlike**

Look at these

Dyson. Huge success through differentiation with new technology and way of solving problems in what had become commodity areas: vacuum cleansers, hand drying, fans.

Apple. They were not the 1<sup>st</sup> MP3 player by far, but through design and interface and integration with iTunes they differentiated.

Virgin Atlantic. When created they stood out from a sea of sameness with services, pickups, multi channel entertainment for all classes. The first true flatbed in business and so on.

Nespresso and home coffee making.

But then we have credit cards and car hire companies. They all are the same, and price or inertia seems to be the only real basis of competition.

Price elasticity sets in when differentiation goes. There are 3 big signs when things are heading this way:

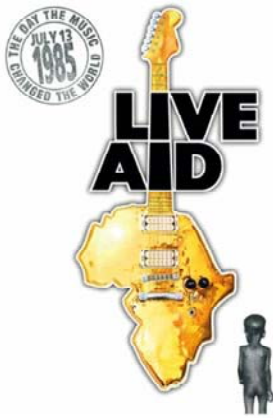
Common signs:

From brand building to promotion

From info-orientated messaging to entertainment-orientated

From distinctive position/ attributes to essence & image

## 8: Repeat. It's all about repeat.



**Staying relevant to ensure you get repeat**

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### **Slide 17: Tip 8 Repeat. It's all about repeat**

One thing that I think is a big cause of brands dying is that they focus on trial and so work through recruitment, but once that pool runs dry they die. In some cases that can take years, but the real focus needs to be on repeat.

Live Aid: maybe there are some brands where you only need trial. Like maybe once off fund raising concerts like Live Aid. But most of us are not in that territory.

Gap and M&S. Both of which seem to be hovering between dying and reviving over the last years. Every now and then they rush off and try and recruit new users, usually younger and more hip. They then alienate the core and struggle to get the young hip, and then revert back to keeping the old loyalists happy and get them back. I think they are classic examples of how you need to focus on ensuring you get repeat from the core, but evolve and stay relevant so you are constantly topping up the core. If you do not stay relevant and get old fashioned you lose.

RoC and Caudalie. I mentioned these earlier. RoC boomed as I mentioned by getting a lot of trial, but not the sustainability as people did not like the products to use every day. While Caudalie, had products that women liked to use and so they bought more and more across the range. Pretty basic stuff, as we can prove clinically we are much better than Caudalie in results but we were losing as they liked using them better. Something we have (of course) changed!

## 9: Beware the self-fulfilling prophecy

Kevin J Clancy: *Save America's Dying Brands*

"Management rarely, if ever cites poor marketing strategy as the cause of problems.

More common: competition built more stores, consumer spending down etc..

If companies make any sort of move, they invariably cut price and special promotions..

Brand loyalty is based on the idea that a product or service is uniquely better and different, not cheaper"

"The main reason businesses behind successful brands die is management and Operational incompetence"

Stuart Whitwell:  
Revival of the Fittest



**Management causes a death or the resuscitation.**

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### **Slide 18: Tip 9 Beware the self-fulfilling prophecy**

Or as this quote from the article "Survival of the Fittest" puts it: "The main reason businesses behind successful brands die is management and operational incompetence".

In fact most of the articles and books on why brands die, argue that managements create downfalls, Not always intentionally but by their actions and by focusing on the wrong things.

Kevin Clancy from "Save America's Dying Brands" writes: ""Management rarely, if ever cites poor marketing strategy as the cause of problems. More common: competition built more stores, consumer spending down etc... If companies make any sort of move, they invariably cut price and special promotions... Brand loyalty is based on the idea that a product or service is uniquely better and different, not cheaper"

Some examples from my own experiences

Johnson's baby Oil was one of the products I worked on when I joined J&J in 1987. I was told that the brand was dying and would be gone soon, as it was generic mineral oil with fragrance and private label would squeeze us out on price. The brand was being slowly strangled by management. I worked with our R&D team and they came up with a fact from an old published clinical that showed that JBO moisturized 10x better on wet skin than the leading moisturizer lotion. We ran that in ads, and the business exploded. We rolled it out and within 2 years we had sold \$70 million more JBO. And still today the same story is running!

On RoC, in the markets we have the brand roughly half are now growing by close to 50% versus last year. The others are static or still declining. In the business model assessment, I can say with some certainty that the key and 1<sup>st</sup> differentiator is the person at the top of the company. If they believe they can and will turn the brand around then we have. The same products, the same packaging, the same competition, the same copy – the key is the belief.



## 10: Always do the right thing.

Be Legal  
-  
Don't abuse  
-  
Be morally right  
-  
Environmentally responsible  
-  
Take pride  
-  
Don't be greedy



**TYLENOL**  
WORLD COM



LEHMAN BROTHERS



There really is more to life than the bottom line

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### Slide 19: Tip 10 Always do the right thing

I am not going to spend a lot of time on this one. But to ensure you do not die you need to be legal, don't abuse, be morally right. Be environmentally responsible, take pride in what you do and don't be greedy.

As we see from these people and these brands on here, if you don't stick to these rules your brand will die or start that path.

## 10 Top Tips from the dead and dying...

1. Created by Visionaries. Destroyed by Caretakers.
2. Have a belief. People remember how you make them feel.
3. Avoid the stagecoach syndrome.
4. Can't win the race by standing still.
5. Beware success breeding seeds of your failure.
6. Consumer is not an idiot. She is your wife.
7. Repeat. It is all about repeat.
8. Stand out in the rush hour.
9. Watch out for a self-fulfilling prophecy.
10. Always do the right thing.

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### **Slide 20: 10 top tips from the dead and dying**

Here are my ten observations and tips listed to ensure you avoid an early grave.

1. Created by Visionaries. Destroyed by Caretakers.
2. Have a belief. People remember how you make them feel.
3. Avoid the stagecoach syndrome.
4. Can't win the race by standing still.
5. Beware success breeding seeds of your failure.
6. Consumer is not an idiot. She is your wife.
7. Repeat. It is all about repeat.
8. Stand out in the rush hour.
9. Watch out for a self-fulfilling prophecy.
10. Always do the right thing.

## Key thought to take away...

If your company went out of business would anyone notice?

- 1. If your consumer could live without you, they eventually will.**
- 2. If you keep doing business the same way everybody does, you will never do better than them.**

William Taylor. Harvard Business review 2010

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### **Slide 21: Key thought to take away**

And finally, if you only remember one or two things here are what they should be:

1. If your company went out of business, would anyone notice?
2. If your consumer could live without you, they eventually will
3. If you keep doing business the same way as everybody does, you will never do better than them

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