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Break From the Pack: How to Compete in a Copycat Economy – Chapter 6

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Author's Bio: A professor at the University of San Francisco's Graduate School of Business, Harari teaches strategic and global management. In 2001, the editors of Business Minds (published by the Financial Times of London) named him one of the 40 "best minds" in management in the world. From 1984 to 1996, Oren was a senior consultant and speaker with The Tom Peters Group. He was a founding member of The Integrity Institute - a foundation that measures and elevates the integrity of corporations, leaders, and capital markets (a mission he calls "noble"). These roles, tasks and accomplishments barely scratch the surface of Harari's resume

Author's big thought: In every industry, a very small number of organizations are fast, fit, healthy, and clearly at the forefront. They are followed by a few pretty good wannabes nipping at their heels. These groups are clearly ahead of "the pack" — that large, undifferentiated bulk of companies of all shapes and sizes that don't stand out and don't draw the kind of positive attention from customers and investors that they'd like. This book helps you guide and lead your organization to break away from the pack—and stay ahead of it.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 6: Put the Pieces Together for a Higher Cause

Beyond the Mission Statement to a Higher Cause

- Mission and vision statements are good things to have. But to break from the pack, a company would be wise to strive for something bigger than a mission and deeper than a vision.
- Leaders who confront "central" questions about the nature of their organization are not simply engaging in intellectually interesting exercises; they are developing critical strategic priorities.
- "Central idea" questions include these:
 - Who are we? What do we stand for? What's our agenda? What's our destination? Whom do we serve? Where are we going? Why do we exist? Why should we exist? What are our underlying philosophies and core values?

- The answers to these questions summon an organization to reach for more than the standard corporate mission statement that appears in the annual report and then is summarily ignored. The answers define a cause. That cause binds together all the disparate elements of an organization—people, decisions, systems, processes—and directs them onto the same path.
- To improve your odds of truly breaking from the pack in a sustained way, you should consider going a step up, to a higher cause. A higher cause defines a noble and honorable purpose. A higher cause aims to leave a positive mark. It aims to change an entire market; in fact, it aims to change the world for the better. It's about somehow bettering the lot of human beings.
- Higher causes focus on customers and potential customers: how they benefit and how their life or business will be elevated, all in a way that's fresh, compelling, unique, and, perhaps most important—uplifting and virtuous. The most powerful higher causes lead people to see how the world will be a better place, and how humanity will benefit anew.
- Companies that break from the pack will aim to maximize profits by changing peoples' lives for the better. That's what your company's higher cause should define for your customers.
- A higher cause takes employees far beyond their career ambitions to feed their most profound ambition: to lead meaningful lives.
- At TiVo, the higher cause is about liberating people's time and power by giving them total control over their viewing.
- Its Motorola's higher cause of "seamless mobility" is about helping people use whatever products they want to use, wherever they are.
- At Honda, the higher cause is an obsession with fuel efficiency to save people money and keep the environment safe.
- The higher cause of Jamba Juice is, to help us live a "healthier, balanced life"; a more "natural life", a "fruitful life."
- A strong higher cause serves as an organization's strategic beacon, market brand, and organizational "soul." It drives all strategic and operational decisions. It demands collaborative excellence in performance. It pushes constant innovation in products and customer service. It spurs employees to continually reinvent and enhance the experience of customers. It improves the odds of leaving a positive, lasting legacy in the industry and the world.
- Especially as organizations get larger, more complex, and more diffuse, having a central force to identify, unite, and galvanize all the pieces becomes even more essential, and that's what a higher cause can do.

The Three Components of a Higher Cause

A potent, break-from-the-pack higher cause must contain three elements:

1. A Higher Cause Must Be Coherent

- The central idea your company propounds must be clear, simple, edgy, easy to brag about, and able to inspire curiosity.

- Starbucks wants to create a place of “refuge” for people, where they can escape the woes and tribulations of the chaotic world outside, a place that is so safe and calming that it becomes the “third place” a customer spends time in. It is this higher cause of refuge that drives the ambience, the smells, the placement of furniture, the Wi-Fi accessibility, the unique Starbucks home music, the CD burning, and of course the rich array of constantly evolving coffees and teas.
- Higher causes can’t be vague, unclear, or bland. To matter—to have an impact on customers and to shape employee innovations—higher causes must be crisp, succinct, and sharply defined.

2. **A Higher Cause Must Be Authentic**

- A higher cause must be real and pervasive if it is to have any substantive impact. It’s got to be real on a personal level and real on an institutional level.
- If the higher cause “grabs your soul,” inspires your behavior, and defines your decisions, then you know it’s personally authentic.
- When a higher cause becomes institutionally authentic, it defines every element of the organization and is the central dictum by which everyone measures all the company’s efforts.
- The first higher cause for Whole Foods is to create an environment where people will enjoy food shopping. Their higher cause is to change how America eats. Whole Foods’ ultimate purpose is to get people to eat genuinely whole and organic foods because they taste better and are better for them and for the environment. Whole Foods is so successful because it remains authentically committed to this higher cause.
- Staying authentic to a higher cause is not easy. Your organization will be tested repeatedly as to its real commitment.

3. **A Higher Cause Must Be Both Revolutionary and Evolutionary**

- Otherwise, it’s unlikely to inspire people or propel an organization ahead of the pack.
- A higher cause also must continually demonstrate the capacity to evolve.

Putting Coherence, Authenticity, and Revolution into Soul

- Determining a higher cause is partly an analytical and intellectual exercise. You have to assess the external environment and your internal organization’s capabilities, and you have to justify your decisions with economic logic.
- But ultimately, a higher cause is almost a spiritual aspiration, one that is deeply felt and sacred in a secular way. A higher cause provides a deep personal purpose to you as a leader and to your colleagues, and it defines the deep purpose and persona, or soul, of your organization.
- When you as a leader can experience both analytical and spiritual elements as you determine future alternatives for your company, you’re on your way toward defining a higher cause that will elevate your business to a new level.
- The official “vision” of Cirque du Soleil is to provide customers with an “awe-inspiring encounter.” But as Guy Lieberte says, his personal cause is “to reinvent the circus.” The

Organization Cirque has an even higher cause, one that is not written as an official document but can easily be inferred from the coherence and authenticity of its productions: to fully reignite adults' emotions and senses in ways they may have experienced as kids but never thought possible as adults.

Six Steps to Help Your Organization Find its Higher Cause

- Higher causes arise from your willingness to carefully examine the horizon figure out significant gaps in the emerging marketplace, get genuinely jump-up-and-down excited about an untapped opportunity to fill those gaps in the emerging marketplace (especially when that opportunity changes the rules of the game). Define how your next steps will make the world a better place as it makes your customers' lives better, truly believe that what you and your organization can do is very important and valuable, and articulate that in a way that inspires and mobilizes others.
- Here are a few concrete guidelines that will help you develop and execute a higher cause for your organization:
 1. *Ask the deep questions about your organization.*
 - A higher cause is about customers and potential customers: how their lives will be elevated, and how the world will be better off too.
 2. *Concentrate your attention on the horizon.*
 - Start the conversations about what trends on the frontier of your industry might threaten your current business or offer it big opportunities.
 - Discuss the implications that intrigue you.
 - Discuss the possibilities that excite you. You'll feel the higher cause emerging.
 3. *Rearrange the pieces to make a big difference.*
 - Push your people to talk about concrete possibilities that could be groundbreaking and that could make a big difference in the lives of your present (or potential) customers, and maybe even the world.
 - Consider possibilities that might come from new technologies, new partners, new supply chains, new scientific advances, new sources of capital, and any new trends out in the marketplace.
 - Talk about what it would take to match (or rebuild) your internal capabilities with those possibilities on the kind of scale and impact that would make a difference in the world—and make money for your organization.
 - Start with the central idea that you want your organization to stand for. Then start building a business case around those groundbreaking possibilities by rearranging the interesting pieces "out there" to make this big difference happen. Build on these initiatives with your team, discuss them together, contemplate them, and pretty soon you'll be talking about a higher cause.
 4. *Don't let anyone else define coherence, authenticity, and revolution/evolution for you*
 - Consultants might help you analyze the environment, the possibilities, and your organization's capabilities, but the soul you find must be your own.

5. *Enlist champions.* Avoid the career skeptics and stack the deck with people who share your cause and want to help it unfold.
6. *Learn to synthesize.* To put the pieces together for a higher cause, you and your colleagues will need to excel in synthesis. When you rearrange the pieces, keep as your goal a bigger, richer cause than is possible for your organization to accomplish today.



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Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is the advisor to call to work with you and your executive team as a confidante and - some would say - corporate shrink. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.