

## Strategy: Be Extraordinary

My friend Barry Gibbons ran a retail chain in the UK called Chef and Brewer. The parent company bought Burger King somewhere along the way, and Barry was the guy who went to Miami and ran it. And at the first big meeting he had of Burger King employees, I was asked to speak to them. It was out in San Francisco, and I did a little bit of research, as in: went to a few McDonald's and Burger Kings and Wendy's and things like that.

As I was getting ready to give the speech Barry and I were standing behind the stage curtain. And I said to him, "Hey, I worked on this, did a little preparation, went to look at a few of your stores." And he sort of gulped about two times. And then he turned to me and he said, "How were they?" And I said, "Nothing wrong with them." And Barry insisted that was one of the turning points of his professional life and certainly his life running Burger King. And the way he subsequently wrote about it and he told the story a million times is ... he said, "It was the worst thing I've ever heard in my life. My translation is, when we did it right, it was still very ordinary."

He went on to write a little bit more about it. He said, "I thought to myself, 'What a dreadful mission I have in life. I'd love to get 6,000 restaurants up to spec, but when I do, it's ho-hum.' It's bugged me ever since. It's one of the great paradoxes of modern business. We all know distinction is key, and yet in the last 20 years we have created a plethora of ho-hum products and services. Just go fly in an airplane. It could be such an enlightening experience, but ho-hum. We swim in an ocean of ho-hum, and I'm going to fight it. I'm going to die fighting it."

And the reality is, in my opinion—and apparently Barry made the same translation—that ho-hum or pretty ordinary may well be worse than awful. And so, my strong suggestion with the way you present yourself—that could frankly be your logo or your reception desk in a technical company or it could be a retail space or an accounting shop—is do you really pop? Do people say, "Wow"? And I don't mean "wow" like Cirque de Soleil, but just, "This place really looks like they're up to something interesting." Or is it, heaven help you, "Ho-hum"?