

## Strategy: Brand Equals Talent

For the last five or maybe even 10 years, branding has been the rage. We always sort of thought of it in terms of Coke or Pepsi or Procter & Gamble, but now it's branding everything. And I'm part of the problem or part of the solution, as the case may be. I kind of was the guy who invented the "brand you" notion. But now we talk about branding churches and branding countries, and so on.

When you think about branding, I think even today you tend to think about a marketing program or what have you. Nothing wrong with that. I am a strong believer in marketing. But whether it's a football team with a half billion dollar stadium or whether it's a six-person training department, at the end of the day the brand is the quality of the talent. Period. You can build the world's greatest football stadium for half a billion bucks and because it's a great stadium the first four years every seat will be filled. Well, if the team that is playing in that stadium, by year four, is on its fourth consecutive significant losing season, guess what? In year five, all the seats aren't going to be full, and it's downhill from there.

Which is to say, end of the day, real estate company, grocery store, high-tech company, football team, symphony orchestra—the brand is the talent, which is why the answer to every question is the same: Put people first. Period.