



# LET YOUR CREATIVE SIDE FLOW

BY Cynthia Ackrill, MD

## Does your clinic brand reflect your practice?

And does that matter to doctors? Today with marketing consultants more than happy to part physicians with their hard-earned dollars to create a “brand,” many doctors are overwhelmed and confused, even resistant to the concept.

The better question: Does your practice, your clinic, your life reflect you? The term “brand” may be the challenge. What does it really mean? Many associate brand with logo. But brand is much more—a brand is what others experience of your service or product, what differentiates you from the pile. Brand starts between the ears and in the heart. It is dynamic, born of both sides of your brain, rooted in your values and mission, and it connects the real you with every element of your practice. Creating a brand for as an individual or a group can even add more fun to the daily grind.

Properly executed, a well-defined brand informs every decision of the business, from marketing materials to details of patient service. It validates and engenders collaboration and trust. How do you want your

patients to feel? Think Apple. Their brand is not about a particular product or service, it is about creating a space to be innovative, to building trust that you will be ahead of the pack and well taken care of...you will be part of the tribe.

How does that relate to the profession of medicine? Like it or not, healthcare is changing. Riding on Dr. Welby’s brand is over. Patients and providers are longing for more. Despite the best of intentions, healing and care can feel subjugated by financial obstacles and EMDR’s. Bringing the art of healing and care into the brand restores career satisfaction and patient outcome. Details do support purpose.

Working faster and harder to just keep afloat, many physicians complain of missing the art or creative side of their life. They relegate that side to “outside” interests. Brand is a place to bring it on and have fun in the process! No, you don’t have to have artistic talent, just permission to dream. Tapping that creative space is re-energizing.

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## LET YOUR CREATIVE SIDE... (continued)

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Go ahead, instead of surfing the internet to procrastinate, take a “what if?” dream break. What if you could create the ideal practice, one that reflects your values and mission? What would it look like? Who would you be in that practice? How would you and your staff behave in that practice? What environment would support your work? How would your patients experience this? What’s your tribe?

Now... what values and purpose define this vision? Even without a magic wand or a budgetary windfall, you can start to define a brand that will inform subtle changes, even behaviors and attitudes, which will continually re-engage you, your staff, and your patients in real “health” “care.”

Curious enough to explore?

I recommend going offsite to start this activity—somewhere where you not distracted by the cues of your current obligations and where you feel generally positive. Great creative work is done in some weird places! These suggestions are for an individual. For a group practice, this can be a really fun and unifying activity, best facilitated by someone skilled in generating collaboration.

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- Start by listing your values, those principles you want your life to express. Most high-achievers want them all, but pick the top 5 that are immutable for you.
- Then write down your purpose—why do you want to do what you do? What do you want your contribution to be? (What do you want that eulogy to say?)
- Now... the fun part! Brainstorming. Put on a smile and start thinking about what makes you you. In what aspects of your life do you feel the most authentic? Where is your energy highest? If you asked others about your best qualities, what would they say? What would you like them to say? To what are you naturally drawn? (Here's where you can really play... what do you read, like to see, feel Sympatico with?) Write down all loose concepts, descriptors, desired qualities. Use color if you want to please your right brain even more.
- Now with your right brain alive and no holds barred, what would you like your ideal practice to be? How should the physical environment support your mission and values? What behaviors would be best? As a patient walking in that door what would you notice? What would you experience? Have fun with this! Be patient, breathe. [Not always easy for doctors!]

This reflective and creative way of thinking will begin to yield your brand—a clarity of the desired experience of you and your practice that reflects the best of you. Yes, this is the real world and healthcare is filled with more obstacles and fewer funds than ever. But that does not mean you cannot start to make decisions going forward that are more in line with your authentic choices. It does not mean you must check your creativity and dreams at the door.

What one tiny, no-cost change can you make tomorrow that will move you closer to your vision? What little tweak of your physical office, your meeting agendas, or your personal habits will make you, and perhaps someone else, smile? ■

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