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THE CAT'S MEOW

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In 1994, American authors James Collins and Jerry Porras developed the concept of a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal), which they said explained the success of visionary companies that embraced these goals to challenge, stimulate growth and provide direction to leaders (e.g. 'Become number one or two in every market we serve and revolutionise this company to have the speed and agility of a small enterprise' - General Electric). It's time for every brand to have its own BHAG, and here's how I recently helped an international packaged goods company develop a BHAG for each of its brands.

Creating a brand BHAG

1**FORM THE TEAM**

Form a diverse team of six to 16 people, who can commit to spending half a day together. In our group there were marketing people, advertising agency staff, sales managers, market research, media and senior managers. Have a BHAG champion but ensure you invite people who have a limited knowledge of the brand. The challenge is to create interactions between a diverse range of perspectives. It is also a good idea to vary the team design for each meeting (i.e. have a core group and other invited participants) and to select an external venue.

2**ENSURE EVERYONE HAS WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF BRAND**

This step ensures that everyone has a working knowledge of the brand - its profitability, competition, any market trends, etc. The BHAG champion (usually the brand manager) should conduct this overview. This should be sent out before the meeting so participants can come prepared, and then be re-presented at the beginning of the workshop. Importantly, every participant should be asked to develop his or her own BHAG and bring it to the meeting. In this way you have many different starting points and participants have to think and engage in the session.

3**ENSURE EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS A BHAG**

Another vital step is to clarify and discuss what exactly a BHAG is and why it might be beneficial to the brand. At our first meetings, this stimulated much discussion as we argued what were examples of good and bad BHAGs. Our consensus was that a powerful BHAG had to engage our collective 'heads' and 'hearts'. It needed to be a measurable goal (to double our business in five years) but it also had to engage 'our' imagination and emotions (e.g. to be the most talked about brand among teenagers). At the end of the day, however, the workshop should be primarily focused on creating a new BHAG for the brand - not trying to solve any specific issue (that's a later session). Participants should be concerned with what the brand is trying to achieve, not how, at this stage.





4 **START WITH EACH PARTICIPANT'S BHAG**

The next step is to discuss and review each participant's BHAG. Each BHAG should be placed up on the wall for all to see and various variations of the BHAGs can be discussed. In this way, everyone has an opportunity to contribute and sometimes a winning BHAG can be created from taking elements of a number of different ones. It is useful at this stage not to get bogged down in exact wording but trying to organise and prioritise like-minded concepts.

5 **MOVE OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE**

This is the most critical stage in the process. BHAGs by their very nature are non-linear so the challenge is to move out of the group's comfort zone to explore new possibilities. One technique we used to achieve this was by asking each participant to create at least three original questions about the brand (you do not have to solve these; they are simply to create a new perspective). For example, why don't people love our brand? The more provocative and left field the questions, the better. The group is then asked to decide on the five most surprising, unexpected questions and asked to develop a BHAG to address these questions. This process is repeated a number of times until a set of more insightful BHAGs emerge.

6 **EVALUATE**

Again this is a critical step that takes courage and creativity. You have to fight the temptation to throw out the outrageous BHAGs because they make everyone feel uncomfortable. By definition, that is exactly what you are trying to achieve. Try and develop a shortlist of similar concepts, then try and prioritise them. In this way you can at least agree on the main thrust of the winning BHAG. Then begin crafting each word so it can be as powerful as it can possibly be. If it is too rational, give it some emotion (e.g. 'love', 'crave'); if it is too subjective, inject an objective measure (e.g. by when? how much?). In our sessions we developed evaluation criteria which covered consumers, the company, trade, the brand, competition and our own gut feel. In this way, we examined the new BHAG from many different perspectives.

Developing a BHAG is a powerful new way of starting your brand planning process. It is rewarding because it provides an illuminating beacon, but the journey itself can also be productive as you begin to challenge your preconceived notions of a brand's potential. You find yourself asking such questions as: Why can't this brand double in size in the next five years? What are the barriers? Are they real or imagined? When you start to ask these types of questions you begin to unlock many new opportunities for your brand and your business. M