

Beyond Brand

The Essential Character of Catholic Health Care

By CAROL BAYLEY, PhD, and JOHN BUSACKER

In the late 18th century, hundreds of ships passed by Nantucket Island every day. Unpredictable Atlantic storms, dense fog, treacherous shoals and strong currents resulted in frequent shipwrecks. Thousands of lives were lost, many within a mile of shore. A group of citizen volunteers who recognized the need for a lifesaving organization banded together to form The Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, later known as The Massachusetts Humane Society.

The Society built huts to store lifeboats, blankets, signal flares and first-aid supplies. The volunteers regularly searched the coastline for signs of ships in distress. When one was identified, a flare would go up and a rescue team immediately set out to do everything it could to save the ship and all those on board. At a time and place where people's livelihood depended on whaling, fishing and forces of nature, the volunteers felt they had "to go out," but they knew their safe return was not guaranteed. That perspective later became the Coast Guard's motto: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back."

Would you join an organization with such a purpose? Hundreds of Nantucketers did, demonstrating that mission — especially one meeting an urgent need — matters.

Mission is the very essence of an organization. The external structure and practices in place to execute the mission are its form. Lifesaving was

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the essence of The Massachusetts Humane Society. The huts of refuge were one form their mission took.

Every organization, including Catholic hospitals, health systems and their leadership, requires both form and essence.

FORM

Form is literally the shape something takes. It is what we see from the outside. A leader's form is both as simple as appearance and as complex as the ability to communicate effectively. It is sometimes referred to as a leader's style. An organization's form is its structure, practices and brand identity, which includes not only its name and tag line, but also its presence in people's consciousness.

Since it is the touch point between a leader or an organization and the rest of the world, form is vital. Good form attracts, invites and begins the conversation. It is the first impression given by leaders and organizations. And first impressions — what Malcolm Gladwell in his bestselling book *Blink* calls rapid cognition — matter a great deal. In a world increasingly shaped by YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, our attention spans have diminished. The hook of inviting form, whether it is a leader with staff or an organization executing a branding campaign, is a critical initial opening to a more sustained relationship.

Mission is THE VERY ESSENCE of an ORGANIZATION

ESSENCE

While good form attracts, essence is what causes people to follow leaders over time; it inspires and engages people with the organization for the long haul. Essence is the enduring core, often revealed in trying conditions and through difficult situations.

As is the case for every Catholic health care system, the essence of Dignity Health is its mission to reveal and extend the healing presence of God in the world, delivering health services, advocating for the poor and partnering to improve life in community. Similarly, the people of Providence reveal God's love for all, especially the poor and vulnerable, through their compassionate services. We know that through their exceptional health care services, SSM Health reveals the healing presence of God. Scroll through the web pages of any of our Catholic systems, and you will see it — the words are slightly different, but the narrative is the same. It is the essence of Catholic

health care to spread the good news, especially to God's people who are most in need of it.

INTEGRITY

It is tempting to think that because the style of a leader or the branding of an organization can change, those things are somehow not as important. But the truth is that both form and essence are indispensable. A health care organization can have a lofty mission, but if the ER is filthy and understaffed, its mission will never get through to the people it serves. On the other hand, a slick ad campaign may initially move people, but the essence of an organization ultimately is its true identity. The Livestrong yellow bracelets were ubiquitous and raised a great deal of money to fight cancer; but when the founder was discovered to have cheated at his sport, the brand was emptied of power. Clearly, it's not form *or* essence; mission *or* brand; it is the powerful alignment between the two. For organizations and leaders

that have integrity, what you see is really what you get. Just as form is the outward expression of the essence of an organization, an authentic brand is the demonstration in words, images and actions of an organization's integrity — the fusion of its purpose and practices. In Catholic health care, the purpose always is anchored in the healing presence of God, and the practices always are aimed towards people most in need of them. How does the Catholic health care brand effectively communicate its essence?

THINKING ABOUT BRANDS

When we consider an “outside-to-inside” approach to a leader's form and essence, we see clearly that the style a leader adopts can either draw people in or put people off. A leader committed to his or her personal mission will be more successful in accomplishing that mission if style and substance match. The same is true of an organization. Ads and images have the power to attract, but they must be more than that — there must be something really there.

A real brand goes beyond mere ads and images. It may begin, on the outside, with the form that has expression in logos, tag lines, billboards and TV spots. But for an organization, brand integrity is really form fused with essence. Since 2012, when Catholic Healthcare West changed its name to Dignity Health, the organization has been committed to a campaign that engages employees and the public alike in a conversation about humanity and kindness. Its form began with small messages about human connection, but it was linked down deep with the central mission of healing. For that message to function as a credible brand, it had to be backed up with actions that reveal the mission of Dignity Health: The form had to align with the essence. This means that employees, physicians and staff who treat patients and families with reverence, advocacy for the poor and respect for the disenfranchised are regularly and genuinely in evidence. Dignity Health's “Hello Humankindness” campaign is about general human kindness, not hospital kindness.

Dignity Health is dedicating resources to discovering key factors that affect the patient's experience, and it is making efforts to improve that experience for every patient. The organization

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also encourages employees, physicians and staff to rediscover what it was about medicine that pulled their hearts into the profession in the first place, and then liberate that calling in their current roles and situations. These are examples of things that manifest the essence of the Dignity Health mission beyond a tag line or a TV spot.

Form has to adjust and adapt, but essence is formed early and changes little in enduring leaders and organizations. As with every Catholic health care system, the real key to leadership and organizational integrity is choosing every day to live out the essential mission in the face of the strong headwinds of change and even outright opposition. But to have only form, even great form, without essence is to lack the critical fusion of style and substance, tag line and brand, that will cause the leader and the organization to not merely survive, but to thrive.

Whatever became of The Massachusetts Humane Society and its huts of refuge? The Society eventually ceded its lifesaving mission to the U.S. Coast Guard, and what remains of the refuge huts have been turned into museums or yacht clubs. The Society still meets for fellowship and to recognize acts of community service, but it doesn't save lives anymore. The form without the essence of the once compelling undertaking called The Massachusetts Humane Society is a historical memento.

For Catholic health care to retain the essential character of its mission, it always needs to remember the urgent need for which it was formed — revealing and extending the healing presence of God in the world.

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JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, November - December 2015
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