



THE PASSION CONVERSATION

A Guide for Falling Madly in Love
with the People your Business Serves

BRAINS ON FIRE

In the three years since our first book, *Brains on Fire*, was published we've done a lot of thinking about *love* and how it relates to business and word-of-mouth marketing. We've also given a lot of thought to the word *passion*.

We've wondered over and over again—at first to ourselves, then aloud to one another—is passion something that can be unearthed in someone? Can it be taught? Is it real? It is overused or misused? Does it belong in business, or is it a word best saved for artists, romance novels, religious stories, or 20-year-old lovebirds who can't stand the thought of being apart?

We've asked ourselves over the years why the following lesson from our last book gets tweeted and repeated over and over and over and over again.

“It’s not about the product conversation;
it’s about the passion conversation.”

Hmmmm. We got a few thoughts on that...

The manifesto you're reading is called The Passion Conversation. We don't take that deliberate choice of words lightly. Can we really write something worthy of such a lofty title? Who knows? But we do know the following:

The Passion Conversation
is a **LOVE STORY.**

It's in our DNA as human beings to share things we find valuable and meaningful with others. We talk about things (*and people*) we love often and with a force that sticks.

We believe with all our hearts and souls, it is possible, *absolutely possible*, to fall madly and passionately in love with the people you serve.

And we believe that it's possible for those folks to fall in love with *you*, too; and, yes, for you to become famous and grow your organization because of that love. If you want people to be in love with you and talk about you, you must fall in love with them *first*. Your clients, customers, donors, tribe, employees, advocates—what you call them doesn't really matter—can and should become beloved heroes in your organizations.

Because guess what naturally happens when you're in love? You talk about that person you love constantly. You can't wait to be with them. You think about how you can surprise them. You inspire them. They inspire you. You share secrets. You want to understand them. You have empathy. You defend them. You have compassion. You are deeply connected.

Passion is contagious.

As business owners, marketers, or Chief Love Officers (a title we think more relevant than Chief Marketing Officer) we should feel wildly romantic and passionate about the people who help fuel our businesses and spread our causes.

Passion fuels word-of-mouth conversations and excitement. Our passions make us happy and let us know that life is worth living. They motivate us to do remarkable things. When we are passionate about someone, we really do talk about that person all the time. We're eager and excited to share the tiniest details. Spend just a few minutes around a new parent and you'll see what we mean.

Passion is not something you *own*; it's something you pass forward. So if you take the time to understand your own unique passion conversation—*and yes, we believe everyone has them*—as well as the ones that excite those you serve, something amazing will happen.

That's exactly what we've done to grow our own business over the years. Not only have we fallen in love with our customers, we received the permission and indeed the honor to get to know and care for our customers' customers. We are village matchmakers, facilitators, the Cupid of marketing companies. It's our role to help connect our customers with their employees and customers through shared passions.

Don't just take our word for it.

What does it take to fall in love with your advocates, the customers and employees who are ready, willing, and happy to fall in love with you? The people who therefore willingly and passionately talk about you?

Here are a few love notes we've learned on how to fall passionately and madly in love with your customers.

1 | Know yourself and clearly define what you really want from a relationship with your employees and customers. We hate it when companies talk about using fans to tell their story. Think about it: Do you really use people you care about? Absolutely not. You listen to them. You get close to them. You see them frequently. You want to be a meaningful part of their life.

When we begin working with a new client, we almost always start by listening to stories within that organization's walls. We have a day of knowledge sharing. We play games. We laugh. We hear their hopes and dreams. Our goal is to help the people we serve better define who they are and what they stand for. So, we spend time with the people who answer the phones. We observe them in action as they talk with their current and potential customers and supporters. We ask to see their love letters. We take photos of the things they hang on their walls and keep at their desks.

We talk to the people on the front lines as well as the CMOs and CEOs and brand managers. We spend time in meetings and just hang out socially to get know their passions.

Because you know what? Passion should be a mirror. Write that down or star it in the margins so you get it under your fingernails. The reflections should match; inside passion should mirror outside passion. You have to know what drives you and your employees to get up in the morning before you can connect with other like-minded people.

As author and speaker Simon Sinek says in his book, *Start with Why*, we go looking for your why. (By the way, if you haven't read Simon's book, do it. Right after you're done with this manifesto.)

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2 | Be very realistic about who your customers and potential customers really are.

If you're a not-for-profit, get an accurate picture of your volunteers and your donors.

Who's doing more than just writing a check once or twice a year and why? Start internally and ask yourself some tough questions. Who do you serve? What do they really look like?

What are their challenges? How and when do you fit in their lives? How can you add value?

For a brief time, we had a client in the beauty and fashion business. We discovered this client's customers were fairly average women, people who shopped at Walmart and Target and drove minivans. They were amazing, beautiful women who cared about looking their best, but they were not just off the cover of Vogue or Glamour. So we connected with them and started igniting a community around that connection. We found that they were real women with beauty and fashion tips and life stories (and struggles) to share.

The CEO was upset that the women we felt they should be celebrating and loving weren't magazine-glossy perfect. Some of them (heaven forbid!) were even overweight. He wanted to chase the pretty girl at the party, because that's who he wanted leading the community and talking on his company's behalf. That's what people in the beauty industry do. But the pretty girl in the room didn't want to talk to him and his brand. He missed the point entirely, and we resigned. (Most likely, before we were about to be fired.)

The point is you have to be very realistic about who your customers really are and not just who you want them to be. As most of us know from personal experiences, you can't make someone who is not interested in you love you. Write this down too: You can't choose your advocates; they choose you.

3 | Love can't be found sitting on your couch watching TV. There's a time to just chill and watch TV, just like there is a time to quietly pour over data and demographics. Make no mistake: We love data as much as the next company, but to really fall in love with your customers and find their passions, you have to take time to be with your customers. You have to get out and make real world connections. You have to meet people where they are. Join their parties and go to their football games.

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And for goodness sake, don't just come out and ask people, "What's your passion?" It's a personal and emotional question and one that's pretty hard to answer without any warning or opportunity for forethought.

You have to earn trust to learn about someone's true passions and trust takes time. Let's be honest. The first requirement in finding the passion conversation is pretty simple: You have to enjoy being with people.

4 | You can discover love and learn a lot online. There are tons of ways to listen to and participate in the conversations your customers and potential customers are having online. We partner with many smart companies who can help do just that. So exactly what can you learn from listening to these online conversations? A lot.

You might find out people are tuning you out, or that they are crying bullshit on your entire industry. By using today's online technology, everyone has the ability to meet people who share similar interests, people who they would have never been able to meet in "real life."

When we get a new client, we do two Google searches: "I love _____ (fill in client name)." And "I hate _____ (fill in client name)." This helps us narrow down where the passionate

conversations, both positive and negative, are taking place. You can learn a lot about passion at both ends of the emotional spectrum.

5 | Love is patient and kind. You cannot find the passion conversation, ignite community and fall in love overnight. Sure, there are one-night stands that might feel good at the time (perhaps the marketing equivalent of this is a successful campaign). But for real and lasting relationships to take hold, you have to be in it for the long haul.

Igniting community and sparking movements are not like traditional ad campaigns. Ad campaigns have an on and off switch. You create them, run them, cross your fingers and hope for the best. Building community and loving your customers is not something you do for a limited amount of time. It's something you do every single day. And the value of that effort grows exponentially stronger and deeper with time.

6 | Meeting people through activities is a low-pressure way of getting to know them, and also will encourage bonding. We almost always bring our clients together with their potential community leaders because a requirement of any movement is to have have inspirational leadership. We bring companies and customers together to engage in a multiday summit or training session in an impressive venue. We encourage everyone to let go and enjoy themselves as we learn about each other. People share and form trust, and memories are created.

There's a little secret in the dating world that *The Game* author Neil Strauss calls "time-distortion." (Though definitely not a business book, there are few good marketing lessons hidden in there.) "Time-distortion" occurs when you go to several different places with a person or group you've just met in a short period of time.

Maybe you first go bowling, then to a restaurant, then out for ice cream, then for a nightcap. By creating memories in several different locations, it seems like you've known each other for longer than just one evening. This approach makes sense; after all we feel more familiar around people with whom we've shared fun places and experiences. And while this takes time and effort in business relationships, it's worth it.

7 | Be realistic and take a stand. You'll make some mistakes along the way and you'll even change your mind. You'll encounter a few dead ends while building lasting relationships and igniting community with your customers and your employees. This can get frustrating, but don't give up. Keep going. It's important to enjoy the process of expanding your community and connecting through shared passions.

Not everyone will love you when you take a strong stand, and that's okay. You won't be everyone's cup of tea, so don't take it personally. You don't have to—in fact it's impossible to connect

with everyone. You might even push a few people away, but that will actually turn out for the best since the people who are turned off by your passions will never be your advocates or customers.

8 | Become familiar. Studies have shown that proximity is a significant factor in falling in love. The more someone becomes familiar to you, the more positive emotions you will feel around them—and the more the attraction increases.

In order to get closer to someone, you need to have lots of contact with them. How can you provide platforms and content that add frequent, maybe even daily value? How can you create events that bond you to your clients? How can you give more than you get?

Once a year at Brains on Fire we bring in our employees and current and potential customers together for the Fire Sessions, a day of sharing and learning. We invite speakers we've met in our travels to share their research, experiences, and stories. We eat together, we talk, we laugh, and most importantly, we share. People start connecting with us months in advance, asking when the Fire Sessions are going to be, and if they can bring a friend.

This is a lot of work, but it's one of our favorite events because everyone in our company gets to interact with our customers and advocates. And good things happen. For starters, we remember our why—something that does wonders to refuel our passion conversations.

SPARKING
~~WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING~~
LOVE & PASSION

9 | The passion conversation isn't about getting people to talk about YOU, the brand.

It's about getting people to talk about themselves. Encourage others to talk about themselves, their lives, their hopes and their dreams. Create platforms, online and offline, for the people you serve to share their own stories. Give them opportunities to talk and be willing to listen.

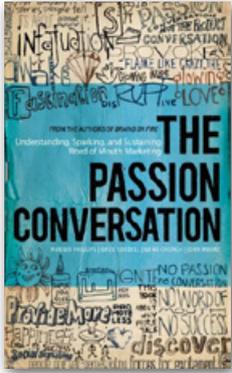
It's possible to learn to fall madly in love with your employees and your customers, and in the process unearth your own passion conversation.

It's about *people*, stupid.

We're not really in the marketing business these days. We're in the people business. This makes sense for us because marketing nowadays is more about reframing the work you do in the world to inspire your employees and customers. The most successful word-of-mouth-driven businesses in the world have always been in the business of inspiring people.

Good stuff happens when you're in the people business. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Robbin Phillips, Greg Cordell, Geno Church, and John Moore work together at the word of mouth marketing and identity company Brains on Fire. Along with others in the Brains on Fire tribe, they partner with some of the most fearless businesses and organizations on the planet to ignite movements through the contagious power of passionate people. Robbin is the courageous President of Brains on Fire and truly believes love is a circular transaction. Greg is the Chief Inspiration Officer, which means his job is to find inspiration where no one else is looking. Geno is the Word of Mouth Pathfinder, helping to find and nurture the passion conversation inside every business. John is the Chief of Wahoo, helping clients grow and fostering learners and leaders within the Brains on Fire tribe.

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