

Chapter One

Warmth and Competence

The two timeless judgments that drive our behavior toward others

During the summer of 2012, Theresa Cook, age eighty-four, was dying of pancreatic cancer in a hospital in Nashua, New Hampshire. Her twenty-one-year-old grandson Brandon was at Theresa's bedside, feeling helpless because she had lost her appetite, and the hospital food didn't appeal to her. What she would really like, she told Brandon, was her favorite food: clam chowder in a bread bowl from the local Panera Bread shop.

It was a Tuesday, and when Brandon called over to Panera on Amherst Street, he discovered that during the summer they made clam chowder only on Fridays. Brandon said he didn't think his grandmother could wait. In three days, she might not be able to eat at all. Suzanne Fortier, the manager of the Nashua Panera, got on the phone, and without missing a beat, asked him to come right over. She told her staff about the special request, and they got to work pulling out the fixings and putting a pot of clam chowder on the stove. By the time Brandon arrived from

the hospital, his order had been bagged up, along with a box of cookies for Brandon. Suzanne told Brandon there was no charge and to keep her posted. If his grandmother needed more soup, she said, he should just give a call.

Brandon went home that day and posted a status update to his Facebook friends. He gave a brief account of Suzanne Fortier's and her staff's kindness toward him and his grandmother. Then his mom reposted his update to *her* friends—but she also tagged Panera's corporate page, as well. Within days, Brandon's Facebook post had racked up 730,000 likes and drawn 24,000 comments. Many commenters jumped to conclusions about Panera—positive conclusions of a kind you'd love to see if you were a Panera executive or franchisee:

“Panera seems like a wonderful company.”

“Glad to hear that there are folks out there that still care for their neighbors and community . . .”

“CHEERS TO PANERA for following the ‘Golden Rule.’

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you—
and a little kindness goes a long way—there shall be
showers of Blessings on this business.”

“Bravo to Panera Bread! Goodness in food, and goodness in people!”

“What a great story, I have never heard of Panera but I will be sure to try the first one I come across. It's awesome to see how far a little kindness can go.”

Many of the online comments reflected the forgone conclusion that Panera Bread was responsible for this act of generosity, but that wasn't really the case. During the ensuing media coverage, Suzanne Fortier explained to interviewers that she'd only done what she felt was decent and right. As the mother of three sons, one of them Brandon's age, she explained that she was impressed by young man's devotion to his grandmother, and she wanted to help.

We make such leaps of logic, attributing the actions of a Panera manager to Panera the company, as an extension of our gift for detecting warmth and competence in others. Research shows that people will judge a single act of generosity as evidence of a generous personality, simply as an effortless, routine by-product of categorizing the act itself as being generous. From the moment of observing someone's single action to inferring that person's seeming personality, we just "know," and we don't even think about how we know.¹

However, the thoughtful initiative Fortier showed that day happens to be encouraged by Panera's culture. When it comes to community and relationship building, Panera Bread truly is an exceptional company. It was the first national restaurant chain to make a policy of taking end-of-day baked goods to food banks and homeless shelters. It was the first to offer its customers free and open Wi-Fi access. It was also the first chain to put the calorie counts of all its foods on its menus. None of these steps have caused Panera to sacrifice profits. Instead, these measures taken with its customers' interests in mind have helped make Panera the most successful restaurant chain in the first decade of the new millennium. Between 2000 and 2010, Panera outperformed every other stock in the Russell 1000.² It's one of those brands that has done well by doing good.

The reason that the story of Suzanne Fortier and Panera Bread went viral online is that we have a spontaneous and immediate attraction to signs of warmth and competence in others. Warmth and competence judgments prompt us to feel friendly toward some and alienated by others. Warmth and competence judgments explain why some inspire our loyalty while others provoke only feelings of suspicion.

Decades of social science research have shown that within the two broad categories of warmth and competence perception, detailed dimensions of how we perceive others can be measured and interpreted to reveal the predictable patterns of emotions and

behaviors that result from them. Warmth is judged by assessing whether one is kind, friendly, and good-natured; whether one appears sincere, honest, moral, and trustworthy; and whether one possesses an accommodating orientation and is perceived as helpful, tolerant, fair, generous, and understanding.

Next, we assess people's overall level of competence to understand how successful they would be in carrying out their intentions towards us. Are they stronger or weaker than I am? How much status do they possess? What special resources do they have that make them capable of helping or hurting me? Competence is judged by assessing whether one possesses special resources, skills, creativity, or intelligence that grants them an advantage. Do they appear efficient, capable, skillful, clever, and knowledgeable? Do they seem to possess the confidence and ability to carry out their plans?

These judgments are a remarkably simple but powerful mode of social perception that, by some measures, influences more than 80 percent of all human social behavior. We use warmth and competence to assess not just people, but *everything* in our lives that acts or seems to act of its own free will. So we make warmth and competence judgments about people, groups of people, pets, animal species, teams, companies, brands, and nations. And when the car sometimes "acts up" or when the computer seems to have a mind of its own, we even make warmth and competence judgments about inanimate objects.

Recall the times you have walked down a dark street as a shadowy figure approaches from far off. Your senses immediately go on alert to detect the stranger's intentions toward you. Does the stranger look at you? Is it a casual glance, indicating no threat? Or is it a stare, ambiguous in intent? Just as our ancient ancestors did, you need to judge instantly with imperfect information whether this person intends you well or ill. These immediate judgments of intent assess the stranger's warmth (apparent friendliness or trustworthiness) or its absence. Your reaction, based on this judgment, can be a matter of life or death.

At this same moment, you must also judge how well the stranger can act upon this apparent warm or cold intent you've detected. Is the stranger large or small? Young or old? Male or female? Walking with a swagger or with a limp? Is that a weapon in the stranger's hand or just a bag of groceries? The stranger's apparent competence—the ability to act on intentions—determines how seriously you need to consider your assessment of those intentions.

These two perceptual dimensions, of warmth and competence, are basic to our humanity.³ To survive and thrive long enough to grow up and have children of their own, our distant ancestors had to judge the intentions and abilities of others quickly and with adequate accuracy to avoid danger. But they also needed to infer with some reliability the warm intent and competent abilities of others, in order to build the relationships necessary to access food, clothing, shelter, and protection offered by tribe or alliance—all of which are just as critical to survival.

Studies show that of the two dimensions, warmth comes earliest and carries more weight in our perceptions. We are highly sensitive to warmth and its absence. Studies show, for example, that you are judged for your trustworthiness within a split second of someone's seeing your face. Moments later, you'll be judged for your competence.⁴ Even seemingly minor comments, actions, or appearances can suggest negative intentions that set off emotional alarm bells heard only in the unconscious.

Warm implies trustworthy. Rightly or wrongly, we judge other people's trustworthiness after seeing their faces for a fraction of a second, in the blink of an eye.⁵ Imagine someone wide-eyed, with a hint of a smile: the picture of innocence. People with slightly surprised, happy faces and baby-faced people tend to gain our trust almost immediately.⁶ Conversely, we immediately distrust people with furrowed brows or frowning, angry faces, judging them cautiously and with suspicion.

Our judgments of competence arrive a fraction of a second more slowly, in maybe two eye-blinks. People with strong,

dominant faces tend to win our immediate respect as competent (whether they are or not), and we conversely assume that people who look weak and submissive are actually incompetent, no matter the objective truth. Snap competence judgments of this kind can even predict election outcomes. Research participants shown photos of unfamiliar out-of-state political candidates were able to pick out the winners on the basis of assumed competence two-thirds of the time.⁷

The human face was, in a sense, the first “brand logo”—a rough visual representation of the person’s general demeanor in terms of warmth and competence. Our abilities to make these judgments develop so early in life that even babies are able to recognize which puppets and animated characters have good or bad intentions and are able to act competently.⁸ Perception of warmth, in particular, predates verbal communication. Consider how parents comfort infants by holding them close. Even baby orphaned monkeys prefer a warm surrogate “mother” fixture blanketed and warmed by a light bulb, compared to a cold wire-mesh mother, despite the wire-mesh mother’s providing a feeding bottle. The baby monkeys would rather be warm than fed.⁹

We are so profoundly attracted to warm feelings that social acceptance makes people *feel* physically warmer, while rejection makes them feel colder.¹⁰ Test subjects holding warm beverages behave more generously toward strangers than when they are holding cold beverages.¹¹

Research suggests that competence also has bodily manifestations. Taller candidates routinely win presidential elections.¹² People who are literally higher up seem like leaders.¹³ People who take up space dominate people who take up less space,¹⁴ as do people making fists.¹⁵ Standing strong—“power posing”—raises testosterone, lowers the stress hormone cortisol, and emboldens decision making.¹⁶ (Try this before the job interview, but not during.) All such larger-than-life physical stances effectively convey dominance, status, and competence to others.

Over a period of decades, social psychologists have identified the warmth dimension by a variety of names such as morality, communality, and “social good-bad.” Social psychologists also measure the warmth dimension by asking test subjects to rate other individuals or groups on the basis of perceived traits such as *warm*, *friendly*, *likeable*, *trustworthy*, *honest*, and *sincere*.¹⁷ Regardless of the specific terms, all are consistent with warm, worthy intentions.

Likewise, psychologists have identified the competence dimension variously as “capability,” “agency,” and “task good-bad.”¹⁸ Perceptions of competence can be measured by asking test subjects to rate individuals and groups for traits such as *capable*, *intelligent*, and *skilled*, all of which pertain to the ability to act on intentions.

The fundamental dimensions of warmth and competence make the most sense when they are combined to reflect distinctive sets of emotions and behavioral responses. Each combined pattern of warmth and competence perceptions leads to a predictable set of human emotions, and those emotions stimulate a predictable pattern of behavior, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Susan began her academic career studying this body of classic person-perception research and then went on to study how we categorize people into social groups by gender, age, ethnicity, and social class. For example, career women, rich people, and highly successful minority groups are often perceived by society

Figure 1.1. The Warmth and Competence Model

Warmth Assessment	Competence Assessment	Emotional Response	Behavioral Response
Warm	+ Competent	→ Admiration, Pride	→ Attraction, Affiliation Alliance
Cold	+ Competent	→ Envy, Jealousy	→ Obligatory Association, Potential Sabotage
Warm	+ Incompetent	→ Sympathy, Pity	→ Patronizing Help, Social Neglect
Cold	+ Incompetent	→ Contempt, Disgust	→ Rejection, Avoidance

at large as being competent but cold; therefore they are envied and begrudged. Disabled people and the elderly are pitied and neglected because they are considered to be warm but incompetent. Research reveals that homeless people, drug addicts, and welfare recipients elicit feelings of contempt and disgust in other people, providing evidence that society rejects such people as being both cold and incompetent. Only groups that reflect the American society's "in-group" ideal picture of itself, such as "middle class" and "citizens," are judged by most people to be admirable for being both warm and competent.

Investigations of these patterns led Susan, along with Amy Cuddy and Peter Glick, to propose the "stereotype content model (SCM)" and the "BIAS (behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes) map" by which individual members of society are judged by the majority according to the perception of their respective group's warmth and competence.¹⁹ Dozens of studies in other countries using this model have shown similar patterns of warmth and competence judgments.²⁰ "Out-groups" judged as incompetent and cold are despised by the majority in every society. Successful and highly competent "out-groups," such as rich people and entrepreneurial minorities, are also judged as "cold," and therefore are commonly treated with envy and suspicion.

Figure 1.2. Stereotype Content Model (SCM)

	Low Competence	High Competence
High Warmth	Older, disabled Pity	In-group, allies, middle class Pride
Low Warmth	Poor, homeless, immigrants Disgust	Rich, professionals Envy

Some of society's darkest and most powerful forces—gender bias, prejudice, ethnic bigotry, and discrimination—rely on the same spontaneous survival mechanism that prompts us to make snap judgments about individuals.²¹ In her book *Envy Up, Scorn Down*, Susan points out, however, that although prejudice is hardwired into human nature, acting on it remains a matter of personal choice. The challenge is to come to terms with these primal forces that guide our snap judgments, and then push past them in order to know other people as individuals, not stereotypes. “Solutions,” Susan writes, “focus on warmth.”²²

Brands Are People Too

For Chris, all the academic literature on warmth and competence served to confirm many of the concerns he had developed over two decades of researching customer behavior and brand marketing. Chris had long considered traditional brand management principles and practices as unnecessarily complicated and abstract. With the warmth and competence model, he saw a simpler and more direct way to measure our perceptions as customers—a method based on social science and grounded in the fundamental way that people spontaneously perceive, respond to, and judge the world around them.

Consider first that every corporation is literally a body (*corpus*), and as customers, we perceive them as acting with intention and volition, just as we perceive other people. Human psychology has encoded in us the imperative to be wary of others, but also the sense that they have warm intentions toward us and might offer us something of value. Out of our need to secure access to resources, we perceive, judge, and trade with brands and companies just as our most distant ancestors did with people and social groups. To be human is to balance these conflicting impulses—to be on guard and to cooperate.

All of this stands to reason, but prior to 2010 it had never been scientifically tested. Leading marketing academics had proposed

related ideas. Susan Fournier and Jennifer Aaker had posited that people have personal brand relationships, with their own ups and downs.²³ Others have described the emotional side of brand relationships.²⁴ Along with our colleague Nico Kervyn, we set out to test the extent to which warmth and competence insights could be adapted and applied to study customer dynamics.

Susan and Chris's first collaborative study was launched in June 2010, during a period when several of America's best-known companies and brands were embroiled in unprecedented public relations turmoil. In the winter and spring of 2009–2010, the venerated Tylenol brand and its parent Johnson & Johnson were clumsily struggling through a series of embarrassing product recalls. The McNeil Consumer Healthcare unit initiated a string of ever-widening product recalls that included Tylenol Arthritis Pain Caplets, Benadryl, Motrin, Roloids, Simply Sleep, St. Joseph Aspirin, Tylenol, and more than forty types of children's and infants' products. By May 2010, the FDA had shuttered the primary manufacturing plant for Tylenol products in North America due to poor sanitary conditions and safety standard violations.

Around the same time, BP, the third-largest energy company in the world, was trying in vain to plug an undersea oil gusher created by the April 2010 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, which killed eleven workers. While this was under way, we asked one thousand U.S. adults to evaluate BP, Tylenol, and six other widely known companies and brands—Shell, Advil, McDonald's, Burger King, Tropicana, and Minute Maid. The objective was to quantify the extent to which warmth and competence influenced the behavior of customers, and to see how these crises had affected public perceptions of these companies and brands.

The findings were startling; they showed that companies and brands were judged so strongly along the lines of warmth and competence dimensions that these judgments explained nearly 50 percent of all purchase intent, loyalty, and likelihood to recommend a brand or company. To put that 50 percent figure in perspective,

consumer research is normally considered to be significant if it reveals a new variable explaining as little as 15 percent of customer behavior.

The customers in our study showed widespread distrust for BP and reported a low rate of purchase intent and brand loyalty for BP locations, about 40 percent lower than for Shell stations. The results for Tylenol, however, showed that the brand was largely unharmed by the bad publicity surrounding its product recalls and FDA actions. Tylenol scored twice as high as BP on such warmth characteristics as “honest and trustworthy” and “acts in the customer’s best interests.” In fact, customers reported substantially higher purchase intent and brand loyalty for Tylenol than for its competitor, Advil, even though the Advil brand had enjoyed a blemish-free record.

Customers appeared to have interpreted Tylenol’s production problems to be a short-term, forgivable lapse in competence that did not impair its reputation for warm intentions. Tylenol’s maker, Johnson & Johnson, has long acted on a companywide credo that directs employees to put customers first. The company’s behavior in the face of Tylenol product-tampering deaths in 1982 became a textbook case of effective crisis management. McNeil Consumer Healthcare eventually took the same extraordinary and selfless actions J&J had become known for in 1982. After a stinging FDA report on poor production conditions at its main Tylenol production plant in Pennsylvania, McNeil voluntarily shut the plant for retooling, effectively removing Tylenol from store shelves and costing the company hundreds of millions of dollars. Through the parent company’s willingness to take large financial hit and go far beyond what the situation required, Tylenol retained the trust of consumers.

BP, in contrast, had led with defensive words instead of selfless actions when the Deepwater Horizon blew up and sank in the Gulf of Mexico. BP spokespeople laid blame with the rig’s owner and sought to minimize the extent of the oil spill. CEO

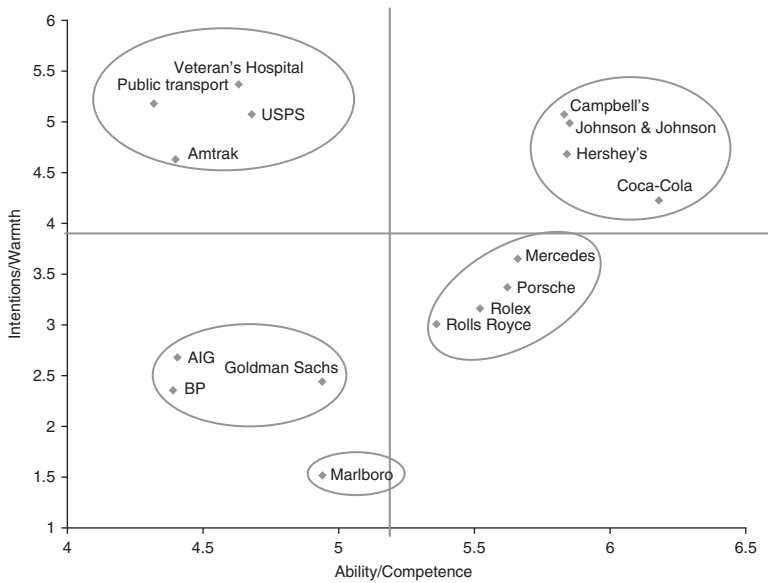
Tony Hayward insisted that the environmental impact would be “very, very modest.” He pleaded ignorance of the company’s operations and deflected responsibility in Congressional testimony. Underwater cameras recorded in real time the company’s failures to staunch the gusher of oil polluting the gulf, cementing the image of BP as fundamentally incompetent. And with a record of recent safety failures that included a deadly refinery explosion in 2005 and an Alaskan oil spill in 2006, BP had no store of goodwill on which to draw.

A key element of Chris and Susan’s work together is how perceptions like these become reality in the public mind. The research explores how we talk about the companies and brands we buy from: “My cable company doesn’t respect my time.” “My insurance company hates me.” “My computer loves me.” A peer-reviewed, academic study subsequently showed how warmth and competence dimensions drive people’s purchase and loyalty behavior.²⁵

The study, involving well-known companies, showed recognizable clusters of brands spread out across the intentions-and-ability matrix (see Figure 1.3). The most popular brands—Hershey’s, Johnson & Johnson, Campbell’s, and Coca-Cola—all landed in the well-intentioned, capable quadrant of high warmth and high competence. People admired them, said they would purchase from them, and expressed loyalty to them.

Troubled brands—which included BP, AIG, Goldman Sachs, and Marlboro—all rated as low on ability and low on intentions. People expressed neither planned purchase nor expected loyalty. These brands landed in the “contempt and disgust” quadrant, ranking low on both warmth and competence.

Luxury brands—Mercedes, Porsche, Rolls Royce, and Rolex—rated high on ability but tended to score low on good intentions. People reported feeling envy toward these as a result of their ability to enact their intentions. Both dimensions strongly predicted purchase and loyalty behavior.

Figure 1.3. Brand Warmth-and-Competence Matrix

Source: Adapted from “Brands as intentional agents framework,” Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, April 2012.

Finally, government-subsidized corporations fell into the region of sympathetic and pitied brands. The U.S. Postal Service, Veteran’s Administration hospitals, Amtrak, and public transportation agencies were all regarded as well-intended but incompetent. Again, both dimensions predicted purchase and loyalty—their intentions ranked positively but perceptions of competence were low.

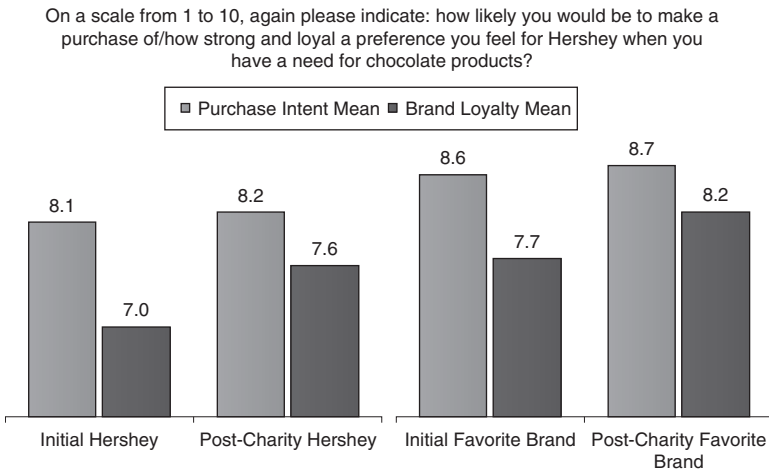
The research confirmed that customers reward perceptions of warmth and competence with feelings of admiration, purchases, and customer loyalty. Just as we all assess other human beings, we also assess the intentions and abilities of companies and brands. Perceptions of a company’s intentions and abilities trigger specific customer emotions, which in turn drive customer behavior. Companies and brands win our affiliation and loyalty just as real people do, by worthy intentions and capability, through warmth and competence.

A larger follow-up research project, focused on chocolate manufacturer Hershey in 2011, helped illuminate the extent to which customer loyalty is enhanced by the perception of warm intentions in particular. In this study, customers rated Hershey higher on warmth and competence than any of the other twenty-six companies studied to that point. And yet, few of Hershey's customers are aware that the majority ownership of Hershey's is in the hands of a philanthropic charitable trust. The majority of Hershey profits are devoted to funding the Milton Hershey School in Pennsylvania, the nation's largest boarding school for underprivileged children.

The research was designed to test the hypothesis that customers would view philanthropic efforts by a particular brand or company as a reflection of the warmth and competence of the people leading that brand. The question was whether customers would internalize those perceptions as an indicator of what they could expect in their own dealings with that brand or company, and whether those perceptions would in turn increase brand loyalty.

Because Hershey's philanthropy isn't widely known, it provided an ideal test case among a demographically representative sample of U.S. customers. First the research captured the participants' brand perceptions, purchase intent, and loyalty toward Hershey. Then the participants were exposed to the story of the Hershey Trust's funding of the Milton Hershey School. They were questioned about their prior awareness of these charitable efforts and how this information impacted their views on the brand and company. Finally, they were asked once again about their perceptions, purchase intent, and loyalty toward Hershey.

As expected, very few customers were aware of Hershey's philanthropic roots, and nearly 80 percent of respondents indicated that their views of the Hershey Company and its employees and products were more favorable once they were aware of the story. The respondents reported more favorable perceptions of the Hershey brand across all warmth, competence, and social

Figure 1.4. Impact of Hershey Philanthropy Awareness

responsibility measures. Customers apparently conclude that Hershey's charitable heritage also indicates that the brand acts fairly toward its customers, employees, dairy farmer suppliers, and communities as well.

The Hershey's research results show how, in the mind of the customer, a company's people *are*, in fact, the primary basis of judgment. Customer loyalty and purchase intent were strongly influenced by what customers knew about the real people behind Hershey's, despite an already high baseline level for the brand. Just as important, the research showed how specific information about the intentions and behavior of the people behind companies and brands can significantly affect customer perceptions and loyalty to the products and services those people produce—even while the product itself remains unchanged.

To test this idea further, Susan and Chris performed another study in which one group of U.S. adults read about a hypothetical company "seen as consistently acting with the public's best interests in mind and having good intentions toward ordinary people." Another group read about a hypothetical company with the opposite traits, described as able or not: "(un)skilled

and (in)effective” and “having (lacking) the ability to implement its intentions.” Participants then rated the company on its warmth and competence, the emotions it aroused, and their own likely reactions.

Participants rewarded the well-intentioned, capable company with high ratings on warmth and competence, admiration, purchase intent, and loyalty. They punished the ill-intentioned, incapable company with low ratings on warmth and competence, higher contempt, and lower purchase and loyalty. The mixed companies mostly received appropriately mixed reactions.

For Ed Martin, Hershey’s director of international insights and new methods, these results offered him the ability for the first time to quantify the value of corporate social responsibility efforts for brand and company business results. As a self-described “believer in conscious capitalism and purposeful business,” Ed wanted to make those findings available to the larger philanthropic community in support of efforts to encourage corporate social responsibility. Since the study, Hershey has expanded its philanthropic activities and has also become more willing to talk about them.

We shared the details of our findings with McNeil, and the company used our study to articulate in internal meetings precisely how they differed from findings about companies and brands that had seen significant decreases in customer loyalty and purchase intent following recalls. McNeil then commissioned a deeper study, conducted in April-May 2011, designed in part to determine how warmth and competence insights might greatly accelerate Tylenol’s recovery upon its planned relaunch in the market.

The Language of Loyalty

The Coca-Cola Company employs a sophisticated brand equity model to measure and track the strength of its connections to

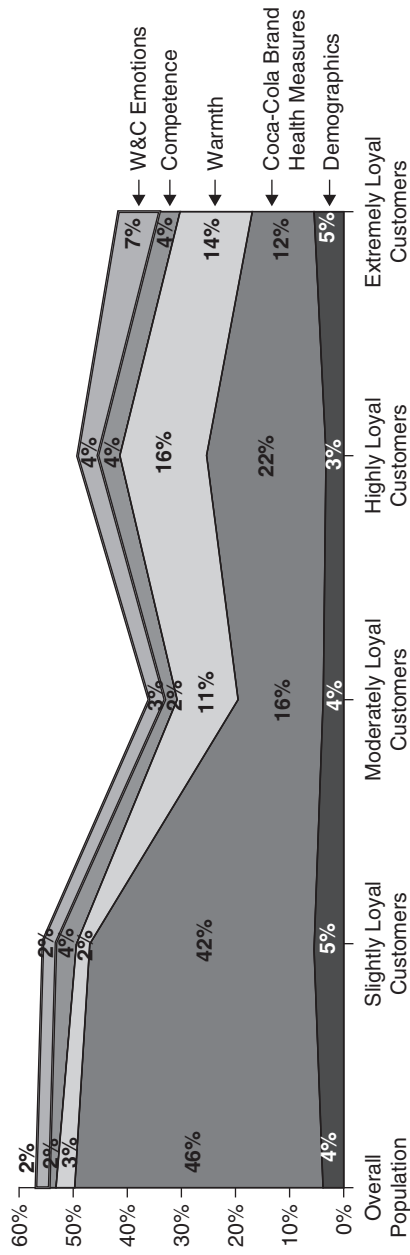
customers through market research in over two hundred countries. The company has used these tools to predict customer behavior, and identify areas requiring improvement to generate purchase and loyalty growth. However, Coca-Cola consumption had been steadily slipping for the past few years, even though all of the measures of brand health tracked remained relatively stable. Chris worked with Coca-Cola's vice president for marketing strategy & insights, Stan Sthanunathan, and its director of marketing research, Clare Hulsey, to add warmth and competence dimensions to the company's model; they then analyzed the results extensively.

The company's existing model explained nearly 50 percent of customer behavior—a very good batting average, as any marketing researcher would tell you. But the addition of warmth and competence dimensions increased the model's explanatory power to 58 percent. When the results were examined in greater detail, however, a curious pattern emerged. The warmth and competence model was much more effective in identifying loyalty behavior among Coca-Cola's most passionately committed customers. Moving up Coca-Cola's customer loyalty hierarchy, from casual purchasers to fanatical supporters, the existing model's predictive strength went down dramatically, while the predictive strength of warmth and competence went up. Coca-Cola's existing brand health model was least accurate with the company's most loyal and valuable customers. For its most loyal customers, the warmth and competence dimensions improved the predictive validity of Coca-Cola's brand equity model by 146 percent.

This result provided us with a very valuable insight: the stronger the relationship between Coca-Cola and a customer, the more closely that relationship resembles a one-on-one human relationship in terms of warmth and competence.

All this research suggests that if companies are going to succeed with customers in the Relationship Renaissance, a new language of loyalty is needed, one built around warmth and competence.

Figure 1.5. Coca-Cola Purchase Intent Explained at Differing Loyalty Levels



Our loyalty as customers doesn't commit us to abstract companies or brands. Rather, we become loyal to what we experience, learn, or infer about the intentions of people behind those companies and brands. And we don't even need to know those people first-hand. Related research on computers and websites as "social agents" shows that we rely on warmth and competence even when engaging in commerce online. Computers easily gain personalities, and test subjects act politely toward computers they interact with.²⁶ We exercise politeness toward websites,²⁷ consistent with the idea that we humanize our technology, just as we humanize our contacts with brands and companies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that people were likely the first "brands" and human faces perhaps the first "logos," meaning that all the branded trade and commerce that has unfolded over the past several thousand years is simply our adaptive response to a civilized world in which we enjoy the benefits of products and services made by "unseen hands." Our mental apparatus perceives brands as stand-ins for people, logos as substitutes for faces, and companies as the equivalent of a tribe or social group. Accordingly, we perceive, judge, and interact with everything in our world in the way we have evolved to interact with other humans.

We all inherently know that a bottle of Coca-Cola is an inanimate object. But we also know it is produced by a company and that the company is made up of people. And despite the fact that we may not have any direct contact with any of those people, we can infer insights about them from Coca-Cola's packaging, its product's quality, the things we hear from others, and our first-hand experience with the product. And as the Hershey study showed, the more we find out about the intentions and abilities of the people behind the product, the more likely we are to become their loyal customers. To that extent, the best companies and brands, the ones we bond with, are those that we are most easily able to relate to and evaluate on the basis of their human characteristics.

This insight, profound in its implications, runs counter to how companies and brands have been managed for the past fifty years. If we perceive, judge, and become loyal to companies and brands using the same warmth and competence thought processes we use to form relationships with other people, it appears that companies have been pursuing customer loyalty on the basis of a number of mistaken premises.

For instance, conventional wisdom in the business world tells us that customer loyalty is synonymous with repeat patronage. Loyalty, by this reasoning, is simply the continued purchase of a product or service over a particular period of time, regardless of how and why it happens. Our studies suggest, however, that purchase behavior by itself is a poor indicator of whether customers have strong and loyal relationships with companies and brands. In fact, our research suggests that continued patronage and genuine customer loyalty are two entirely different things.

Why are Tylenol customers more loyal than Advil customers? What motivates increased loyalty in Hershey's buyers? What is the basis of brand loyalty among Coca-Cola's most ardent fans? None of these questions can be answered by measuring repeat patronage. They can be satisfied only through the lens of warmth and competence.

These findings, along with the rise of the Relationship Renaissance, call for a new approach by businesses, one that seeks to build trust-based relationships with us as their customers. They need to demonstrate a lasting commitment to us before they can expect our commitment to them in terms of repeat purchases. The very definition and language of customer loyalty needs to be rethought. It needs to reflect not how loyal and committed customers are to companies and brands, but rather how loyal and committed are they to us.