



Identity Insights

*Information and ideas about what's going on
beneath the surface of our lives*

The Identity Circle Viewletter

Issue Twenty Two | June 2014

Count your lucky STARZ (before your competition does)

Starbucks must like smart people. The company just announced it will provide a free online college education to thousands of its workers, without requiring that they remain with the company, through an unusual arrangement with Arizona State University. The offer is being extended to the 135,000 U.S. employees. That's a lot of potential brain power.

In the tradition of famous word couplings, think "Branjolina" and "bromance," **let's call this partnership "STARZ."**

There are conditions and many details that come along with STARZ, but I won't bore you with those; they miss my point. If you want to read about them, here's a [New York Times article](#) that ran June 16.

What matters is this: Starbucks understands the intimate connection between coffee and education, between purpose and profit. They understand the power of being -- and being seen as -- an *institution*.

Up with institutions!

Institutions have gotten a bad rap. The word conjures up images of facilities that care for people who have serious mental and emotional problems. If not that, the idea of institution is often synonymous with big, lumbering, bureaucratic, dusty, old-line, faceless corporations. (Insurance companies come to mind.)

But there is another understanding of institution that is as positive and compelling as these more common notions are depressing and off-putting. And that understanding holds the secret of what it takes to succeed, if you want your company to thrive and endure.



Larry Ackerman

Founder and President

The Identity Circle

**"Education is the
oxygen of progress. It
breeds curiosity,
innovation and
opportunity -- the stuff
society needs to stay
healthy."**

Past Newsletters

[DesCartes' Trap](#)

[And more...](#)

Want to get a

Taken from Webster's Dictionary, a key definition of **an institution is "an organization that has a relationship with the culture or society of which it is necessarily a part."**

The operative word here is "necessarily," meaning, you don't have a choice. Like it or not, your company is in a relationship, not just with its customers and other traditional stakeholders, but with humanity-at-large. Which leads me to the secret I refer to above ...

All value flows upstream

Companies that behave as institutions automatically connect themselves with fundamental societal needs, which when met, lead to trust and loyalty among the populations they touch.

Such concerns create value from the bottom up. They realize that the headwaters of value creation aren't at the point of product development, engineering, manufacturing, or marketing; they rest with society, which is where human needs and desires are born. **It is only in working its way back "upstream" that a company can come to know and capitalize on its true potential for value creation.** Which brings me back to STARZ.

By committing to fund some or all of an employee's college education, Howard Schultz, founder and CEO of Starbucks, and his team have elected to operate as a full-fledged institution. (Yes, they still need to sell coffee.)

Shortly after the company announced its plans, [Starbucks' critics](#) came out of the woodwork, pointing fingers at various aspects of the program. Some of their concerns are probably well-founded, but who cares. They don't get it. **Starbucks is playing on a larger stage and for bigger stakes.** Ironically, the criticisms of its program will most likely help the company fine-tune that program, over time.

In an OpEd piece the next day, [Times writer, Joe Nocera lauded the program](#), in particular, Starbucks' academic partner, Arizona State for seeking new and innovative ways to educate people. Universities are indeed institutions in the best sense of the word.

Connecting Starbucks and Arizona State is truly symbiotic, with a potentially great and positive impact for thousands of people today, and many more in the future. Why? Because **education is the oxygen of progress.** It breeds curiosity, innovation and opportunity -- the stuff society needs to stay healthy. In Starbucks' case, an investment in education will breed profits, too.

handle on your
value-creating
potential?

Go to the
[Identity Discovery
Deck](#)
to learn more

[TheIdentityCircle.com](#)

[Identity Beacon](#)

Call
203.227.8589

The Identity Circle

is dedicated to helping individuals and organizations thrive. We offer personal coaching, workshops, and self-guided tools to help people build fulfilling, successful lives -- and strategy development for companies seeking greater brand impact and employee engagement.

 Send to a Colleague

What does STARZ mean to you?

Let's get personal.

- **If you're a CEO**, have you taken steps to forge an institutional strategy that has the same rigor as your business strategy?
- **As an employee**, ask yourself if your company is reaping the benefits that come from operating as an institution. What's the link between your company and the culture or society of which it is necessarily a part?
- **If you're a job seeker**, check into whether prospective employers have STARZ-like qualities. Are they purpose-driven? Do they have a deep sense of identity that connects them to humanity-at-large? You'll be happier in your new position, if they do.
- **If you're an investor**, seek out concerns that consciously and conscientiously act as institutions. Remember: All value flows upstream.

Are there other STARZ in the sky?

Of course, there are. I'd argue that Google is one. So is Zappos and Whole Foods. Some are large, well-known concerns. Some fly under the popular radar. What do you think? What companies do you believe are STARZ-like and why?

Weigh in at [Identity Beacon](#). The world needs more STARZ.



Join
us!

A **Read More** feature of **Identity Insights**
Discover How To...

... Stop being "busy"

Are you busy? The question resonates in all walks of life. And it isn't just about how you spend your time. In my view, the question has become code for "are you important?" Here's a different and most welcome view about the value of busy. The article, by Guy Kawasaki, is entitled [Let's Stop the Glorification of Busy](#).

(c) 2014 Identity Insights is a trademark of The Identity Circle LLC.

