

The 15 Core Meanings:

Accomplishment—achieving goals and making something of oneself; a sense of satisfaction that can result from productivity, focus, talent, or status. Examples: American Express’ “membership has its privileges” and Nike’s “Just Do It”.

Beauty—the appreciation of qualities that give pleasure to the senses or spirit. Of course beauty is in the eye of the beholder and thus highly subjective, but our desire for it is ubiquitous. Beauty can be more than mere appearance. For some, it is a sense that something is created with an elegance of purpose and use. Examples include Bang & Olufsen and Jaguar.

Creation—the sense of having produced something new and original, and, in doing so, to have made a lasting contribution. Designers’ lives and careers are all about acknowledging and participating at this level of meaning.

Community—A sense of unity with others around us and a connection with other human beings. Examples include any religious community, fraternities, or club.

Duty—the willing application of oneself to a responsibility. The military in any country counts on the power of this meaning, as do many employers. Duty can also relate to responsibilities to oneself or family. Commercially, anything regarded as “good for you,” including vitamins, medications, and cushioned insoles, relays some sense of duty and the satisfaction it brings.

Enlightenment—clear understanding through logic or inspiration. This experience is not limited to those who meditate and fast, it is a core expectation of offerings from Fox News, which promises “fair and balanced” reporting, to the Sierra Club, which provides perspective on environmental threats and conservation.

Freedom—the sense of living without unwanted constraints. This experience often plays tug-of-war with the desire for security; more of one tends to decrease the other.

Harmony—the balanced and pleasing relationship of parts to a whole, whether in nature, society, ourselves, or in our homes.

Justice—the assurance of equitable and unbiased treatment.

Oneness—A sense of unity with everything around us. It is what some seek from the spirituality and what others expect from good tequila.

Redemption—Atonement or deliverance from past failure or decline. Though this often stems from negative experiences, the redemptive impact is highly positive. Like community and enlightenment, redemption has a basis in religion, but it also attracts customers to Weight Watchers and expensive spas.

Security—the freedom from worry about loss. This experience created the insurance business, and it continues to sell a wide range of products from automatic rifles to adult diapers.

Truth—A commitment to honesty and integrity. This experience plays an important role in most personal relationships, but it also is a key component of companies like Whole Foods, Volkswagen, and Newman’s Own, all of which portray themselves as simple, upright, and candid.

Validation—the recognition of oneself as a valued individual worthy of respect. Every externally branded product—especially clothing—counts as a trigger for this core meaning: Ralph Lauren Polo, Mercedes Benz, Four Seasons.

Wonder—Awe in the presence of a creation beyond one’s understanding. While this might sound mystical and unattainable, Disney has been a master of this experience for decades, and this is what kept the Concorde flying all of those years.

Step 1: List the top 5 core meanings you’ve observed in each of these three categories:

Target Customer (Needs & Desires) via User Research:

Corporate Strategic Goals & Messaging (from Strategic Plan):

Development Team Goals:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Step 2: Look for and circle overlap between the categories. If there isn’t any (or much) overlap, this is a serious signal that your strategy needs review. You should be able to prioritize at least 2-3 core meanings that overlap across these three groups. List these on the left below:

Step 3: Through Market Research and User Interviews, assess your competitors’ core meanings via their offerings, experiences, and messaging. Write these in the columns to the left of yours:

You	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Step 4: Which core meanings are unique in comparison with your competitors? These should be your product development, messaging, and strategic focus.