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*original*



strutting for success

lessons on  
leadership,  
love and the  
media universe

# brand girl

barbara kwasnicki

Let's get one thing straight: I am not a girl. At least not in the development sense. I am all woman. But when it comes to being a girl in the sense of energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity for this world I've found myself in, I am all girl — **brand girl**, that is.

This Brand Girl is Barbara Kwasnicki, a.k.a. Kwas, a.k.a. Brand Girl. In this book, Brand Girl is going to give you the skinny on three things:

- 1) What makes brands into leaders,
- 2) How I grew into Brand Girl by doing what the leading brands do, and
- 3) How great branding can improve your leadership, your love (relationships), your universe – i.e., success.

**But really, who am I, and why should you care?** Among many other things, I've been called a branding maven, an expert in design and communication, and a live wire. I created Kwas Inc (of course), a “creative strategy and brand development house” that was based in New York City for well over a decade. I have spent most of my life immersed in every aspect of this industry. I know that brands affect our every decision, our every waking moment. I know that brands have the power to change the world.

Like me, my clients have been an eclectic mix. They range from a greeting-card company to digital media; an overstock discount retailer to the world's leading purveyor of cultured pearls; a high-flying magazine startup to an international luxury airline; a shopping-mall sneaker chain to the Olympics; and from American beer to the finest French champagne. I know what it takes to successfully launch a high-profile magazine like Fast Company or to put momentum into a blue-chip brand like United Technologies, and garner a presence for a Manhattan-based 99¢ retail store called Jack's. This girl is attracted to extremes.

Extremes, apparently, are attracted to this girl.

For instance, we have all experienced floods at one point or another. But a clogged sink is one thing, and flooding an entire building and raining out a handbag goddess is another matter altogether. We all have experienced bad timing. But imagine waking up one morning to find yourself homeless because your fat new loft in Tribeca (the one you could barely afford) was now barricaded within the confines of Ground Zero. We all have some families and some have a sibling count, but how many can say that eight is truly enough?

Most of us envision a certain life for ourselves, based on our families, our heritages, and the qualities we inherited. Sometimes, this vision of life is an accurate one, but often, problems occur. Some folks call it the universe throwing you for a loop; Brand Girl calls it market conditions. And just like market conditions alter the brand strategy for a company, problems teach you things – and alter your personal strategy.

My mental shelves are stocked with leadership advice by everyone from Oprah to Stephen Covey to Jack Welch — and at times, Bill Maher. Unlike them, I have not led a mountain of people to victory or hysterics (on purpose, that is). But I'm someone who has been leading my own parade for quite some time now.

I've learned that whether you're building out a brand for a national company, for your own queendom or for a personal relationship, it's up to you to step up and lead your own way.

Hence, my commitment to branding has become my commitment to living. I don't settle professionally, so why would I settle personally? Why would you? There are dangling carrots that inspire all of us, to have the life we want with the trappings we desire. For some it means modeling the techniques of a calming Deepak Chopra, or of a shock-jock Howard Stern. For me, it's the understated George Clooney. (Why? See Chapter Six. All of it.) For some, keeping time through a varied collection of

*The Early Adopter Case Study: Powerful Company, Powerful You*

Let us consider Apple Computer's rock-star launch of its much-coveted iPhone. Many stood in line to be one of the first to have the fashionably and technically forward toy. For three weeks these early adopters were the cat's meow – or so they thought. In a not surprisingly, but relatively sooner than expected move, Apple slashed the entry price for its iPhone by a couple hundred bucks. The attempt by Apple and its team to indirectly snub their early adopters hardly went unnoticed. In fact, it caused quite the angry stir with both media and consumers alike. There use to be a time when Apple could pull such a stunt on their devoted groupies and get away with it. (Believe me, I know.) But now, the technology that serves Apple all so well, serves its audience too. We are a culture of social network junkies, and within mere Google seconds and Facebook posts — we are able and willing to call everyone on what does and doesn't work. Today, that is something that both individual, and a company like Apple must contend with. And so given the social media riots (i.e., market conditions), a plan "B" was devised. Apple promptly handed out discount coupons, bushy-eyed apologies, promises for a better future – and was again, a starring venue.



Swatch and Tag Heuer watches is what ticks and keeps them on track, but for this girl it meant holding out (and at times, being fashionably late) until she could afford that one prized Cartier – Pasha, to be exact. Applying the skills of design and branding to my own life has shown me something important: it all matters.

**The lesson? When you're promoting your brand, everything you do – and everything you choose not to do – communicates the value and character of the brand. This is the basis for a powerful company and a powerful you.**



**NOW.** On a personal level and discussing an early “adopter” of another sort, imagine this. Let's say you dated a boy (or girl). A few months later, you were married (any co-habitation applies). But before the honeymoon was over, and unwanted housewarming gifts returned (today, those multiple George Foreman grills would be “Craiglisted”) — you caught whim that your partner was not of the rock-star ilk. (*sigh.*) And if that wasn't tragic enough, you shortly thereafter ended up living in a friend's basement with way too much clutter, china and credit card debt. Did you crawl up in a ball and wither away? Nope! After a few heavy pours of Grey Goose or similar, you activated your own plan “B”, built back your emotional reserves, AmEx credit (thank you very kindly), and once again, like Apple, you were center-stage. A tad wiser and grayer perhaps, but still, a highly-desired starlet.

**The lesson? Accessory or not, there is always a price to be paid for the privilege of first. (Good decisions come from good information folks.) Whether picking an Apple toy, a boy\*, or a pricey Lancel handbag for that matter — you ought to know when to grab, pause or pass.**

\*But Good Lord, no pausing or passing on George! Never!

Brand Girl is primarily a book on leadership filtered through the world of Kwas – and the world of branding. Brands, because they are not human, can be made perfect. Brands can have the leadership qualities that we search for in people; brands give us something to aspire to. *And if you think people don't identify themselves by the brands they choose, look in your own parking lot and see who gets into what – Chevy Suburban? Mercedes SLK? Toyota Prius? Vespa anyone?*

Brand Girl showcases how these leadership traits show up in all aspects of your every day life – and how you can practice being a leader 24/7: whether you're running Apple computers, shopping at Target or eating Devil Dogs. Brand Girl shows how these things are interconnected, and how you can learn life lessons from the most unexpected places.



And secondly, Brand Girl is about realizing success. I'm referring to success as it relates to you personally, as a living, human — brand. Not every move we make in life is going to be a box office hit, but sometimes your biggest gains can be found in the smallest of draws. Honor what you've accomplished, be realistic about what is possible for you, and your dreams. And embrace this awareness, because it is the very first step needed to achieve any kind of success.

At the end of the day, I'm just someone still tripping through life with some stellar wins and some equally magnificent flops. It's my intention that this book provides you with the spark for your own light bulb. No matter where you sit along the food chain of life, staying on-brand and behaving as truthfully as possible under all situations will make your life a smoother ride. It will help you recover even if you're knocked out of your heels – Gucci or not.

I hope Brand Girl makes a difference in your world. I know it will give you courage to take the spills, as even I have, and still laugh – and always look good.



barbara kwasnicki

**One more thing. Well actually, three more things to help you love and adore Brand Girl even more.**

Number one. **This book is half-meditation on branding and half personal memoir (yes, me!).** The yin-yang between professional and personal stories is no doubt part of my nature as being “doubly a Pisces” (see page 83), but layers work! Whether zigging or zagging through a deal with a bank, toddler or boy — for Brand Girl, it’s all business, it’s all life, and lessons learned — all applicable.

Number two. **I know you should never assume, but I’m assuming most of you know what branding is.** C’mon, you can’t get your *Palm Treo* out of your *Louie Vuitton* stamped handbag (knock-off or not), without bumping into your *Bobbi Brown* lipstick, *Listerine* breathe strips or the *Fendi* wallet. Did I mention the *Sponge Bob SquarePants Krappy Patty* gummy — what’evs, for the kids? These days, everything and everyone are brands. And for as many brands there are, there are that many more definitions. But simply put – branding is defining the essence of who you are, and communicating that persona to your audience. It’s the offer, the package — the experience. Think *Starbucks*. Think *Vera Wang*. Think what Vera is doing for *Kohl’s*. For this book – think about the brand called *you*.

And, number three. **This book is not the “how-to.” (This book is more of the “why-to,” or hell, “Kwas Rules.”)** I know, I know — the branding process can seem all so daunting. But lucky for you, just as I still hunger for extremes like skinny thighs, I’m the girl that still wants the skinny on everything. If I wanted to learn to tango, I dated the instructor. If I wanted to get into a club, I made the right friends – I don’t do the velvet rope limbo. And so when building out a brand, I did my homework, flirted with the powers to be and distilled it down to Brand Girl’s Solid Six.

They are the equivalent of six little black dresses in the closet of self-awareness. They’re exactly how the chapters in this book are laid out. They are all you need to start applying the concepts of branding to your own life.

**the solid six**  
 the presence  
 the team  
 the audience  
 the location  
 the integrity  
 the goals

Now go have fun!  
 Start strutting through my closet —  
 and see what works in yours!

xo