

Becoming a Category of One

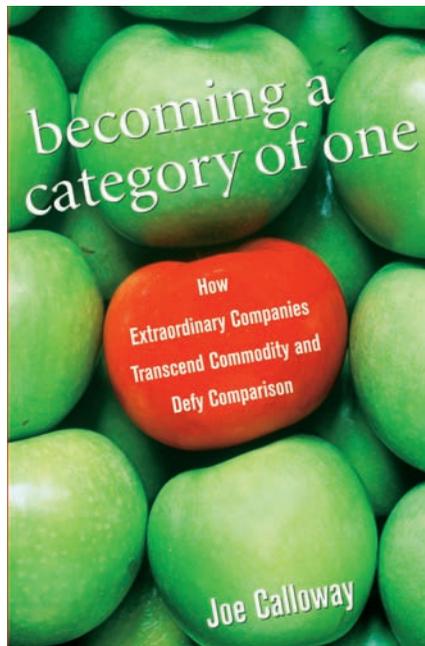
PLAIN VANILLA COMPANIES COMPETE—and may even lead—in their market categories. Yet **extraordinary** companies create their own niche by doing what no one else does—thereby “transcending commodity” and creating extreme loyalty among their customers. In other words, they become a **Category of One**. And this is the secret to their success and longevity.

Becoming a Category of One by Joe Calloway builds on this premise and explains how ordinary businesses can become exceptional by knowing and connecting with their customers beyond all expectations. The book takes the reader beyond price and beyond product (both commodity strategies) . . . it goes directly to the strategy of creating an “extraordinary” and “legendary” relationship with one’s customers.

Calloway challenges readers to think of the successful people in business that they know. They may be “average Joes,” yet what sets them apart is they are willing to do what others will not to reach their goals. That same theory can be applied to businesses, according to Calloway. And the author knows of what he speaks.

“... think of the successful people in business
... what sets them apart is they are willing to do
what others will not to reach their goals.”

No “average Joe” himself, Calloway is a branding consultant to such world brands as IBM and BMW, has been inducted to the International Speakers Hall of Fame, and owns an award-winning restaurant in Nashville where he personally follows his own Category of One recipe.



Interestingly enough, I had a brush with Calloway’s inimitable style that proves that he walks his talk. When my company, J.R. Clancy, and I were recently featured in a business newspaper, I named his book as among my favorites. Calloway—who I did not know and had never met—called to personally thank me for the plug. Further proof that his Category of One theory, as outlined in his book, applies not only to businesses but to individuals and that the two are inextricable.

This book is a quick and easy read yet packed with practical information and thought-provoking real life examples from some of the world’s best-known brands, such as LensCrafters, Quill, Southwest Airlines, and Tractor Supply Company. It motivates and inspires you to dig deep in identifying what sets your company apart

(or will set you apart) from the crowd and causes the reader to reflect on how they can get even closer to their customers. It also reminds us that the value of our brands is interconnected to the quality and dedication of the people we employ and how we treat them.

Calloway reinforces throughout the book the three rules for becoming a Category of One:

- Know more about the customer than anyone else;
- Get closer to the customer than anyone else; and
- Emotionally connect with the customer better than anyone else.

First though, he warns against complacency and encourages companies to foremost know themselves and have a sense of purpose. He asks companies to consider, among other things: what they stand for; what’s important to them; what they are proud of;

and what the point of their hard work is. He also says that those companies who don't understand what used to work and how what does work today won't work tomorrow—are already a step behind. He especially challenges struggling companies to find the courage to let go of the techniques they have come to rely on and do some soul-searching to re-establish their bond with customers and identify new methods of doing business more effectively.

“... the value of our brands is interconnected to the quality and dedication of the people we employ and how we treat them.”

One of the most significant points that I took away revolved around the notion of customer expectation. Calloway stresses that most businesses strive to outdo other businesses in their industry, but fail to recognize that their competition is actually **everybody**! Customers don't judge you against just those businesses who do what you do, but to each and every business or service that they come into contact with.

At J.R. Clancy, we pride ourselves on striving to be a Category of One, keeping and continually recommitting ourselves to improving our partners' experiences. However, this book gave me pause as to how we need to apply this same commitment on an even wider scale by benchmarking ourselves against the best of the best businesses. For example, J.R. Clancy vs. Nike; J.R. Clancy vs. Wegmans Supermarkets; J.R. Clancy vs. Starbucks. This type of benchmarking really raises the bar!

I heartily recommend this book to any company that wants to stand out from the crowd—and stay there. ■



Bob Theis is president of J.R. Clancy, Inc. J.R. Clancy has been designing and supplying stage rigging systems and services to the entertainment industry around the world since 1885. Its guiding principle is to “Make Their Partners Successful.” He can be reached at bobtheis@jrclancy.com. Visit their website at www.jrclancy.com.