

# The 6Ws of Authentic Branding

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[original](#)

*The eighth of nine blogs in serial format, adapted from Mike Connor's Cornerstone Keynote Address at the Association of Independent Schools Admission Professionals' (AISAP) Annual Institute in Nashville, July 8, 2013. Connor addressed 200 admission professionals from around the world. Connor's topic: Becoming Your Own Brand and Value Proposition!*

The [Four Dimensions of Educational Value](#) are a good start to defining both your school's value to potential and current constituents, and for defining your value to your school.

What are the 6Ws that help you discover a great and differentiated, *authentic* brand? Again, think about these not only in terms of your institution, but in terms of *you*.

The first two Ws are:

## 1. *Who We Are*

## 2. *Who we are NOT*

This is all about your core purpose. "Who we are" is why we get up in the morning. Our intention ... our mission ... our promise. It is equally important to take a strong stand on who you are NOT, so those you seek to serve will know if what *you* value is what *they* value.

The next two are:

## 3. *What We Stand For*

## 4. *What we will NOT Stand For*

These speak to core values. They help you define success and risk and by doing so, demonstrate respect to prospective families. Managing expectations is just

plain considerate. For a school, core values are timeless, guiding principles that will never be compromised, regardless of consequence. The same goes for *your own* core values. Your core values are who you really *are*. Not what you want to be *like*.

What is the test that determines if core values are *really core*?

You would *shut it down* before you compromise those values. If your board is willing to shut down the school, or you are willing to move on to another job rather than compromise what you identify as your core values, *only then are those values core*.

Not too many organizations and not too many people have core values that will pass *this* test. People need to know where you stand.

**5.** The 5th W is *Why We Matter*.

This is the answer to “So what?”

*I'm talking to you now as prospective parent:* What's in it for me and my child? How is this going to make my family better? How are you different from other choices? Why should I buy this from you? Why should what your school stands for matter to me?

*And now I'm talking to you directly:* So why on earth do *you* matter as an enrollment management professional?

**6.** The 6th W is *Where We Are Headed*.

By talking about where the school is headed – your school's vision – your institution will attract and retain those families who want to go there with you. You'll also attract the philanthropy that will help get you there. You don't have to sell them. They will self-select you.

Your vision statement should incite them: “This is why you should join us!” You have to be a *cause*, not just a school.

The same applies to us as individuals. When people understand our personal intent and our personal vision, we tend to attract the support and friends we need to amplify our cause.

The 6Ws of authentic branding.

Answering these 6Ws changes your institution from being just another school to becoming an educational *cause*.

Applying these 6Ws to your life will make you an enrollment management professional...and maybe even a little more fulfilled!

These 6Ws require clarity and discipline. They hold you accountable as a school. Most important, they hold us accountable to becoming better human beings.