

## **Expert Interview I with Dan Kohler, Founder of DK Branding, an independent marketing consultancy**

**Including |** thoughts on building a branding consultancy, and the societal structure of work boundaries

>> Dan guest curated Strands on June 9, 2022. [Read it here.](#)

### **Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?**

I'm in the fourth year of running my own branding consultancy, DK Branding. After a career building world-class brands alongside the best creative minds at top ad agencies, I went on to lead the International marketing team for Subway Restaurants, helping reposition the brand across 112 countries. I then started doing my own thing, originally to help a start-up, and since then I've had the good fortune to work with progressive start-ups with strong purpose and tangible roles in society. These organizations hire me as a jack of all trades to incubate and build brands to drive affinity and engagement.

### **What excites you most about what you do?**

I love being creative, thinking out of the box, being challenged by colleagues and working to BUILD SOMETHING MEANINGFUL & LASTING.

### **What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?**

Passion...passion...passion,  
Humanity/compassion  
True listening (not just hearing)  
Cultural awareness  
Good taste and judgment (strategic and creative)  
Coaching and motivating

## **What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on, and why?**

I won the Leo Intel Award (the highest strategic honor in the global Leo Burnett organization) for a strategic point of view on the importance of creativity in driving real-world business results. This "white paper" influenced a change of culture in McDonald's marketing, the culmination of which was the winning the Cannes Lion for Creative Excellence.

## **We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?**

As you know, the BLM movement started in 2013 with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African American teenager Trayvon Martin. I'm a strong believer in the power and humanity of diversity, but honestly BLM isn't a subject that I've found myself required to actively address in the workplace (in my personal life, it's an ongoing conversation with my 15-year-old son, who was exposed to much of the George Floyd trial which I watched live from beginning to end). This is because my past two positions were global roles at global companies that are highly diverse, culturally and through actual employees (Subway and McDonald's).

## **Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?**

If you land a job you really love, it will never feel like ugh...work. I believe work/life balance is possible...and necessary to be happy and successful, no matter the company culture or specific position you may be working in. In European countries like France, it's actually now illegal for companies to infringe upon personal lives. Yes, The French government passed a law that keeps businesses from requiring their employees to be available for workplace communication, like calls or texts, outside



of regular work hours. I try to keep this mindset when working with my own teammates, as a practitioner of the Golden Rule. The key to success is to openly talk about it with teammates and agree that it's important together. It's never going to be perfect (let's not hold our breath that the U.S. government would pass such a law) but you can make it better.

### **What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?**

I'm an inspiration junkie. I'm a consummate consumer... especially of fashion and art books. I'm also a beach enthusiast, dog lover, non-fiction reader, contemporary art collector and energetic student of all things David Bowie.

### **As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?**

Without question reading Jack Kerouac's book *On the Road* changed my life...thankfully for the better! I was born and raised in Chicago...went to school not that far away at Indiana University...I graduated and got a job at Hal Riney & Partners in the Chicago office...I lived my whole life in a very concentrated geography. The lesson I learned from that book and "stole" into my personal ideology was, "Wait a minute...you mean I can just get in a car and drive and live anywhere...? I don't have to stay in Chicago...? I'm outta here!". [This may or may not have been somewhat influenced by the fact that I read the book during a particularly cold and windy February.] Since that epiphany, I've lived in LA, NYC, Miami, and have traveled the world for pleasure and also for work via global positions at multinational companies.