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## CHAPTER 1

# A Product of Passion

*“The future is determined by what stories we choose to tell and by who gets to tell the stories.”*

— Juan Enriquez, author, futurist and venture capitalist

DURING THE EARLY days of my career, I changed my approach to meetings based upon my perception of each client. When I perceived clients and prospects to be more conservative, I dressed in more traditional business attire, and I avoided discussion of my fledgling side-hustle in the music business. I played to my audience. Over time though, I started to divulge more to my clients about my work in music and found that it not only helped to build deeper relationships in every sector, but was also a differentiating factor. The lesson? Embrace your passions, explore how your interests might be relevant to your business, and encourage your teammates to do the same. We all win when we bring our whole selves to the table.

It's become somewhat cliché to talk about leaning heavily on passion for career guidance, but I believe that it's worth exploring. When I speak with people who are unsure about their passions or their careers, I suggest they look back to their childhood for clues. There's usually something in our early lives

we can point to as evidence of why we pursued, or dreamed of pursuing, a particular path. With that in mind, a number of the stories and examples I rely on throughout this book come from my youth. Through that exploration I've uncovered that my interest in business and marketing was sparked by a passion for pop culture and, more specifically, sports and music. After all these years, I've realized that sports and music provide inspiration that can help improve any business because they are both built on layers of collaboration.

## The Power of Sports

I was taught from a young age to be a fan. More specifically, a fan of the New York Yankees. I grew up in southeastern Connecticut, a place that was geographically and philosophically split between “The Bronx Bombers” (or the “Evil Empire” if you asked the *other* guys) and what would later be branded, “Red Sox Nation.” The Yankees and Red Sox made up one of the most heated rivalries in all of sports and everyone I knew pledged their allegiance to one or the other. My father was a Yankees fan, and so, unlike some of my best friends and family members, I hated the Red Sox. Not surprisingly, I jumped at the chance to debate which team had the better squad. I was truly passionate and took pride in being a part of that community, or what my favorite marketer Seth Godin calls a “tribe.”

I'll never forget the first time my father took me to Yankee Stadium, just as his father had done thirty years earlier. It was a true rite of passage in our family. That morning I proudly put on my New Era Yankees hat, a Starter Don Mattingly t-shirt (he was the team's All Star first baseman at the time) and my Rawlings baseball mitt in case a foul ball came our way. We

met up with a few friends and made the two and a half hour pilgrimage to the Bronx.

Needless to say, the surroundings were a lot different than what we were used to in suburban Connecticut. The experience was amplified by an orchestra of honking horns, police sirens and street vendors. When we entered the Stadium, I was overwhelmed with emotion. The energy was palpable. It became even more intense as we walked through the tunnel and I saw the field for the first time in person. The grass was a shade of green I had never seen before. It simply didn't translate through our 1980s TV. We went to Monument Park and paid homage to the great players cheered on by my father and his father during their Stadium visits. We snuck past security during batting practice to get autographs, ate hot dogs and knishes, sang “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” and cheered wildly for the Yanks. In the end we left early to beat the traffic, and listened to the play-by-play on the car radio to make sure we didn't miss any late inning fireworks. Once I was a little older my Dad agreed to stay until the final pitch so we could hear Frank Sinatra sing “New York, New York,” as is the tradition at the end of every Yankees game.

Although attending the game was thrilling, it was just a small part of being a fan. We only went to the Bronx once a year, but my support for the team was a year-round commitment.

Today fans have the Yankees Entertainment Network (YES), a pioneering multimedia platform that became a sports marketing case study, but when I was a kid we relied on a combination of print, TV and my favorite medium at the time, radio.

As Yankees fans living in Connecticut, we listened to sports radio commentary on New York's WFAN, the first all-sports station in the country. My daily ritual included listening to “The Fan” while getting ready for school in the morning and while

falling asleep most nights. However, the station only had the broadcast rights for the New York Mets games, so when it came to hearing the actual Yankees games we tuned into another station, WABC. I can remember lying in bed at night listening to the “voice of the Yankees,” John Sterling, calling the games. He had a classic, deep, announcer voice and became famous for his animated home run call: “It is high... It is far... It is... gone!” Unlike the ESPN and WFAN on-air personalities who mostly remained neutral, John regularly showed his Yankees bias. His passion for the team made it feel like we were in it together. This shared experience was based on a common set of values, and ultimately strengthened my connection to the Yankees brand.

At a time when there were no social media outlets through which the team could communicate, John really was the “voice” of the brand and the leader of the tribe. I remember being fascinated by this and, at the age of 13, I decided I wanted to be a broadcaster just like him.

One day I was outside playing ball—as I did almost every day—when my Dad yelled for me to come inside for a phone call. I figured it was a friend or one of my grandparents, but instead I picked up the phone and heard a man with a familiar deep voice say, “Hello, Brady.” It was none other than John Sterling.

Like many Yankees fans, my father felt a connection to John. He had actually listened to him on a different station years before John started calling Yankees games. In fact, my father even wrote him a letter explaining how he had followed and admired his career. I don’t want to discount the contents of the letter, especially since my father happens to be a talented writer, but I’m guessing that John didn’t get a lot of fan mail at the time. Not only did he call our house to say thanks for the letter, he invited us to visit him at Yankee Stadium!

On our next trip to the Bronx we met up with John for a tour of the press box, where he introduced us to the other media personalities, including the legendary Phil Rizzuto, and gave us a tour of George Steinbrenner’s office. George was the controversial owner of Yankees, later portrayed as George Costanza’s boss on *Seinfeld*. At the time he was in the middle of a league-imposed suspension which meant he was not allowed in the ballpark. I could tell John got a kick out of walking us through George’s private office while “The Boss” was away.

For a few years, visiting John became a part of our Stadium ritual and I’m extremely grateful for those priceless experiences. Although I decided not to pursue broadcasting, I can still see a clear connection between what John represented as the voice of the Yankees and my work in marketing.

The interactions with John may have played a role in shaping my career, but like millions of other sports fans, it was a combination of factors that bred my passion and loyalty for the Yankees.

When I take a step back I see that sports are filled with stories, personalities, history, heritage, traditions and experiences. Teams provide endless opportunities for fans to engage, including a wide array of content, merchandise and events. Perhaps most importantly, sports provide a platform for connection, emotion, pride and an opportunity to be part of a community. Every company would like to develop a brand that harnesses the power of sports, and although we may not have the resources of a professional team, we can all apply these lessons in our own way.

Another factor that played a role in building my loyalty for the Yankees was the ecosystem around the team, which included a variety of supporting brands. There were the media brands that covered the games and those who sponsored the broad-



casts. The brands that advertised in the stadium and those that sponsored the giveaways. (I'm still not sure "Bat Day" was a great idea since the Stadium could get rowdy, but someone sponsored it.) The brands that made the uniforms, equipment, hats and other merchandise that enabled us to rep our favorite teams. The brands of baseball cards my friends and I tracked, traded and sold as if we were stock brokers. And last but not least, there were the players, who sat in the middle of everything with their own complex personal brands.

I gave up my early dream of becoming a sports broadcaster like John, but I did end up working in professional sports for a few years as a sales and marketing exec. While there, I learned even more about the power of collaboration as I activated sponsorships for Dunkin' Donuts, Harley Davidson, Miller Light, Kia Motors and dozens of others. The marketing agency where I worked next also produced numerous segments for *Sportscenter*, the show I watched religiously as a kid and once dreamed of working for as a broadcaster. Things have a funny way of playing out when you develop the right collaborations.

## I Want My MTV

As a young kid in the 80s, you belonged to one of two households—those that allowed MTV and those that did not. Guess which one mine was? When talking about my passion for music, my mother likes to reminisce about the day she walked into the living room to find me jamming out to MTV. Knowing it was banned in our household, I pointed out that she said I couldn't *watch* MTV, but she didn't say anything about *listening* to it. I had used the contrast knob (remember when TVs had knobs?) to blur out the picture in an attempt to get around her

rule. But why would I bother doing that? What drew millions of people just like me to the channel in the first place?

It turns out that MTV marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of media and branding. Not only was it a visually appealing medium that played right into my short attention span, but from a business standpoint it was also the first mass media channel to completely blur the lines between content and commerce. This created a complex ecosystem and an ideal platform for brand collaboration.

Every music video on MTV—in addition to being highly entertaining and cutting-edge in terms of creativity—was essentially an advertisement for an artist and an album. Just like sports announcers, video DJs—or VJs—became the voice of the MTV brand, providing commentary on videos, interviewing artists and reporting on the news.

Consumer brands quickly adapted their approach and made advertisements that resembled music videos. By leveraging the same tone, style and often collaborating with the same artists, brands became an integral part of the viewing experience and less of an interruption. Whether you had an artist in your advertisement or not, being on MTV meant you were collaborating with their brand. It allowed you to co-opt some of the cool and feed off the rebellious nature of the channel that turned on young people and turned off most parents.

## Wanna Dance?

In the early days no artist stood out more on the MTV platform than Michael Jackson.

With the help of MTV, Michael Jackson built an empire that redefined the meaning and impact of personal branding in entertainment. He was already famous, but he took full advantage of the new music video platform to take his career

into the stratosphere. He captivated us with his songs, dance moves, style, eccentricity and his use of visual storytelling. I'm only slightly embarrassed to admit that I had a make-your-own studded glove kit and mimicked his dance moves in my living room. Jackson's brand grew as he released a string of hit records and collaborated with a variety of other brands to amplify his reach and raise their relevance at the same time.

One such brand was Pepsi. Their main competitor, Coca-Cola, had built a global following that benefited from a variety of collaborations with brands like McDonald's and successful advertising campaigns that focused on friendship and happiness. To win, Pepsi had to carve out a more youthful and edgy position. Michael Jackson and MTV were the perfect partners. The Pepsi tagline, "The Choice of a New Generation," tapped into the idea that the product—just like Michael's image and MTV—was not for everyone. This was a bold move because, on the surface, it alienated people and limited the brand's appeal. However, savvy business leaders and marketers know it is always better to be some people's number one than everyone's number two.

The brand took things even further when they commissioned Jackson to rewrite his hit song "Billie Jean" for a commercial, and hired legendary advertising exec-turned-filmmaker Bob Giraldi to direct the spot. At the time Bob was known as one of the directors driving the new music video genre ushered in by MTV. He crafted the commercial to resemble Michael's "Beat It" video, which he also directed, and featured a gang of kids mimicking the King of Pop's dress and dance moves while he sang, "You're a whole new generation, you're a Pepsi generation, taste the thrill of your day and taste the Pepsi way." Bringing all of those elements together was a monumental marketing moment. The collaboration took on an added layer

of virality, long before what we know as viral today, when Jackson's hair caught fire during the filming of the campaign's second spot. Eventually it premiered on MTV as part of a special prime-time program, resulting in one of the first instances of a commercial running as actual content.

### **Built On Collaboration**

While Michael dominated the early days of MTV, and I practiced my Moonwalk, the relatively new music genre of hip-hop was also emerging, and it was literally built upon collaboration. First and foremost, the music itself often layered one record over another or new lyrics over audio snippets of existing songs. This foundational element set a tone and led to more artists working together in this genre than any other.

My friends and I were completely obsessed with hip-hop from the moment we heard it. I'll never forget the first time I saw the Parental Advisory stamp on a cassette tape that I was probably too young to listen to. Of course, just like my mom's short-lived MTV ban, the label made me even more curious. At first we relied on each other to discover new artists, but soon we began looking more to the artists themselves to connect the dots and expose us to their contemporaries.

When artists formally teamed up as part of a group like Wu-Tang Clan, they had a better shot of breaking out than they did as solo performers. Although each individual member was unique, they typically shared a common style, their own version of buzzwords, and in many instances a hometown or region. Most importantly, they shared the spotlight on the same songs and albums. Even if an artist wasn't officially part of a crew they could quickly become associated with one if they were featured in a song. For example, I first heard Snoop Dogg when he was featured on the song "Deep Cover" with Dr. Dre,

which was also Dre's first solo song after leaving the group, N.W.A. Snoop was just one of many superstars Dre would go on to collaborate with and introduce to the world, including Eminem, 50 Cent, The Game, Kendrick Lamar and others. Even Dre's labels—Death Row Records and later Aftermath—were collaborations with his longtime partner, Interscope Records executive Jimmy Iovine.

As this collaborative formula proved successful, it was emulated by more artists. Once Snoop was established we were introduced to his crew, Tha Dogg Pound. Many artists took this a step further and began launching their own record labels. Eminem created Shady Records, another imprint of Iovine's Interscope, relying on the same theory of collaboration by introducing his crew D12, not to mention the business benefits that come from owning more of your own intellectual property.

Collaborations in hip-hop continued to evolve and even some of today's biggest stars in other genres owe their continued relevance to the world of hip-hop. Take Justin Timberlake, whose foray into becoming a solo artist was ushered in by a collaboration with the rap group Clipse and production from Pharrell. This was masterfully executed to help him evolve from his boy-band branding into a pop star.

A similar collaboration phenomenon also played out in hip-hop and other genres through sampling: the art of taking pieces of songs and using them like instruments to construct new tracks. By sampling, an artist reveals something new about themselves and their brand. This holds true when an artist quotes an existing lyric from another song, and even when an artist or band performs a cover song. These associations make statements and inform how brands, in this case personal brands, are perceived.

Christopher Wallace, better known as the Notorious B.I.G. or Biggie, applied all of these tactics to launch his career. He first came to the attention of most fans through his feature on the song "Flava in Ya Ear" by Craig Mack, a popular rapper at the time and a fellow member of Bad Boy, a record label with a variety of artists.

Although Biggie was later shot and killed, allegedly as a result of an ongoing battle with west coast rappers, the lyrics and hook on the first song of his first album were each sampled from the king of west coast hip-hop, Dr. Dre. In doing so, Biggie was paying homage to an artist he admired and revealing his taste to fans. And in giving listeners something familiar, a point of reference, he also made his music and his personal brand more approachable. Familiarity, trust, respect and admiration can all come from producing and experiencing a thoughtful collaboration.

Biggie's producer, Sean "Puffy, Puff Daddy or P Diddy" Combs, was a student of music and a great marketer who took the art form of sampling to a new level. Although many would challenge his assertion, Combs claimed that he invented the remix. As documentary filmmaker Kirby Ferguson established in his 2010 film *Everything Is a Remix*, artists have been stealing from each other forever, but Combs and others in hip-hop made it a deliberate part of the art form.

Today two of the most popular places to discover new music are YouTube and Soundcloud, especially when it comes to hip-hop. There we find another example of branding and collaboration playing out. As young artists create music, they often collaborate on the production, and in many instances they do it virtually. In fact, an entire economy has been built around marketing and selling instrumental beats over the internet.

Bedroom and basement beat makers sell creations on social networks and within communities like BeatStars and MyFlash-Store, where anyone can listen to, license or outright purchase the music. Like any growing marketplace, it's getting crowded and becoming difficult for newcomers to stand out. In an attempt to overcome this and attract attention, many producers create type beats, as in Drake-type-beats, or beats that sound like the artist Drake. This illustrates one of the same principles that drives collaboration: association.

As Biggie and Puffy did before them, by tying their product to an existing artist and personal brand, these producers create a familiar reference that increases awareness and consideration for something new. Artist A\$AP Rocky even admitted to sourcing the beat for one of his songs by searching A\$AP Rocky-type beat.

### Marketing With Music

Just as they do in sports through sponsorships and a variety of other products, services and media, brands also play a huge role in music. While every genre gets in the game, and this is not a new phenomenon, the most creative brand partnerships have always been in hip-hop.

One of the first and most famous examples grew out of the track "My Adidas" by Run-DMC. As the song gained popularity in July of 1986, the month I turned seven years old, the group's management invited adidas representatives to a concert at Madison Square Garden. On that night the band prompted fans to literally put their shoes in the air when they performed the track, further demonstrating their influence.

Music manager, label exec and founder of Translation—an advertising agency focused on being a bridge between culture and corporations—Steve Stoute shared his interpretation of

what unfolded that night in his book *The Tanning of America*, "When adidas execs witnessed twenty thousand young urban fans jubilantly holding their brand aloft, they immediately saw the incredible economic potential that this new, raw form of entertainment possessed."


The overall awareness and commercial impact of name-checking brands in music cannot be overstated. Most of these branded lyrics began as unofficial endorsements by artists who were unprovoked and unpaid. Still, it didn't take long for brands like adidas to quickly realize the potential impact, embrace the phenomenon and begin paying artists. After that evening at Madison Square Garden, Run-DMC ended up with a seven-figure payday and their own sneakers, making them the first nonathletes to secure this kind of deal. Perhaps fittingly, Run-DMC was also the first group to blend hip-hop and rock when they teamed up with Aerosmith and produced "Walk This Way."

*"For anyone at any level of commerce, from corporate execs to aspiring entrepreneurs, from marketing directors to college students who will soon be entering the working world, this is theretofore a cautionary tale: Ignore the globalization of popular culture at your own peril."*

—Steve Stoute

### Back to the Future

So why all this history and nostalgia? I find it's incredibly helpful to look back in order to understand current and future trends. Just like they were for me as a kid, sports and music are



arguably two of the most pervasive parts of our culture today. In fact, while television viewing has been moving to on-demand, streaming, and time shifting, the two things that are still consistently viewed live are sports and entertainment industry award shows. This viewership, and the layers of collaboration we see in sports and music, provide a stark reminder that brands must be part of our culture if they expect to be part of our conversations. And if they are not part of our conversations then their products will not be purchased.

When you combine this with the fact that individuals are more empowered to communicate through technology, build their own communities and influence one another, it's easy to see why the brands that invest in collaboration to gain cultural relevance tend to win.

Today brands and products show up in sports and music all the time, but just as brands need to continue taking collaborations further to make them more creative and impactful, athletes and artists are doing the same. In some instances they create completely new brands and products that run independently and then form collaborations with known brands, while in others they launch with the help of a core brand partnership.

Dr. Dre and Jimmy Iovine built an empire with their headphone and speaker company Beats by Dr. Dre, which relied heavily on artist and athlete endorsements and, along with the streaming service Beats Music, sold to Apple for a reported \$3 billion. Sean Combs turned Ciroc vodka into a juggernaut. Rihanna launched her Fenty Beauty line of products exclusively with retailer Sephora in the U.S. and also has a popular sneaker line with Puma. Jay-Z, her longtime mentor and collaborator, has also been a prolific brand creator, partner and ambassador. In addition to running his own management

company, and brokering deals between artists, athletes and brands, in 2018 he was personally named the President of PUMA's resurrected Basketball division. Drake created his own brand, OVO, then grew it through collaborations with Nike's Jordan brand, Canadian Goose, Timberland, Clark's, the Toronto Raptors and fellow Canadian artist The Weeknd, who, in turn, launched brand and label XO in partnership with retailers H&M and Puma. Perhaps one of the most popular and impactful uses of personal branding and collaboration came when Kanye West helped adidas regain relevance, just as Run-DMC had done 30 years earlier, with the launch of his Yeezy Boost line of sneakers.

But these collaborations must be created thoughtfully and *fit* into a consistent brand story if they are going to be perceived favorably. It is not enough to simply insert your brand into culture without considering whether or not the alignment reflects shared values and goals. In the coming chapters we will explore how to find this *fit* and how to act upon it once you do.