Everyman is on his way to work on the 7.30 a.m. commuter train. He’s rereading George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, in between elbows, coughs, sneezes, and newspapers. The banality of its antihero Gordon Comstock, who resigned from his job with a lucrative advertising agency in favor of the life of a penniless poet, to romantically rage against Mammon, seems so childishly idealistic. How society has advanced since Orwell’s pessimism between the wars. Looking around the smart suits in his carriage and out of the windows at the houses flashing by, he reflects on how he and his partner, like so many of his traveling peers, have made it onto the property ladder on the back of a free university degree, state welfare, and a job in the City with a generous pension package. They live at 8 New Road, a much-envied corner plot with solid middle-class neighbors; a teacher and his executive assistant wife. Nice couple. This is what his grandparents had suffered depression, conflict, and austerity for, the chance to create a landed generation of “baby boomers,” who would, in due course, hand down the baton of middle-class affluence to their own lucky children.

Arriving at his office building, with its Palladian columns, exactly half an hour before his contracted start time, he is still, after all this time, a little intimidated by the cathedral-like dimensions of the entrance and halls, with the single arched window leading to the executive floor. A shadowy figure is looking down from the window as he arrives. Quickly passing the managerial suite, he is soon greeted by the usual chorus of affectionate banter. “Afternoon,” calls one comedian. “Good, none of the managers have made it into our section yet,” he thinks to himself. “I’ll have enough time to grab a coffee before starting the recon-
ciliations and hopefully manage to get some real work done before the Monday meeting.”

The ritual of Monday meetings seems to have been around forever. It is the organization’s way of ensuring that key employees are aware of the changes to rules and regulations and standard procedures (copies available in the sequential instruction manuals controlled by the senior appointed officer), as well as any marketing initiatives that would inevitably mean additional work for frontline staff. The managers hate these sessions as much as the staff but go through the motions, managers at the front, officers arranged in rows in front of them. They always last for the first hour of the day, which means that many of Everyman’s colleagues started early to ensure that their normal, time-critical tasks are finished first. Some had been at their desks since 6.30 a.m.

At the appointed time, they’re summoned by the senior manager’s assistant and take their places for the Monday briefing, ties straightened, notepads in hand, mouths shut and brains parked. The monolithic Georgian door slowly swings open.

WHAT DOES GREAT BRAND ENGAGEMENT FEEL LIKE?

**Brand** (noun or verb): torch, permanent mark deliberately made by hot iron, trade-mark goods, burn with hot iron (penally or to show ownership), impress on memory, stigmatize

**Engage:** bind by contract, bind by promise, hire, morally committed

**Engagement:** state of being engaged, moral commitment

**Engaging:** attractive, charming

SOURCE: *Concise Oxford Dictionary*

Branding is an overused and often poorly understood term. In a world where we should retain a healthy objectivity, it’s often an enlightening and salutary exercise to track these seemingly modern “power” words back to their roots. Taking this back-to-basics approach, branding is reduced to little more than “making a mark signifying ownership.” That’s a loaded image in a contemporary context.

In the modern world of commerce, where services and experiences are traded as vociferously as physical goods and products, brands have come to signify a set of associations that we, as consumers and employees, make, linked to a set of communicated promises. In short, commercial brands are synonymous with promises.