

5 Ways to Leverage Your Personal Brand for Greater Career Success

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New times demand new solutions, and with most professionals fearful of corporate downsizing or restructuring measures, personal branding methodologies are more critical than ever. Organizations have to navigate to survive in today's new business climate, and so do top leaders and high achievers.

How to differentiate yourself from peers and competitors is the question, and personal branding is the answer. Here are five key insights into why individual executives need to discover and market their own personal brands – just as large organizations must market their corporate brands.

#1 Success Today Demands a Magnetic Brand

The global economy has drastically altered our employment landscape and new rules apply. Even top professional jobs are unstable, so high achievers have to stay on the innovative edge of career opportunities. Today it is common for executives to change jobs every several years – not every few decades – because of lay-offs, downsizing, or the desire to work in a different and more exciting and rewarding environment.

Highly successful leaders and high achievers are now managing their own careers by discovering and leveraging a personal brand to attract greater business opportunities and career progress. Those who understand how to use this innovative business tool become the hunted – not the hunter – as they are actively sought out and courted for prized positions and leadership roles.

#2 Why Personal Branding Works

Large corporations like Starbucks spend millions of dollars to instill and nurture strong brand loyalty by communicating clear, concise, consistent advertising messages about their unique promise of value. Otherwise why do we spend top dollar on a cup of coffee at Starbucks when we could stop by McDonalds and pick up a caffeine boost at a bargain price?

It's because we will pay a premium to identify with their brand – which encompasses a great store ambiance, specialty coffees, and that inviting and innovative cultural and social place where we can meet and mingle. We spend more in order to get more – which means we expect to be served not just a cup of java but also the emotional feeling and experience conveyed through their carefully crafted brand.

Personal branding utilizes the same principles of brand marketing to help professionals discover their authenticity and unique promise of value. As a personal branding strategist I tell my clients it's like discovering your true self and then communicating it to a selective group of people so that

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you become the highly sought after celebrity within your area of expertise. Professionals typically only need to market their unique brand to a very selective and influential group of superiors, human resource professionals, or competitors in order to get “A-listed” on the “fast-track” to greater success. The rest happens automatically as people beat a path to your door.

#3 The Mirror Principle: Discover and Know Thyself

One of the most innovative business tools I utilize with my clients to help them discover their personal brand is the 360 Reach Assessment tool. Unlike other corporate 360 assessments, this particular branding tool allows you to receive anonymous feedback from your friends, family, colleagues, and peers – and get a true picture of how they perceive your brand attributes.

This allows you to discover and get to know not only yourself, but how others around you perceive you. Every successful professional understands that knowledge is power. This is also a great tool to enhance self confidence, because it really helps you to focus on where you can honestly claim your strengths – understanding that they are in your true essence. I coach my clients to focus on those personal strengths – unlike the approach taken by typical corporate assessments that place more emphasis on areas of weakness that may need improvement.

It's important to discover your true self, but it is also powerful to understand and know how you are held in the hearts and minds of others. Your brand and reputation is identical. Are you communicating your brand message in a clear and concise way so that others perceive you the same way you perceive yourself? Participate in a 360 Reach Assessment process with a qualified brand and image strategist and you'll discover new ways to market yourself in this new decade.

#4 Strong Brands are Never Stagnant

Once you have discovered your personal brand it may evolve and change as you mature in your position or change career directions. The best brands take on a life of their own over time.

Perhaps the three to five brand attributes that you marketed for a certain position in one firm may need to be slightly adapted to attract a new position in a different industry. You always want to stay true to your authentic self and your values, but you will find that your 360 Reach Assessment will give you numerous strengths that you can pull from in a flexible, adaptable way.

So always tailor your personal brand to the “targeted” messages that your new audience may need to hear. If you currently work in a creative field, for example, then being “avant-garde, creative, and quirky” may be a great brand persona. But if you find yourself later seeking employment in a more conservative industry, you may want to choose descriptors that resonate more with a traditional audience – such as “innovative, creative, self-starter.” A certified brand strategist can coach you to select the right brand attributes to create the desired brand message.

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#5 The Exponential Benefits of Personal Branding

When high achievers and executives discover and understand their unique brand promise of value – and start to exude it – they begin to stand out from their peers and competitors. Since they understand and appreciate what makes them different, they also know what they can uniquely offer to an organization to leverage their employment status.

Here are a few benefits that accrue from using personal branding in a corporate environment:

- Be memorable and command higher salaries as a valued asset to the organization.
- Extend your brand by accepting new developmental experiences to provide personal growth and stretch your brand attributes – giving you a leading edge over your peers as you become more conceptual in your decision making and skill-gathering.
- Survive economic downsizing by marketing your brand attributes to key people to strategically ensure you are on the new “must-have” list
- Attract top talent to join your team as people begin to really understand your strengths, values and leadership vision.
- Leverage your strengths to become flexible and embrace changes that allow you to survive a tumultuous employment situation.
- Become better focused on understanding your ultimate goals and vision so that you start to make much better long-term career decisions.

This personal branding process is a must-have business tool for today’s professionals. Employers and companies expect it of those who are high achievers desirous of career advancement, so learn to understand your own brand essence and you can control your own destiny.

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