

# What's in a name?

Questions and answers about the importance of personal branding.

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YOU know you've really arrived when the whole world calls you by just one name or when the mere mention of your name elicits special attributes and distinct associations. This is the power of personal branding and here's why it's not just for celebrities like Oprah, Madiba and Madonna.

## What is personal branding?

Personal branding is the differentiator of the future: the single greatest competitive advantage for personal and professional success. Like a strong product or company brand, a distinctive personal brand enables people to identify you and helps you control how others perceive you.

The underlying assumption of personal branding is that each one of us has unique gifts and a distinct purpose in life. How we use them and live our lives is our own choice.

You may not be able to change what people think about you, but you can control how you present yourself and the consequent impact that this has on your personal and professional success.

## Why is personal branding important?

A strong personal brand differentiates you from your competition, confers "top of mind" status, increases authority and credence of decisions, places you in a leadership role, enhances prestige, attracts the right people and opportunities, adds value to what you're offering and increases earning power . . . the list goes on.

## Who should build a personal brand?

Everyone, because as the world becomes more and more competitive, no matter what your goals are, you're going to have competition, and standing out in the crowd will be of extreme importance. Even if you're not the best there is, because people know your name they will automatically confer superior status on you. Today, more than ever, what Tom Peters says is true: "We are all CEOs of our own companies – ME Inc".

## What's important to remember when building a personal brand?

False advertising never did a single product any favours. Neither does lying about who you are. So, build your brand with integrity.

As Abraham Lincoln said, "Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing."

When building your personal brand, you should be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Live the life you wish to project, because reputation is, after all, merely what others think.

But, because perception is reality in the world in which we live, you need to work to close the gap between who you truly are and your reputation, striving to raise your unique profile in a memorable and enduring way.

Nothing is as important as your reputation, and you need to learn to guard it as your finest treasure, realising that what you do shouts far louder than anything you'll ever say. It's your character that counts.

## How can I go about building my personal brand?

In brief, when building your brand, you need to first establish what your brand currently communicates (comprehension). You then need to establish where you want to take it (clarity) and what you need to do to get it there and keep it there (consistency).

## Comprehension

When trying to figure out what others think of you, it's worth talking to a few friends and colleagues, as well as people who you don't know that well. Tell them to be brutally honest about who you are and how you come across, your strengths and weaknesses – that's the only way you're going to get an insight into how others really see you.

Once you know how your personal brand is currently positioned, as well as its strength, you need to think about what you'd like to achieve by having a strong

brand, who you need to influence and how best you're going to do exactly that.

## Clarity – your personal brand and your vision for your life

At this point, try to articulate exactly what the image is that you'd like to portray to the world. You also need to note what you hope to achieve by emphasising these aspects of your character.

## Target market

Because you don't live on a desert island, you're going to need the buy-in of people in order to achieve your objectives. During this stage, figure out who the key individuals and groups of people are who you need to influence. You also need to think about the best ways of reaching these people.

## Touchpoints

Think of your senses and all the ways in which people experience you. Think about the impression you create at each of these instances, or touchpoints, in order to gain greater control over the image you project. Consistency is key.

Some examples of your touchpoints include:

- Your physical appearance;
- The company you keep;
- Where you go to relax and socialise; and
- Your relationships with employees;

## Communication

Words, both the ones you speak and those written and spoken about you, are exceedingly important in building your personal brand. But because action really does speak louder than words, the non-verbal aspects of your communication and the life you live are incredibly important.

Bear the following in mind:

- Your personal style and image;
- Health and fitness;
- Your voice and presentation techniques;
- Etiquette;
- Who you hang out with and how you conduct your personal life; and
- Business cards, stationery, website.

And when thinking about ways in which to strengthen your brand and get your name out there, consider the following:

- Philanthropy;
- Media relations;

- Speaking engagements;
- Memberships;
- Events and social engagements;
- Business relationships and opportunities;
- Hosted events;

Whatever the activities you're undertaking to build your brand, it is important to achieve consistency in terms of the image and message you convey. Consistency builds strong personal brands, founded on integrity and honesty.

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