



What the CEOs Know:
The Nine Timeless Principles of

PERSONAL BRANDING

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Chapter 1:

What Personal Branding is... and Why It is a Business Survival Skill

Have you ever wondered, what do other people think of you, as a person and a professional? What are you doing to actively improve those opinions? Those two questions are at the heart of everything we are going to talk about in this book... and, believe it or not, much of the success or failure you will have in your career.

Most of us like to think that, in life, we make it as far as our talents, abilities, and work ethics will take us. To some degree, that's entirely true. But what many hard-working men and women don't realize is that just like in product or service marketing; a company's brand is only effective if it motivates a consumer to buy. In personal branding, your brand is only effective if it helps you win the next big promotion over the person sitting in the cubicle next to you. In other words, it doesn't matter if we are the brightest or the best if no one else perceives us as such.

That's where personal branding comes in.

Some of the things that make a great personal and professional impression on others are concepts you've probably heard about a thousand times before but yet have chosen up until now to keep ignoring them. Dressing for the occasion, having the right manners at work and social events, knowing how to send positive body language messages, and other "impression management basics" are the secrets known by those who know how to succeed in every business encounter. But as important as these steps are, and believe me they *do* matter a lot more than you'd think, they aren't the whole story. Personal branding is also about the way you communicate in person and over the telephone, how you compose your e-mails every day, how you treat your colleagues and customers, and even the way you portray yourself online in all the social media websites.

In this book, I'm going to share with you the steps I teach my students every day. The most important part of my job is helping you to be more successful, and you're going to get the tools you need. But first, you have to know why personal branding isn't just a set of career tips, but an important business survival skill.

It's a Jungle Out There

Given that the benefits of having a strong personal brand are numerous, you would think it would be something stressed by every organization in the world. Strangely, that's not usually the case.

In the hundreds of companies I've worked with, I have found that most initially contact me because they have a sense that they want something more from their employees, but have had trouble putting those needs in to words. They often share with me that they're concerned about the way their employees are representing their company with customers; this can include their attire, grooming, manners, social skills, and even communication styles. In most cases, the employees are not even aware of how they are being perceived by others. Management can see that there are problems. However, most of the time they avoid addressing the issues for many reason not the least of which is fear of offending an

employee. While they see the need for training to preserve the corporate brand, they are reluctant or feel unprepared to deal with the topics.

Why aren't more employees and employers concerned about personal branding? After spending more than a decade doing research and training in this area, I found that it's usually because most businesses think of personal branding as one of those "soft skills," that are nice to have but are not as important as technical skills. What they are not realizing is that it is affecting their bottom line.

In fact, this is a sentiment I've heard expressed many times over. Organizations would like to teach their employees to look, act, and communicate the right way, but they're too busy worrying about sales, customer service, and the bottom line. If there were ever a case of missing the forest for the trees, however, this is it. Consider a few of the following situations:

- James, an account executive with a Fortune 500 firm, regularly loses potential accounts ~~of~~ to the competition because he "just doesn't realize his manners are abrasive and he looks like he just rolled out of bed and went to work."
- Nicole, a customer service representative, leaves the customers feeling irate because of the way she treats them. Her demeanor is arrogant, her tonality condescending, lacking energy and enthusiasm; she feels her job is just to spend the next eight hours on the phone – don't just expect anything from her. This often results in losing customers to the competition.
- Samir, who has been taking night classes to finish his MBA, can't seem to break into management because his supervisors mistakenly intone from his body language that he's lacking confidence and credibility and is not ready for the next position.
- Thomas, who regularly meets with customers as part of his job, doesn't realize that his abrupt style of communication, including in person, on the telephone and the way he answers e-mails are costing him thousands in quarterly bonuses and promotion.
- Carol, a freelance consultant, is always seen as the lowest cost solution, rather than the highest-quality solution, by her clients because of the way she dresses and grooms herself.
- Stephen, his company's representative and customer trainer, frequently makes inappropriate jokes and comments at his presentations, inadvertently insulting customers' in his audience. He also drags his feet at returning phone calls and responding to e-mails... frustrating customers and colleagues alike.
- Mary, a CPA at a major firm lost her last promotion because of the way she dressed and her communication style. When she spoke, her tonality was so soft-spoken that it was difficult to hear her even in one-on-one meetings. Unfortunately for her, she did not think that her clothes were important so her wardrobe was very old and worn out.

These are just a few examples, of course, but I can promise you that they aren't at all uncommon. I've seen situations like these – and a lot worse – play out hundreds of times over. When I mentioned them in seminars, I can watch the men and women in the audience slowly shake their heads in agreement. They all seem to know someone who fits the description, even though they're sure it isn't them.

And really, that's the worst part of having a tarnished personal brand: you'll probably never even know what it's costing you... or even that it's a problem at all. I often hear students say, "I didn't even know that I didn't know!" That's because most of your clients or supervisors aren't going to bother to point out how you've just left them with a bad impression. Instead, they'll just find someone else to work with and you just lost another opportunity. Often managers won't pinpoint your lack of luster as the reason why they passed you over for promotion, because on a conscious level they are not aware of it themselves. It's easy for them to see that the organization is leaking revenue, but it's hard to pin down the human connection as the reason why.

A lack of personal branding is a huge problem, and if you haven't been paying attention to this area of your career, I'm here to help you.

"But once they get to know me..."

If I only had one dollar for every time I heard this comment, I'd be rich – no, due to the economy, let's change that to ten dollars. That's because attendees in my seminars often tell me they're confident that their talents and skills can easily outweigh any other personal branding challenges they may have.

Personal branding is important; we need to understand that someone else's perception of us is their reality. In fact, many people will not go beyond the point of their first impression. Our personal brand sends out the message of the perceived value that we bring to our organization.

Think of it this way: everyone you work with already has a personal brand. Are you surprised? If I were to ask you, "Who in your office is always punctual with all their deliverables and is dependable?" Surely a name comes to mind. Or, what if I asked you, "Who in your office is always trying to get out of work or repeatedly tries to find others to take up their slack?" I bet you thought of someone else just as quickly. These people already have a personal brand; it just may not be the one they think they have. So, what's your personal brand?

Remember, personal branding isn't just about the way you look, or your manners, it's also about your reputation, communication style, and your professional demeanor.

It's good and well to talk about not judging a book by its cover, but as human beings we rely on our past experiences to help us make quick decisions. For that reason, first impressions aren't just important... they are almost *all important*. Yes, you do need to work hard to be seen as a professional by others, that is – if you're ever going to maximize your potential and become the success you dream of being. Your technical skills and talents will become more apparent when you master your personal brand. Remember, people won't take the time to get to know you before they form an impression of your brand.

Personal Branding is a Business Survival Skill

Your personal brand is the sum of how you want to be perceived and what you want to stand for – it's your reputation. Not surprisingly, it's made up of many of the same components as a company's brand: the packaging, quality of the product, delivery of promised content, and ultimately the value. In other

words, it is everything that makes you a unique person and true professional. To quote William Arruda, “Personal branding is a unique promise of value” and I agree with him whole-heartedly.

We live in a society, right or wrong, where our visual message is vital to our success. The fact is your image, presence, and manners affect how others judge your intelligence, honesty, and character. “Perceptions become reality,” is an old saying, and it's as true today as it ever was. That is why affirmations work, and why we encourage people to dress for the position that they want instead of the one they currently have. Those who want to excel in the game of business must understand that presenting a unique polished professional brand is not only critical for personal satisfaction, but also for your personal bottom line results as well.

Be the Change

The great news is that improving your personal brand – and changing the way others see you for the better – isn't nearly as hard as most people might think. The challenge are that you first must be willing to make the necessary changes, it takes work, and ~~that~~ it's hard to accurately assess yourself with the same kind of critical eye that others do.

In the following chapters, we'll take a look at the nine steps to developing your personal brand. Each one represents a critical step in showing others what you can do in creating a positive impression of yourself, your company, and your work. Here is a quick introduction to each step:

Step 1. Finding Your Goals. What do you have to do in order to take the next steps in your career? That's a question you can't wait to let someone else answer for you. The days when someone worked for one company for 30 years, with their career outlined by the organization at every step of the way, are long gone. Even if you aren't working on your personal brand, it's imperative that you take the time to envision your future. What do you have to do in the next 6, 12, 18, or 24 months to get closer to your ultimate career destination? I'm going to help you figure that out, and to take responsibility for making it happen. If you don't have written goals you don't know where you are or where you're going.

Step 2. Doing an Honest and Thorough Self-Assessment. You can't change the way others perceive you if you don't know what they think of you now. Some of the questions you'll need to consider are:

- How would you describe your personal brand today?
- What image do you think you present?
- What image do you want to present?
- How do I stand apart from my competition?

These aren't always easy questions to answer, but they're necessary to help you determine where you're at – and where you're going – in your career.

Step 3. Attitude. You can't say enough about this topic, because your attitude will take you everywhere... or nowhere. How would others describe your attitude? Think long and hard about this, because it may be the single biggest determinant of the way others perceive your personality.

Step 4. Know and control your body language to attain the look of confidence. Winners walk, stand, and look a certain way; luckily, poor body language is easy to fix once you're aware of the problem and actively work to correct it.

Step 5. Hone your listening skills. Good listeners are becoming an endangered species. But if you can make people walk away from you feeling that they had a wonderful conversation, and that you are keyed into what they were saying, your personal brand will always get a big boost.

Step 6. You cannot NOT communicate. Everything you say, and don't say, conveys something to the people around you. Learning to master your words, tonality and the art of small talk are a key part of enhancing your personal brand.

Step 7. Pay attention to your visual resume. You should dress yourself with the intent to consistently send the message "You can depend on me; I pay attention to the details." We live in a visual society. Whether you like it or not, if you want to play in the corporate/business court you need to respect the rules of the game.

Step 8. Manners are relevant in at any age, and at in any place. Manners are the icing on the cake, and good ones are an essential element in your personal portfolio, including the way you behave at the dinner table while entertaining clients.

Step 9. Leave your mark on everything you do. Everything you deliver should say "QUALITY!" This includes your e-mails, phone calls, the contributions you make at meetings you attend, and all the customer visits you go on. The most essential element of personal branding is learning to manage your career every day, not just when you are thinking ahead to the next promotion.

As you can see, we've got a lot of ground to cover, and possibly some old habits to overcome. That's all right; that's why I'm here to help. There isn't anything in your personal brand that can't be overcome or improved with the proper focus and attention. It might seem like a daunting task to change the way people see you at first, but I can promise that, if you're serious about making the attempt, you can make enormous progress in just a few months. Like dieting, there are no overnight solutions.

So, if you're ready to start being taken more seriously by your peers, be considered for future promotions, earn more money and experience unlimited potential in your career, and to feel better about yourself than ever before, I'm about to give you the answers you've been looking for. Let's get started!