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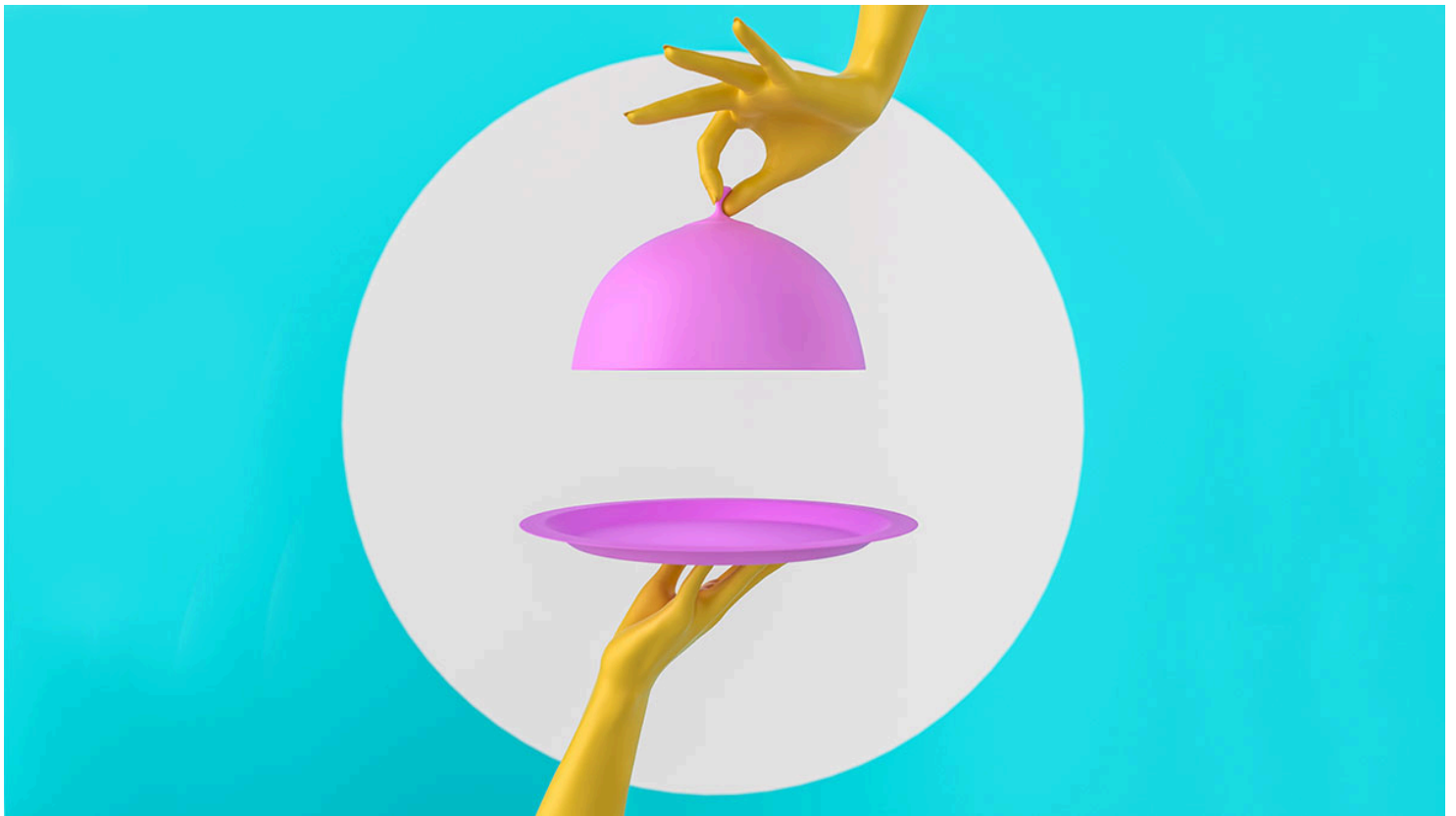
**Harvard  
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**Personal Brand**

# **How to Build Your Personal Brand at Work**

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**Summary.** Building a personal brand is a real investment and can be tricky when you're giving yourself fully to your job. It's even more difficult for young professionals, who may have less experience to build from. So, how do you get started? The trick is to make your personal brand a fulfilling part of your day-to-day job. Here's how.

- Define your brand. Identify three things: your uniqueness (what unique perspective do you bring to the organization?), your values (what give your work purpose, or what do you stand for?), and your contributions (given your business experience or studies, what can you bring to the table in your industry?). The combined result of these three elements make up your personal brand.
- Find organizational initiatives that are aligned with your brand. Take a look at the projects your team is currently carrying out. Do any align with your personal brand? If so, raise your hand to participate. If you don't find what you're looking for dig deeper, and see what's happening at the organizational level.

- Connect with colleagues who have similar interests. You need colleagues with similar interests to inspire you, support you, shape your message, bring in new perspectives, and challenge your ideas so that you can refine them.
- Create and share content. If you don't have content showcasing that work, no one will know what you actually did or what you actually stand for. Block an hour or two at the very end of your day or week (or whenever is most convenient) to dedicate to content creation. An easy way to start is by reposting articles or news that align with your brand on social media channels. [close](#)

Working hard has always kept me busy. As a college student, I took on two internships at once, only to find out neither company was hiring upon my graduation. In my first job at a big tech company, I went the extra mile to exceed my quarterly goals, only to be laid off three years in. Despite my efforts, my position was made redundant. A few years later, once I landed on my feet, I was assigned a major project by the head of my department at a telecommunications organization. Sadly, my boss was moved to another team, and the new leader completely dropped it.

In all of these stories, I was so absorbed in my day-to-day tasks, so eager to meet expectations, that I had no time to think about my personal brand. Each time I changed roles, or was forced to move on for factors outside of my control, I naturally thought, "I have to prove who I am and what I can do all over again."

What I wish I had known back then: If I had created a personal brand sooner, it would have saved me from constantly starting from scratch.

When most of us think of “personal brands,” our minds wander to social media influencers singing, dancing, posing, or talking about fitness and fashion. These people are known for their expertise. They are up with the trends. They are trusted by their followers. Well, what if you had that same kind of influence at work? What if people in your field sought you out for advice and inspiration? Think of what that could do for your career.

The idea that employees should build their own personal brands has become popular in the past few years — and for good reason. To me, this means being up-to-date in your industry, making you more resilient and adaptable. It means being recognized for your unique self and skills, and increasing your visibility, access to opportunities, and growth. A positive personal brand is beneficial to both you and your organization.

Given this, why don't more people develop one? In my experience, it's because we don't have the time. Building a personal brand is a real investment, and this can be tricky if you, like me, enjoy giving yourself fully to your job. It's even more difficult for young professionals, who may have less experience to build from.

So, how do you get started? The trick is to make your personal brand a fulfilling part of your day-to-day job. Here's how.

## **1) Define your personal brand.**

When we work for corporations, it's easy to get sucked into the culture and blend our identities with that of our organizations. I've always been very proud of my employers. I enjoy wearing corporate colors and using the company jargon. If this is also the case for you, how do you develop a personal brand that lives within that larger corporate identity?

You need to identify three things:

### **1) Your uniqueness**

What unique perspective do you bring to the organization? Think about the vastness of your intersectional identity: your background, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, caste, religious beliefs, and so on. Considering these factors, ask yourself: How does my identity impact my understanding of the world and this business? What can I bring to the table that no one else can? Your differences are your superpowers.

### **2) Your values**

What do you stand for? What problems — global, domestic, or at the community-level — concern you? In which causes do you believe? To get inspired, have a look at the UN Global Issues or PWC reports. Climate change, equality, health, human rights,

disruption, sustainability — these are just a few examples of causes that may drive your actions or give you a sense of purpose at work.

### **3) Your contributions**

Given your business experience or studies, what can you bring to the table in your industry? For example, perhaps you studied psychology and have insights into human behavior that allows you to offer valuable feedback to marketing teams. Maybe you're a UX designer who understands how to create more accessible products. Or maybe your talent is analytics, and you know how to tell data-driven stories about why a business strategy is or isn't working. Whatever your area of expertise, how do you use it to add value to your individual work, team, or field at large?

The combined result of these three elements make up your personal brand.

As an example, I'm a woman passionate about technology, with an international background, who has experienced the challenges of being a working mother and immigrating to a new country (uniqueness). I stand for equality and want to help people from diverse backgrounds find good jobs in our digital world (values). I lead a technical team at a tech company, and people come to me for career advice — tips around how to get into tech or how to

upskill their workforce (expertise). Combined, these elements of my professional and personal identity create a personal brand that is entirely unique to me, my values, and my expertise.

What if you are not an expert yet? Don't worry: We are talking about building a *professional* personal brand, and that means all is possible in time and with learning. Even if you don't know or haven't developed the skills you need to be an "expert," you certainly have something to contribute. You just need to decide what it is, how much you can offer right now, and commit to developing yourself in that area. (It's also okay if this changes or evolves over time.)

## **2) Find initiatives and organizational goals that are aligned with your brand.**

Now that you know the focus of your brand, you need to find ways to exercise it. Make it a part of your professional development goals. This way, it becomes a part of your regular workday.

Take a look at the projects your team is currently carrying out. Do any align with your personal brand? If so, raise your hand to participate. If you don't find what you're looking for dig deeper, and see what's happening at the organizational level. Big corporations often release annual reports around sustainability, DEI, workforce development, and other specialty areas. Read them, and connect with teams working on the issues that pique your interest.

For example, is there an initiative that both aligns with your brand and could use more support? I once worked for a huge telco, and was eager to contribute to projects outside of my role. I discovered a team that was team defining our organizational purpose, and while there were some permanent members, they were also seeking collaborators from other departments. I ended up leading a part of the project focused on building digital societies, which aligned well with my brand. I learned a lot, connected with people, and of course, used it to share new insights with my manager and team.

If you work for a smaller company be vocal about your skill set, and ask how you can best support some of their public-facing projects. This is a great way to increase your visibility, and showcase your brand internally and outward. As I did, make sure you frame your participation as a developmental or stretch goal. It may even lead to your next big opportunity.

### **3) Connect with colleagues who have similar interests.**

Making your brand a part of your work is an excellent start — but you can't go about it alone. You need colleagues with similar interests to inspire you, support you, shape your message, bring in new perspectives, and challenge your ideas so that you can refine them.



For instance, if you are interested in creating a more inclusive workplace for first-generation employees, and this is a key element of your brand, who can you connect with in the company to help you develop this goal, bounce ideas off of, and start building real community? Many organizations have employee resource groups (ERGs) focused on creating safe spaces for varying identities. That may be a good place to start.

Likewise, if your brand is more focused on an environmental, political, or human rights issue, look into whether your company may have existing discussion groups around these topics. You can also find like-minded employees by searching your “company name” + “social issue” online, and seeing if any of your coworkers have posted on the topic — in an article or even on social media. Don’t be shy around inviting people who inspire you to connect over a virtual coffee to learn more.

Finally, you can take initiative yourself. Share articles or videos that you’re passionate about with your team members or organize a “lunch and learn” on topics that align with your brand. This will allow like-minded people to come to you, help you expand your inner circle, and who knows, maybe even connect with new mentors or thought partners.

#### **4) Create and share content.**

You're meeting new people and working on new initiatives. Now comes the essential part: creating and sharing content. Think of it this way: People move. Projects end or are killed. If this happens, you may end up like I did early in my career, starting from scratch. Sure, you can update your resume and LinkedIn profile to reflect your work, but if you don't have content showcasing that work, no one will know what you actually did or what you actually stand for.

Block an hour or two at the very end of your day or week (or whenever is most convenient) to dedicate to content creation. An easy way to start is by reposting articles or news that align with your brand on social media channels like LinkedIn and Twitter. Don't just hit "retweet," though. Add your perspective when you post. Over time, you'll grow more comfortable putting your thoughts into words, and may even be inspired to produce your own think pieces, social posts, or videos on those topics.

Of course, creating original content will require more time and effort. But if your perspective is thoughtful, ethical, well-researched (backed by evidence), and fresh, people will respond. Your personal brand will grow, slowly, but organically. Be prepared for people to provide you with feedback — positive, negative, and critical. Just as you're able to share your thoughts

freely, others will share theirs. From this feedback, aim to learn, get inspired, re-examine your perspective or ideas, think of new angles, and create something stronger the next time.

Finally, as you reach people and gain more visibility, you can expect to get more opportunities to exercise your brand. This may look like being a speaker in your corporate “all hands” meeting or delivering talks internally or at external event. With those invites, you’ll be required to create new content as a part of your job, and you can use iterations of that work when developing new ideas to publish or post.

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Remember: you are never “too busy” to work on your personal brand. Once you make it a part of your day-to-day job, it will come to you easily, and grow from there.

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