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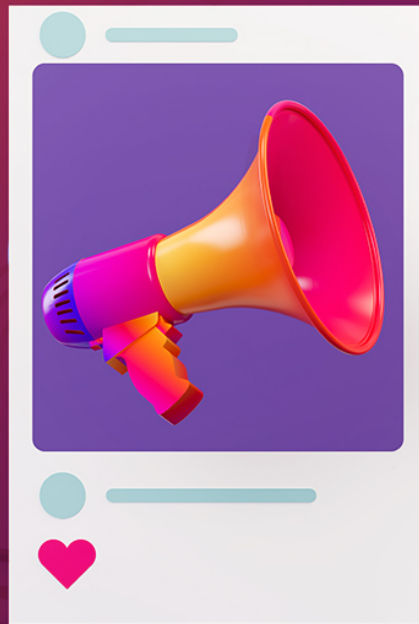
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What's the Point of a Personal Brand?

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Summary. We often confuse our reputation as our personal brand. But that's not true. Everyone has a reputation. The first impressions you make, the relationships you form with managers and peers, and how you communicate – all of these things impact how others see you. Your personal brand, on the other hand, is much more intentional. It is how you *want* people to see you.

- To start building your personal brand, figure out what drives you. What motivates you to get up in the morning and go to work? What skills are you curious about but have yet to build? What subjects pique your interest?
- Next, align your values to your organization's goals. Say your organization regularly brings the most cutting-edge new products to market and values leaders who challenge the status quo and think outside the box. How do your current strengths align with the company's goals? You see yourself as a creative person, who loves solving complex problems. Given that, you may decide on "innovator" as your key personal brand attribute.

- Just like in the commercial world, a brand has no value unless people are aware of it. To increase your visibility, create a stakeholder map. It could be a simple list of people you want to know or people who can help you progress at the organization or an intricate document that highlights how others might be able to advocate for you.
- Finally, reach out to the people you want to connect with. When you meet them, use the opportunity to highlight your skills and interests and how those competencies might benefit them and their work. **close**

One of new my coaching clients, Mike, a young manager in the finance industry with a prestigious MBA, was turned down for a promotion. When he asked his supervisor about the decision, his boss replied, “Because nobody knows you.”

That came as a surprise to Mike, who’d received regular praise for his strong work ethic and good results. He thought everyone knew him in the small firm. What he found was that the senior managers at the decision-making table had no idea what he stood for and who he was as a person.

Mike made a mistake that many of us experience early in our careers. We believe our efforts, education, or performance are enough to outcompete our colleagues and secure advancement opportunities. We overlook (or simply are not taught) the value of building a personal brand.

What is a personal brand?

The managers at Mike's company knew he was a strong performer. Why wasn't that enough to land him a promotion?

In high-performing organizations, at certain levels, everyone is exceptional. To clearly differentiate your value and what you bring to the table, you need to do more than have a good reputation. You need to have an outstanding personal brand.

Often, we confuse our reputation with our personal brand. But the two are not one and the same.

Everyone has a reputation. The first impressions you make, the relationships you form with managers and peers, and how you communicate — all of these things impact how others see you.

For instance, if you ask your colleagues to describe you, they might say you're a warm person who's easy to collaborate with. Some might say that you occasionally run late to meetings but are great at prioritizing tasks. Your reputation is made up of the opinions and beliefs people form about you based on your collective actions and behaviors.

Your personal brand, on the other hand, is much more intentional. It is how you *want* people to see you. Whereas reputation is about credibility, your personal brand is about visibility and the values that you outwardly represent.

You have the power to define your brand by aligning your intentions with actions. That is, changing your decisions and behaviors to influence how others see you and to help them connect both emotionally and intellectually to the image you hope to portray. If that image aligns with the opportunities you want, then you are more likely to secure them.

Now that we know what a personal brand is and why it matters, let's look at how you can start building your own.

How to Build a Personal Brand

Step 1: Figure out what drives you.

Start by asking yourself the following questions:

- What motivates you to get up in the morning and go to work?
- What skills or talents are you most proud of?
- What skills are you curious about but have yet to build?
- What kind of tasks or projects energize you?
- What subjects most pique your interest?
- Ten years from now, what do you want to have contributed to the world?
- What do the people you most admire have in common?

Write down your answers to these questions and pay attention to any overlap or alignments you discover. This exercise can help you identify some of the values, beliefs, or goals that are currently driving you.

For example, perhaps you figure out that you're great at productively managing conflict, love brainstorming new ideas, and enjoy collaborating with others. Maybe you learn that the people you most admire display curiosity, compassion, and creativity.

Identifying and reflecting on what drives you, as well as what you want to achieve, will help you harness your existing skills and competencies to deliberately demonstrate behaviors that make your greatest strengths and passions outwardly visible. You can also use this knowledge to reflect on what new skills you might need to develop in order to get to where you want to go.

Step 2: Align your values to the organization's goals.

You're off to a great start, but if you want to grow within your current role, it's important that you find ways to connect your brand back to your organization's goals. Start by looking at the people who are successful and admired within your company. Observe the behaviors and traits they consistently exhibit. What are their most valued strengths? How does their behavior help the business move forward?

Now, turn back to step one, and reflect on the goals and values you identified. Do you see any alignments between your current skills and the qualities your organization rewards? If so, focus on developing those areas. If not, you may need to expand your competencies. Either way, this exercise will help you envision a personal brand that aligns both with your aspirations and the strategic goals of your company.

Sometimes it can be useful to choose a keyword or attribute to help drive your brand, for instance: leader, innovator, creative, or techie.

To continue building on our original example, let's say you join a Research & Development (R&D) team at a consumer goods company. Maybe you observe that your organization regularly brings the most cutting-edge new products to market and values leaders who challenge the status quo and think outside the box. How do your current strengths align with the company's goals? You see yourself as a creative person, who loves solving complex problems. Given that, you may decide on "innovator" as your key personal brand attribute.

Your next step, then, would be to identify the specific traits and behaviors you need to develop and consistently demonstrate to be seen as an innovator. These might include observable

characteristics such as generating creative, resourceful solutions to problems, integrating ideas and inputs from different sources, and building on other people's suggestions during meetings.

Ultimately, your goal is to align what you're passionate about with the core values of your organization and use that passion to drive your professional growth and reinforce your personal brand.

Step 3: Map your stakeholders.

Just like in the commercial world, a brand can't succeed if no one is aware of it. Like my client Mike, if you fail to showcase your brand to a broad audience — especially key decision-makers — you're unlikely to land those bigger and better opportunities.

To increase your visibility in the organization, try creating a stakeholder map. This is a tool that helps you identify the influencers in your organization and strategize on ways to connect with them, both formally and informally.

There is no "right" way to create a stakeholder map. It could be a simple list of people you want to know or people who can help you progress at the organization. It could even be a more intricate document with the names of influential organizational leaders, their roles and responsibilities, and how they might be able to advocate for you.

However you choose to collate this information, the most important aspect is to understand who you want to reach out to and why. Often, your leadership team's success hinges directly upon individual contributors, like yourself, doing an excellent job. This means you have a natural opportunity to reach out and learn more about them: their interests, professional challenges, problems they're trying to solve, involvement in alumni networks, charities, and personal and professional affiliations. You can use the knowledge you gain about these stakeholders to position yourself as someone who adds value to their lives and who has the ability to make a larger impact on the organization.

Step 4: Make yourself visible.

Once you have your stakeholder map, the next step is to reach out to the people on it. When you're new, this can feel a little awkward, so don't be afraid to ask for help. Reach out to your boss, a senior colleague, or a teammate who's worked in the organization for a while to help you make a few introductions.

When you connect with them, see if they would be willing to meet for a quick (virtual) coffee or lunch. You can frame your ask around seeking their advice on a topic within their area of expertise, or maybe even call out some similarity within your backgrounds — a shared hobby, aspiration, or alumni affiliation.

Better yet, if you have ideas around how they can approach a challenge they're facing, don't be afraid to mention it in your message. Highlight your skills and interests and how those competencies might benefit them and their work. Think of this message as a first chance to showcase your personal brand. Articulate what you stand for and, most importantly, how that relates to making a difference for the organization.

Say, for example, you'd like to connect with the VP of marketing at your firm. Your message may look something like this:

Hi Jennifer! At a recent town hall meeting, you spoke about the importance of getting better customer insights to help us develop and execute our business strategy more effectively. I am passionate about data analytics and have worked as an analyst for the past three years. I'd love to share some ideas on using interactive data visualization to translate pools of data into actionable information for our existing digital marketing campaigns. Can we schedule a 20-minute virtual coffee to discuss?

The key is to demonstrate a sincere interest in your colleagues: what they care about and what problems they're trying to solve. This allows you to highlight and frame your own strengths in a way that can help them, without making it seem like you're primarily interested in your own advancement.

Building a personal brand may seem promotional at first glance, but it's not. Your personal brand is how *you* define the distinctive value that you bring to your career. It has the potential to strengthen your connections and engage more deeply with colleagues. Being able to articulate your brand will help others understand who you really are, what you stand for, build authentic relationships, and ultimately, realize your goals.

Harrison Monarth is an executive coach, and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Confident Speaker* and the international bestseller *Executive Presence*. Harrison works with leaders and organizations on positive behavior change, authentic leadership and effective communication. His latest book is *Breakthrough Communication*. Connect with him on Twitter @HarrisonMonarth

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