



Give Yourself a Brand

It is well understood by organisations that their brands are of paramount importance. Consequently, they receive significant time, attention and investment. What is less understood is the importance of personal brands to people's success and happiness, as well as the positive impact this has on the organisations they work for. In this article, **Charlie Wagstaff**, one of the Founders of Criticaleye, The Network of Leaders, shares some of his observations on how senior individuals in business can build and enhance their own brands.

It is hard for some individuals to think of themselves as a brand. For most, 'brand' pertains to a product and 'personal brand' to famous individuals. However, the fact remains that everyone does have a 'personal brand'. As Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, has said, "Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room." What does personal brand mean for the careers of leaders and for their organisations?

Have you ever looked at your individual persona and visualised it as your brand? Very unlikely.

Have you returned from a holiday re-examining how you intend to act, having asked yourself "what is the meaning of what I am doing?" Probably.

Have you, as a result of this self analysis, really done anything about it? Probably not.

What's encouraging is that, by seeing yourself as a brand and giving yourself a context, you can really effect any desired change you might wish to make in a far more informed way.



COMMUNITY COMMENT

Bernard Cragg, Senior Independent Director, Mothercare plc and Associate, Criticaleye

"The challenge in career management is not to become stereotyped. I have found that there is a huge tendency to put you in a box. Thinking about your personal brand can facilitate you to communicate what you regard as your key skills and characteristics and that may (and I mean may) allow you to break out of your box."



COMMUNITY COMMENT

Siva Shankar, Corporate Finance Director, SEGRO plc

"Just like a commercial brand, a few themes that people quickly 'get' ensures clarity, differentiation and consistency on personal brand. Consistency is important to prevent inadvertent mixed messages. Paying great attention to 360 feedback from people within your organisation, especially the more candid feedback obtainable via a web-based platform where anonymity is guaranteed, is a great sense check for consistency on brand themes. And while consistency is important, it is also sensible not to get too rigid on sticking just to the current knitting. This is because we evolve with new experiences, through increasing the scale of difference we make around us, and through meeting people who have an impact on the way we think, and the key themes of our brand should be accordingly managed so that they comfortably and naturally evolve with us."

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BRANDS WE KNOW AND 'ME'

We can all see how a strong brand identity aids the recognition of an organisation, so why can't the same apply to you? Such brands are able to draw us in because they emotionally engage us in some way. For some, Apple is an exciting quirky brand at the forefront of design and technology... for others, it means something else. Either way, it draws an emotional response that affects, among other things, buying decisions.

To achieve brand success and retain brand loyalty, you need to be consistent. We adopt brands only if we trust them fully. Every contact with the brand must be on-message: everything must be true to its identity and values, from the look and feel of the product or service to the environment in which it is sold.

This is no different to how you personally are perceived by your colleagues, customers, friends and family.

BRAND ME AND THE ORGANISATION

The term 'Brand ME' infers that personal brand is all about the individual. However, it is also about the companies they lead or represent - leaders that cultivate their personal



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Molly Jackson, Commercial and Finance Director, Southbank Centre

"I suspect that most of us practise brand management even if we don't call it that. We all have personal values that we apply in our business lives as well as our private... we also know where our strengths and weaknesses lie. All these add up to the essence of our personal brands - and, if we are inconsistent here, then ultimately we will fail. This is particularly true in the current climate wherein customers and wider stakeholders are seeking transparency and consistency from the brands and companies they invest in. They want to trust."

brands, create more authentic and genuine organisations, in turn engendering trust from stakeholder groups and, ultimately, creating a more effective, profitable company.

Savvy organisations can leverage the personal brand of their leaders into a powerful tool to garner respect with their stakeholders and wider business community. Companies who have leaders that are consistent and genuine will be more successful than those that don't. So, it is not just about you branding yourself - companies should also heed the importance of personal brands and encourage their leaders to discover their individual drivers.

BUILDING BLOCKS

In building your own brand, you should seek to inspire people with who you are. It is important, without arrogance, to convey your achievements to your audience - and convey them in the form of genuine, heart-felt stories that offer

real learnings. Just make sure you are consistent with these stories and that they stand out for the right reasons. They will give you greater confidence to engage.

Here are a few fundamentals to engage you and kick-start the process:

- I am different from everyone else because I am 'me'. The influences upon me make me stand out
- There are some constituent parts of me that I am passionate about or have influenced me greatly. They have been the key drivers of my life
- With passion comes energy, commitment and drive – I need to harness more effectively what I am passionate about

The first important sentiment to engage with is your own self belief - accept that you bring unique experiences that set you apart. Identify your 'unique selling points' and the milestones in your life. Usually these were/are driven by some form of innate passion. Capture this passion as, when you have passion, the outcome is pleasurable – and it is infectious. People respond to passion and it makes you more believable/readable/ watchable. Harnessing this makes sense – it will feed your brand.

I am often asked the question “where do I start?” or “where do I go from here?” By taking yourself through the fundamentals outlined above, you will start to pick out the strands of your brand – and this will be all the encouragement you will need to continue. Having said that, remember the baby steps – don't stretch too far too quickly for an unattainable 'Holy Grail'. It won't all come at once.

Once you start down this path, do not be surprised if you discover that you are in a role that is not entirely suited to you. Remember though that this current role will have a use, as it will help inform the dialogue that you are having with yourself. It may even be the spur that you need to force yourself to make that necessary step-change. Interestingly,



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Stephen Pain, VP Global Communications, Unilever

“Personal brand? Think of it in terms of ‘dress down Friday’ - a concept that has always puzzled me. It's like someone telling you that you can be who you are on a Friday - by wearing what you want - as long as you conform to being someone else the rest of the week. So, ask yourself some honest questions, give yourself some honest answers and see what happens. Being clear about your personal brand is liberating - it means you can be who you are seven days a week. In this search engine society having a clear, consistent identity makes you stand out from the crowd and, more importantly, helps people to find you. For example, focusing on the development of a personal website is a useful discipline - think of it as a living, breathing CV. My website has undoubtedly helped position me strategically within the communications industry, differentiate my offer and secure some major assignments for blue-chip multi-national companies. You can see what my personal brand means to me on www.ageofgood.com - like it or not it's who I am.”

an externally imposed ‘shock’, such as being made redundant or the death of someone close to you, often forces people to take stock and undertake a radical review. In my experience, this enforced process enables people to re-direct their career invariably for the better.

WEAR YOUR MEDALS WITH PRIDE

One way to understand what you enjoy or to view your achievements is to see them as your Gold, Silver and Bronze medals. Athletes that returned from the Beijing Olympics, for example, rightly had recognition for all the hard work they had undertaken. When I met some of these returned ‘heroes’, this new found assurance was palpable. You are no different. You have acquired your own medals along the way. Carry them around with you, talk about them and engage with people about them with purpose and pride.

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Jon Slatkin, former CEO, Titan Outdoor

“I never saw the importance in establishing a personal brand until Titan was recently sold and I found myself, for the first time in my career, between jobs. A quick online scan uncovered a variety of press clippings and background that did not fully (or accurately) capture my path to date. For better or worse, perception is reality, and I recognised the need to set the record straight. Thinking through my brand in detail allowed me to readily articulate both my accomplishments and my ambitions (ie, my brand) in the most concise way possible wherever I have a networking interaction.”

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By starting to identify and engage these fundamentals you will begin to understand better your personal brand and what has really shaped it. Let me take you through an example.

"I am a successful professional within a FTSE 100 organisation where I head a function and attend the Board. I have taken my career through my discipline as a company secretary and legal counsel. Where do I take my career now? I manage the corporate politics well and have supported the Chairman and CEO in their roles on the Board. My passion is people and I love mentoring. I have recently become involved as part of a special projects team and I am getting to understand the company's commercial drivers, building real cross functional relationships. This gets me up in the morning."

This individual was at the early stages of questioning where her career was taking her and was trying to map out the unique selling points that have shaped her brand, but also to identify what, at that time, she was involved with that enthused her.

Here are some questions that I advised her to consider in order to see what made her tick:

- When, and in what environment, are you at your most productive?
- Do you feel you want to control your destiny more?
- What do you believe to be right and how keen are you to fight for it?
- How do you best work with people? Do you lead? Do you like to be part of a large team? Do you enjoy matrix structures? Do you enjoy 'politics'?
- Are you driven by money (is it still the focus that it was?) or are you more interested in putting something back in?
- Are you really tied to a location or is there somewhere else you really want to be based?
- How much of a maverick are you?
- Who are your connections (work and social, old contacts)? Is your network broad enough? What could you explore with them?
- What's out there that you have always wanted to do, but never taken time to fulfil?
- What do you not want to do and what do you not want to give up?



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John Allbrook, Executive Chairman, Syscap Ltd

"I had not realised how far my personal brand had evolved in the Internet age. In fact I was not even aware that I had a personal brand until it was pointed out to me. But sure enough, the Google robots pick up a lot more than you think! More importantly, everything that was out there did not give a true picture of my career, my achievements, my business beliefs and the value I bring to the table; so I decided to take action. Now I am not only much more comfortable with my public image but also believe it is representative of the real me. I have worked hard to make that image consistent with my values and beliefs. Undertaking this simple exercise helped me understand my personal values better and what really makes me tick. Consequently I believe it helped me in making the right decisions concerning the next step in my business career."

I advise you to look at these, capture the answers on a single page then retain, revisit and challenge.

FUTURE PERFECT

The next step is to start to scope the future - look at what you want to achieve in, say, 10 years (this could be longer or shorter, depending on your stage of change). Only then can you start giving focus to where you are now. Our FTSE 100 professional had identified that the corporate politics were wearing thin, but the good salary provided security. Her recent involvement in special project work had opened her eyes to new opportunities - opening doors that she previously thought closed. A CEO role became a real consideration. She realised that her future, whatever she thought it might be, was all about achieving 'breadth' and opening new horizons - building on her experiences up to that point.

This is where scoping the future is very beneficial. Some common options are:

- A portfolio career that could involve a mix of Non-executive Directorships, some paid and some pro bono
- Stepping into consultancy or taking up an interim role, thus making use directly of knowledge and expertise accumulated over many years. Ask yourself how your experience is unique - and how do you make that clear?
- Coaching. This market is saturated, but personal relationships can always leverage this sort of work
- Lifestyle mix. You are financially secure, but still want to keep involved and to contribute. But not all the time. You may be based for part of the year in a second home
- To invest in and watch other companies grow or become involved more directly as an adviser or a board director
- Set up your own business

It is about finding that skill or set of experiences that has a value, doing something that you enjoy but also having control over your destiny. There is also invariably some element of leaving a legacy and continuing to have worth and, of course, what you can afford financially.

Now that you have worked out where you want to be at this 'milestone' (ie, ten years time), you must then consider the path you need to get there. It may not be straight, but mapping it out will provide you with the necessary focus and direction. Key to this is raising your brand profile.

For many, including our FTSE 100 colleague, the ambition is to 'run a show'. This individual had become convinced that this was not an option until she sat down and planned it logically. She wanted to invest her knowledge and expertise, rather than her money, thus ruling out a private equity option. She then set about securing some Non-executive

Directorships that gave her the breadth to understand broader business issues and test whether she had an appetite for being active on a board. She did and was successful a number of years later in securing a CEO role of a private company with considerable growth opportunities. By doing this, she also set the path for more fulfilling NED roles in the future.

THE MECHANICS OF EVOLVING AND GROWING YOUR BRAND

The direction chosen for your personal brand evolution is a constant journey that must be fuelled by curiosity, conviction and drive. Here are some key points to consider along the way:

- When starting out, identify and head-up new opportunities and projects in your current organisation, eg, partnerships or alliances, overseas expansion, new markets, and new agendas. These all give you marketable knowledge and experience as well as the opportunity to lead and to shine
- Ask yourself if what you are considering really fits with you or whether you are simply jumping from the pan into the fire. Consult with as wide a peer group as possible about what you might want to do. Then keep those relationships open, because you need to engage with all walks of life – and you never know when each one may be relevant
- Develop new connections and engage with powerful external networks. The reason this is so important is that new horizons are opened, and you can test your thoughts in a receptive and challenging environment devoid of politics. You can use this environment to test the receptiveness of your ideas and start raising your profile
- Gain NEDships or advisory roles, as they provide real opportunities for new insight, challenge, stimulus and connectivity. With such exposure, you gain useful knowledge that not only supports your current role but also your future potential. NED roles can be within very diverse organisations (eg, voluntary, public sector, AIM, main list, SME), all requiring and bringing you different levels of exposure
- Feedback - like all good brand marketing, you need to engage with those that influence you and see if the perception of your brand fits with their perception of you. Do they perceive the 'medals' you hold dear to be as significant as you do?



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Andy McFarlane, Marketing Leader, Vodafone Global Enterprise

"Being authentic and true to oneself at every turn is a must for leaders today and for those who want longevity at the top... especially with the blurring of boundaries between people's digital personalities, business personas and personal life. Strong self awareness and a clear understanding of one's own differentiators are all important factors, but beware too much 'self brand management'... personal integrity, authenticity and consistency of actions are what will ultimately drive people's perception."

- Explore – if you find yourself moving in a direction that you do not like, note it, take stock and move on
- Identify senior mentors (informal or formal). There are always wise people who are happy to help and to advise
- It doesn't take another series of Big Brother to give credence to Andy Warhol's much-quoted prediction that we will all have our 15 minutes of fame. People are increasingly aware that they have a personal brand and a personal P&L that they can manage, manipulate and utilise. The upside is that people will feel more accountable for their lives. The downside is that celebrity is a universal right with a lot of people trying to share the same spotlight!
- Raise your profile by being active - speaking, writing, etc
- Finally, to paraphrase another famous brand, - Just Do it. Don't plan it to death - get on with it

So let's review what we have covered:

- Do you have a unique offering?
- Do you have a strong network of peers/colleagues?
- Can you really sell your idea and do people believe you?
- Even if you have all this, have you packaged your personal brand with a resonance that captures the imagination of your audience?

Wherever you are on this journey of realisation, constantly re-evaluate and enjoy the challenge that this new-found confidence brings you.

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Charlie Wagstaff
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Charlie's diverse background gives him in-depth understanding of the challenges and development issues facing today's leaders. He believes that an organisation's longevity and need to innovate can only be achieved by encouraging leaders to seek constant change within an 'inspirational' framework; he is a great believer in Ghandi's mantra, 'be the change you seek'.

Contact Charlie through www.criticaleye.net