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Eight Steps to Creating Your Personal Brand

Everybody knows that you need to work hard in your current job if you want to be considered for new opportunities, whether inside or outside of your company. But, have you even wondered why some people seem to have all the luck? They always happen to be at *just* the right place at *just* the right time when opportunity knocks. Sure, they work hard and do a good job. So do lots of people — including you! So what sets them apart from the rest, you ask?

The short answer: *Personal branding!*

The long answer: *Savvy employees know they need to do more than simply work hard and unpretentiously hope they'll be tapped for new openings or promotions; they understand the importance of marketing themselves in the workplace.*

Sell the Sizzle and the Steak

The term “branding” has long been associated with companies and the products or services they sell. But, in our world of connectivity (LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.), we all have a *personal brand* (whether by design or unintentionally).

Developing the necessary skills to market yourself effectively has become increasingly more important as the complexity of work environment has broadened, the pace of change has accelerated, and technology has shaped the way we connect. Even the most talented, competent, and sought-after candidates must remember that it's still a buyer's market.

So think of yourself as the *product* and your knowledge, skills, and abilities as the *service* you offer to an employer. It's your responsibility to identify the expertise you bring to your *customer*.

If you're currently employed, your customers are your manager and the company. If you're in job search, your customer is a potential hiring manager.

Creating Your Personal Brand

The process of creating your personal brand in the workplace has many similarities to marketing plans designed to promote any product or service. Use this template below (which is based on a business marketing plan) as your guide:



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Eight Steps to Creating Your Personal Branding Plan

1) Define your unique value proposition.

In marketing, a statement that addresses unique differences between like products is known as a *value proposition*. Successful sales people know how to explain why customers should buy *their* product rather than the competitor's. Along similar lines, your personal branding plan starts with understanding what makes you different from other employees. To define your unique value proposition:

- ✓ Know who you are (and who you *are not*).
- ✓ Ask yourself:
 - “What are my talents (aptitudes), interests, personality preferences, and values?”
 - “What knowledge, skills, and abilities do I possess?”
 - “What are my biggest accomplishments?”
 - “What makes me different than my peers?”
- ✓ Consider what role fits you best. Are you a generalist, specialist, or a combination?
- ✓ Seek candid input from trusted co-workers, mentors, family members, and friends. Ask how they describe your strengths; your unique characteristics and qualities; and (if applicable) your contributions in the workplace.

2) Set your branding objective.

Identify your goals in order to craft a branding message that helps you achieve them. Where do you want to be in six months? In a year? In five years? What exactly do you want to achieve?

For example, when marketing yourself in your current organization, perhaps you're looking to:

- ✓ showcase your skills (technical and soft skills) or learn new ones in preparation for future opportunities.



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2) *Set your branding objective. (cont)*

- ✓ gain visibility (inside your department and / or cross-functionally).
- ✓ influence how work gets done in order to achieve / exceed performance goals (your own as well as departmental / organizational goals).
- ✓ build your reputation as a great employee (or work to change a misperception that may be holding your back from achieving your goals).
- ✓ be viewed by upper management as a viable candidate for a specific lateral or promotional move.

If you're in job search, your branding objectives are likely to be focused around informational interviewing, building and nurturing your professional network to find job openings, and getting interviews.

3) *Establish performance measures.*

What are the observable, objective indicators that show that you are moving towards and / or have accomplished your goals?

- ✓ Set specific goals that are measurable and realistic.
- ✓ Build in a timeline with deadlines.

4) *Gather, analyze, and interpret information about your current situation to establish a baseline.*

SWOT stands for *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*. A SWOT analysis is a structured strategic planning model often used for a project or business venture. You can use SWOT analysis for career management and personal marketing purposes to:

- ✓ assess your strengths and weaknesses. How do you stack up against your competition?
- ✓ identify external opportunities and threats. What trends may affect you and your career positively or negatively?



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5) *Identify your target markets.*

Who needs to know you, your capabilities, and professional goals? Your target market might include key managers, mentors and / or human resources staff solely within your organization. Or you might broaden your outreach outside the company, depending on your goals.

Also determine the geographic scope of your marketing efforts as well (e.g., the Chicagoland area, within the Midwest, nationally, internationally, etc.).

6) *Develop your branding strategy and actions aimed at reaching your target market.*

Depending on your specific goals, your Personal Marketing Plan might include (but are not limited to) any or all of the following actions:

- ✓ Volunteer for cross-functional teams and company-wide task forces.
- ✓ Share ideas and trend information with others and solicit advice from them.
- ✓ Take on leadership or committee roles in professional organizations.
- ✓ Attend and / or present at conferences and continuing education events.
- ✓ Write articles for company or professional publications.
- ✓ Present to peers on job-related topics; facilitate a brown-bag lunch meeting on an industry-related subject.
- ✓ Update your resume, LinkedIn profile, and social media to accurately reflect who you are and what you can do. Make sure the content is consistent with your short- and long-term goals.
- ✓ Join LinkedIn groups associated with your occupational field; post relevant articles of interest and contribute to LinkedIn “discussions”.
- ✓ Build and nurture your network consciously and deliberately.

7) *Define implementation strategies.*

What will you do? When? What resources will you need? What might be obstacles to overcome?



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7) Define implementation strategies. (cont)

After the first draft of your Personal Marketing Plan is committed to writing, discuss it with at least three people you respect — such as a mentor, colleague, or spouse. Incorporate their feedback and suggestions, and then begin implementation. As you make progress, evaluate your results and revise your plan accordingly.

8) Periodically evaluate your branding strategy and modify as needed.

Is your marketing message easily understood? What's working? What's not? What do you need to start doing, stop doing, or do differently?

The Features & Benefits

By marketing yourself effectively, you'll uncover new ways to contribute your expertise in the workplace, creating more opportunity. You'll also reap the benefits of increased visibility and career resiliency.