

The Learning Leader's Guide to Personal Branding

Define, build, and market your value.

BY RITA BALIAN ALLEN

As learning professionals, we are dedicated to fostering development and growth within our organizations. We equip employees with the resources and tools they need to take ownership of their careers. At the core of that process is self-awareness, the foundation for staying true to our authentic selves. That requires deep reflection of our values, strengths, opportunities, interests, motivations, and goals—also known as *personal due diligence*.

Given the ever-changing and competitive demands of the marketplace, understanding your unique value and impact is critical to career success and fulfillment. Defining what differentiates you and effectively communicating your story enables you to advocate for yourself and seize new opportunities. Regardless of industry or profession, three key elements are essential: identifying, creating, and articulating your personal brand.

Personal branding and self-marketing are not just career strategies but essential skills for long-term success. By mastering those competencies, you can enhance your career while guiding others in your organization to do the same.

What it is

Personal branding is the process of identifying what makes you unique, packaging it into a compelling narrative, and communicating

it effectively. It is about doing the necessary self-exploration to understand and leverage differentiators as an anchor for success.

Successful professionals master three specific practices and possess three commonalities:

- They know what they have to offer (their value-add and worth).
- They know what they want (they are goal-oriented).
- They know how to ask for it (they effectively advocate for themselves).

How it works

A well-defined personal brand helps professionals navigate career decisions, strengthen their professional presence, and communicate their value in a way that not only resonates with others but also puts forth their most authentic best self.

Ownership of one's career is the mindset everyone should embrace to realize their full potential and aspirations. While that is not a simple process, it is enlightening, rewarding, and empowering. It is an ongoing process that all levels—including staff, managers, leaders, and executives—must engage in throughout their careers to enable a great sense of autonomy and self-direction.

In terms of career management, people often are not prepared to talk about themselves in a marketing manner—packaging their talents, showcasing them, and presenting their value



CHECKLIST

Personal Branding and Marketing



Conduct your personal due diligence to uncover values, strengths, opportunities, and goals.



Learn your differentiators and leverage them to set yourself apart.

within their organization and externally within their field or community.

The Three Ps Marketing Technique provides a framework and structured approach to start the process.

- Preparation: Identify and define your personal brand.
- Packaging: Create and build your personal brand.
- Presentation: Articulate and enhance your personal brand.

Guidelines

Learning professionals need to develop the core competency of marketing themselves. Building the competency enables you to establish your differentiators, the value you bring, and the worth you have to offer.

Identifying, building, and articulating your personal brand is foundational to the marketing process. Dedication, discipline, practice, and growth help the process become effortless and second nature. When you stay true to yourself, your personal brand will become your anchor during rewarding and challenging times and situations.

One way to effectively communicate your value is through storytelling. Stories are memorable and a comfortable way of articulating value and can showcase impact and contributions. When you tell stories from the heart, people will hear your passion and feel and see your pride. Mastering storytelling skills helps authentically showcase personal branding. The easiest way to do that is to describe the situation or challenge, explain two or three actions you took to address the challenge, and share the outcomes and results.

Create a running list of all your accomplishments to create the stories you want to develop and start practicing. Be ready and able to find and seize moments of op-

RESOURCES

Brown, B. 2018. *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.* Random House.

Gallup. 2007. *Strengths-Finder 2.0.* Gallup Press.

Klaus, P. 2004. *Brag!: The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It.* Warner Business Books.

portunity to sprinkle those stories within a timely and relevant conversation.

Results

To share an example, a technical leader who was the chief operating officer of a technology company defined their brand as an entrepreneurial, no-nonsense (technical) problem solver. After an extensive self-discovery and self-actualization process that included clarifying goals, interests, motivations, and aspirations, the leader was able to allow their authentic self to emerge and to stay true to it. In doing so, they returned to school to pursue a doctorate. Defining their personal brand helped the individual be more thoughtful and intentional with their identity, goals, and interests. Their journey helped guide them forward to pursue those goals.

In another example, a product marketing professional in a consumer products organization defined their brand as integrity and team orientation. Through the extensive personal due-diligence process, they clarified that those strengths defined and helped them achieve success throughout their career. That empowered the individual to shift focus to becoming the best version of themselves by amplifying and leveraging those strengths in new ways. They did so by requesting and receiving additional responsibilities within the company that aligned well with their goals and interests.

To solidify your personal brand, make a commitment to yourself for action planning. Set clear steps to refine your brand, practice articulating your value and thought leadership, and seek opportunities to showcase your strengths and subject matter expertise.

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Create a plan for marketing your accomplishments—identify how, when, and with whom.



Become a good storyteller through constant and diligent practice.



Build relationships and be visible and engaged to leverage opportunities.



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