

Power of Personal Brands

"Classy, sexy, elegant – always makes me feel like royalty," answered Katie when I asked her about her favorite brand, St. John's clothing. I noted that she did not mention quality – or even the actual look – whether conservative, liberal or artsy. No, she talked about how the products make her feel. Her experience of the brand evokes emotional, lasting and powerful impressions. These clothes whisk her away to another place where all stress and financial restrictions are forgotten. Wow – if a clothing brand can do that – imagine what a personal brand can do?

- Further your career
- Create lasting impressions at important events
- Maximize connection with others
- Further a personal cause
- Add focus and direction
- Increase value in life

Brands are about promises made, promises kept and the impressions these promises leave. Everyone has a brand. Everyone makes promises - some are on the surface – some are just implied. Not everyone delivers on them. But the people that do - shine.

Think Oprah. Think Wesley Autrey. Think about your favorite colleague. When we hear their names, we have immediate reactions. Their brand is in our minds.

Oprah – you may be a fan, maybe not – but most react to her with these responses: Bold, emotional, passionate, giving, survivor, savvy, powerful, successful, rich – She is real – authentic but she also continually crafts her message to stay on brand. Oprah is a powerhouse and a marvel at differentiating herself from others. She stays on brand by delivering on her promises at all points of contact. And it works.

She is:

- Consistent
- Creative
- Cohesive

Wesley Autrey – to those of you unfamiliar with this name, think back when a young man had a seizure in the New York City subway system. Ok, you remember now – the media dubbed him "Subway Superman, Harlem Hero" -- that unassuming, gracious and solid man who saved the other by covering his body as the subway train approached. Autrey continued to remain humble and giving no matter how much the spotlight was shining – he saved that young man because as he said, it was the right thing to do. We saw him in the news on almost every station. Had he suddenly changed personality – style or message we would be less inclined to gravitate towards him. Fair? Not really, but reality. He stayed true to his authentic self – to his brand and we believed him even more. And so did many others. In fact, after the press covered the event, strangers began calling and offering gifts. He received \$5,000 cash and \$5,000 in scholarships from Jerry Sherlock, the president of the New York Film Academy, and also received \$10,000 from Donald Trump.

We have a brand whether we like it or not. The trick is to be able to manage our brand to help others perceive the real us – the brand we feel close to – in a way that works for us and works for them.

We can start by delving inside – into the core of who we are, our values, likes and dislikes. We can examine all our traits and even what does NOT represent us. Boil all this down to a few leading attributes and we start to notice what makes us unique – the elements that differentiate us from others.

- Reflect
- Evaluate
- Summarize

Now we are ready to tell our story. Managing perceptions of our brand is really about telling our story – our truthful story in a way that reverberates with our audience just as companies do with their target markets.

One of my clients came to me because she wanted focus, direction, and guidance with her career. Was it about money? Did she want to work solely for non-profits? Was there any in-between, and should she switch industries? There were many professional goals ahead of her and too many roads to take to reach them. We worked on her brand and realized several things:

- She was creative, but needed flexibility more than creative platforms.
- She was compromising her beliefs and her abilities by her communication tactics at the time. But did not necessarily need to work for a non-profit to balance this.
- She loved process more than she had anticipated.
- She narrowed in on what differentiated her and pulled back on choices based only on monetary gains.

A few weeks ago I received a call from her. She switched careers and was happier than she had been in years. She said she remembered how much flexibility came up in her reflection exercise and noticed that word in a job description. We laughed when she said; “ I actually called first to confirm that job and company truly were FLEXIBLE before moving forward with an interview.”

Only time will determine how many goals she will meet – yet already she is fast on her way to her dreams. Even in letting go of choices based on monetary gains, she found a position making as much if not more than her previous one – and the company is in alignment with her values and beliefs. Much of her new found success is due to accepting and reveling in her personal brand. We were both ecstatic about this positive direction in her life.

When our projected brand is in sync with the reflected brand (the one we discovered during our initial work) we are in alignment and positioned for visibility and success. Out of alignment means out of sight. Out of sight may mean loss of brand awareness. Loss of brand awareness means loss of direction, differentiation and even perhaps loss of success. Personal Brands give way to powerful positioning and personal and professional success.

About the Author

Branding is a wonderful tool for individuals as well as groups to secure and promote a position in the marketplace. Jessi LaCosta of BlueRio offers workshops, coaching sessions and individual consultations in branding and communications to groups of all sizes. To learn more about these techniques, visit: <http://www.bluerio.net>

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