

# Managing your personal brand

Tom Zimmerman, 11/15/2023



## Ask Your Mentor

*Dot down a few follow-up questions or observations as you read. For example:*  
Won't my professional work "speak for itself?" Why do I need to help it along?  
I don't like talking about myself - don't hiring managers just read my resume?  
If everybody does personal branding, don't I still get lost in the shuffle?  
Isn't this manipulative and fake? I don't want to seem superficial.  
For the mentor - How have you done your own personal branding?

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## What does it mean to have a personal brand?

Brands provide buyers with decision shortcuts. You see a familiar product logo, hear a slogan or jingle, and immediately associate "good, bad or indifferent." Cost, value, quality, innovation, status. We form our expectations from a mix of paid promotions, personal experience, and word of mouth. Think through a few of your favorite brands and ask yourself, why buy? I own Sony cameras for ease of use and sensor quality. Martin guitars for rich tones and historic pedigree. Ryobi tools because they get the job done at a lower price point.

Your professional reputation will evolve without any additional assistance from you. You can simply do your job and let your accomplishments speak for themselves. Our *reputation* is earned - or eroded - through demonstrated performance and outcomes. Personal branding adds elements of *intentional* curation and communication. These are meant to *proactively* reinforce that "shortcut" impression coworkers and hiring teams hold for you. Now, and into the future.

## Character, Competence, and Christ

There are a few specific ways to build your brand, as you will read later. These specifics fall into three major categories, all of which influence each other. Character is who we are as demonstrated by how Baton Exchange

we act. Think honesty, diligence, grit, reliability, etc.. Excellent character is essential to our credibility as a Christian. Competency is all about skills: technical skills that we must master to do the job and people skills we need to excel at to build trust and effectively relate to coworkers and clients. Christ of course has to do not only with what we know about our Christian faith, but how we reflect Jesus in our day-to-day work lives. Competence opens the doors for respect and influence, character keeps the door open.

### **Pride goeth before the personal brand? Proverbs 16:18**

Christian professionals are rightly reluctant to brag or boast. It's the humble who are exalted. Matthew 23:12

The Apostle Paul reminded believers,

"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

Fair enough. But Jesus also encouraged us not to hide what is from Him. His words,

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Jesus was not speaking of personal branding, but I do take this point: Include Christ in your intentions. Include your faith. Let people associate not only your professional performance but also your personal worldview. I love it when the professional athlete begins an MVP acceptance speech by saying, "First, I want to thank God." We can do that too.

### **Be purposeful in your personal brand construct**

The time to map out your personal brand construct is now. If you're not sure of your strengths or career goals, it's essential to pray on that.

Have candid conversations with friends and advisors. What is already factually true and demonstrated in your work, ethic, and relationships? What is aspirational for your future growth? This will evolve over time, but you need to start with what you have and know now. This can't wait!

As a professional marketing and communications leader, there were basic industry attributes for my long-term success:

- Creative, collaborative, clear messaging, strong in relationships, can-do attitude, demonstrated outcomes, able to lead, etc.
- There were also notable "above and beyond" attributes: awards, breakthrough innovations, industry commentary, etc.
- Simplistically, I helped ensure that communications *about* me and *from* me would touch on or reinforce these same attributes.
- Then, if people connected any of these factual positives with me in their "shortcut" brand impression, my reputation also advanced.

### **HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR BRAND**

Everything you say, write or do contributes to your personal brand in some fashion. Especially in the digital age.

There is a Public Relations admonition for corporate executives that goes, "Don't say, do or write anything you don't want to see published in the morning news."

My negative corollary to this is, "Don't mess up your personal brand with silly, avoidable mistakes."

The positive corollary is, "Make the most of digital tools and platforms to amplify the best of what you do and who you are."

Refer back to what I just wrote about my marketing and communications branding above:

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**Your brand persona:** What is it you will consistently reveal and share about yourself over time? People knew I loved coffee, loved to sail, went to bible study and did a lot of hiking on vacations. I signed my name and introduced myself as TomZ. “TomZ?” a new acquaintance would ask. TomZ. And that was the “shortcut” to my brand.

**Email:** Every time I wrote and responded to corporate and colleague emails I used clear, collaborative messaging. Whenever possible and appropriate (and true), I would offer creative solutions with a can-do attitude. Every email. Be vigilant and don’t get lax. Go through your send box and read your replies out loud. Make sure they clearly map to your personal brand aspirations. If not, make a course adjustment!

**Texting:** Texting is a mixed bag with professionals. Some are more lax than others. Think about from your personal brand.

**Conversations:** Whenever possible, I picked up a phone or met in person to advance project goals. This helped me sense the other person’s tone and concerns. I could more accurately and effectively address our steps to success. Build relationships that see your brand in action.

**Relationships:** Whether texting, calling, emailing, or meeting, I always watch for ways to *build and strengthen* relationships. Take note of birthdays, kids, vacations, hobbies, sports. Ask follow-ups the next time, and repeat. People begin to pay more attention to *you* when you are sincerely interested in *them*. It’s also an opportunity to pick up on keywords like, “faith, church, prayer, god,” etc. Curiosity is the best tool to building relationships. My personal brand feedback always included references to “builds strong relationships.”

**LinkedIn:** Read and respond to other people’s LI posts. Voraciously. Use your free time to identify the leaders in your industry and people whom you aspire to emulate. Follow their links and co-worker links. Read their articles. Like and share. If you have a pithy, appropriate comment on the content, make it. Refer back to your personal brand construct. Without saying it, people should actually “see” your brand interests consistently represented. This is never as important as when you decide to look for another job or push for a promotion. Your LinkedIn brand persona should be years in the making. Go back quarterly and scroll through your posts, likes and shares. Compare them to your personal brand aspirations and make sure you are consistent.

**Twitter or X:** I recommend staying away from Twitter and other social media unless it’s to simply read the news. Don’t comment, don’t like, don’t share. There is high risk to poorly made and poorly interpreted social media posts of any kind. Including Facebook.

**Industry associations:** Join or support organizations that reflect your brand goals. Participate and contribute in ways that will be noted in light of your personal brand. If you’re sincere in the work, and give glory to God, you are shining a Light on how he uses His resources (you).

### **Live into your personal brand**

All these professional tools and situations are opportunities to express and prompt your personal brand for the long haul.

- When your boss thanks you for a job well done, thank them with words that reflect your key brand aspirations.
- When you congratulate a team you’ve worked with, copying leadership in the chain, refer to brand elements that were exemplified.
- When public accolades come your way, don’t hesitate to list them on your LinkedIn profile under awards and accomplishments.

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As you build this trail of dots, potential hiring teams will be able to connect them. They will browse through your LinkedIn listing and postings. They will search Twitter/X and Facebook (finding nothing). They will follow up with co-workers. If you've done a consistent - and sincere - job of it, your interview conversations will sync exactly with what they've been reading or hearing about you.

“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Hebrews 12:1-2

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### **Ask Your Mentor**

1. What's your perspective on building a personal brand?
2. How do supervisors and leaders talk about the character and competency of those that they lead? How do these attributes affect the degree to which they may view the potential of an individual or the trust that they have in them?
3. How hard is it to build a positive “personal brand?” How easy to lose it?

### **Go Do Ideas**

1. Use the list of recommendations above to make a personal inventory. How are you doing in those areas?
2. Take a moment to reflect. What's one thing you can go do over the next few days to build your personal brand?
3. Is there anything that God is asking you to consider? Pause and ask Him.

### **Go Deeper: Further Conversation & Study**

*Journal or discuss how the following scripture informs personal brand:*

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.

Proverbs 22:29 Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good reputation is better than expensive perfume.

Proverbs 17:28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Acts 24:16 In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

Proverbs 12:8 A person will be praised in accordance with his wisdom, but the one with a bewildered mind will be despised.

Proverbs 3:3-4 Do not let mercy and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 Then you will find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and people.

1 Peter 2:12 and maintain good conduct among the non-Christians, so that though they now malign you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God when he appears.

### **Sources & Resources**

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