



Brand Equity

- Chapter 12 The Hard Skills Necessary for Becoming a Person of Influence
- Chapter 13 The Unspoken Rules for Becoming a Person of Influence
- Chapter 14 The Secret to Being Attractive
- Chapter 15 Getting What You Want, Need, and Deserve
- Chapter 16 Brands and Legacies: Not Such Different Creatures

Building a Lasting Brand That Grows in Value and Leaves a Legacy

Without a doubt, you are potentially your best promotional tool. That's right — in brilliant living color — YOU! The definition of a brand has evolved as the study of marketing has developed. Twenty years ago, when we thought of a brand, we thought of a name or logo like the Ralph Lauren polo horse, the Izod alligator, or the Nike swoosh symbol. It was something that you trademarked, and the brand carried a certain level of prestige depending on the marketing message that was associated with it. It was considered a valuable asset — something you could sell with your company. The process of connecting the attributes to the name or logo was known as branding.

Today, you hear more about branding than every before. Online dictionary *Wikipedia* says, "A great brand is one you want to live your life by, one you trust and hang on to while everything around you is changing, one that articulates the type of person you are or want to be, one that enables you to

do what you couldn't otherwise achieve." You probably know it as your professional image or your reputation. It captures the essence of the stuff legacies, legends, and the lines in your face are made of.

What makes branding fascinating is that it is an intentional act of determining who you are and making it clear what you stand for. The more clear you are, the more powerful your brand. We all come into the world with a name; and we all end up with a Social Security number; but only a select few are willing to work hard enough to define and earn a powerful personal brand.

Think about your tombstone. The dash between your date of birth and date of departure from this life is where you choose to make the most of the time you've been given. Those choices are the building blocks for your brand.

We all have a brand whether we define it or not. Some brands are well known and others are simply a secret to just a few people. The more we understand about the power of a personal brand, the more important it seems to intentionally define it. I don't know about you, but I want total control of how people remember me.

What do you think of when you think of Donald Trump or President Clinton? What about Mother Teresa? When people think of my friend Angela Robinson who owns *The Job Guide*, a regional job advertising tabloid, I'm sure they think of the little packs of Juicy Fruit gum that she leaves when she calls on her clients. If they've ever had a conversation with her, I'm sure they think of her hopeful, cheerful spirit and her warm, engaging smile.

When people make a purchasing or hiring decision or a choice to donate to a charity, they tend to vote with their heart. All logical things considered, the intangibles such as the feeling something gives us still matters.

Branding a person is a thousand times easier than branding a logo or a name. A logo or a name can't interact with you, and they only give people a perceived feeling of significance. You, on the other hand, can engage with people and make them feel any way you choose. The feeling you leave people with determines the quality of your brand. You have a choice in how you define your personal brand, and this final section is about doing just that.

CHAPTER 12

The Hard Skills Necessary for Becoming A Person of Influence

Tragically, we've become a society of people who think our titles define us and that someone else is in charge of determining how much value we have to our organization and society as a whole. While there is an ounce of truth in that, my earnest desire is to help everyone understand that they can harness the true dynamics of power simply by making a series of planned and intentional choices — choices that define an influential and extraordinary life.

You have almost total control of your personal brand. What would you like your brand to stand for? When you are gone from your organization, what will the people you worked with remember or miss about you? When you breathe that final breath, what will that dash on your tombstone consist of — what legacy will you leave?

The first three sections of this book contained important steps and information that will aid you in your life success through networking, communicating, or taking care of your customers. In this chapter, I cover three key items that are necessary to earn you the right to become a person of influence: expertise, experience, and goal setting. These are areas that you can control and guide. They will create the foundation for the influential brand you were meant to own.

Your Experience and Expertise

The experiences we have and the expertise we gain shape our personal

brand. They earn us the right to take a place in life as a person of influence. We don't always get to choose our experiences, but we can choose how we react to them and what we learn from them.

We can control the development of our expertise. We all possess natural gifts and talents, and we can use those to select what skills we develop over our lifetime. Invest enough time in those skills, and they will define your expertise.

The Value of Expertise

Our customers (internal and external) depend on us to have up-to-date information. The level of your expertise can differentiate you from competitors. If you are not a student of your field, you will become extinct. The information is at your fingertips. Subscribe to trade journals, online newsletters, and business publications. Professional associations publish articles and provide teleseminars you can download to listen to when it's convenient for you. Your library has books and audio and video programs. We live in the information age, and it's not hard to find fuel for our expertise; it's just hard to find time to take advantage of it.

Invest thirty minutes a day in your field of expertise. My goal is to spend sixty minutes a day relaxing or exercising because those are my stress relievers. That is a great opportunity to listen to an audio program on CD (or download it to my MP3 player) while I work out or relax. It's a great time to read a book or magazine article related to my field. Capitalize on those times when you are doing chores around the house or sitting in the doctor's office to catch up on the latest information. Your clients — current and future — are counting on it.

If your expertise will give you a competitive edge, you need a goal too. Carl Potter, CSP (Certified Safety Professional) is known as a guru in the field of safety. He makes his living as a professional speaker and consultant in the safety industry. I book professional speakers and had a chance to present a list of speakers for consideration to a safety conference committee. When they saw the list and his name was on it, every member of the conference planning committee said, "We HAVE to hire Carl." Carl has earned the right to speak to that industry because he spent years working for a utility company. However, his additional research for the multitude of books and articles he has written has "showcased" his expertise. His articles appear in

Expertise Inventory

Make a list of the items that might characterize you as an expert. Don't limit your topic to something professional. You might have an undergraduate or graduate degree in a particular topic or years of experience in a particular field. On the other hand, you might have run a successful business for twenty years and that qualifies you to be a small business expert. You might be an expert in getting your family of nine out the door on time every morning without forgetting anything AND manage to get them all around the dinner table together five nights a week. Don't leave any stone unturned when considering what your expertise is because you never know when you'll be called on to use that expertise. Write it all down.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Expertise to Develop

List the areas you'd like to develop expertise in. Also list what it will take for you to gain expertise in each area. This will give you a starter list for your goal worksheet later in this section. For example, you might want to become an expert in viral marketing. To gain expertise in that area, you might read thirty minutes each day and attend a conference on the topic. To get some hands-on experience, consider using what you learn with a small project at your company or a local non-profit organization. Perhaps your particular area of expertise requires getting a college degree or certification in that topic. It belongs on this list too!

What are some areas you'd like to develop expertise in?

What do you need to do to develop expertise in that area?

trade journals throughout the industry, and he speaks at professional association conferences as his schedule permits. He's the guru on safety.

Carl's advice to other speakers on their way up is to set a goal to be the guru. You could give "book report" speeches where you recite someone else's research and ideas or you could deliver training for a company that someone else developed — but why? You'll never reach your earning potential delivering someone else's material. Invest the time in your expertise. Get the education, advanced study, credentials, or certifications you need. It's too important to your brand image to let another day go by.

Using the Expertise Inventory and Expertise to Develop exercises on pages 169 and 170 will help you evaluate and plan your expertise portfolio. While you may never have thought of yourself as an expert in anything, this might serve as a wake-up call that you might be missing out on a competitive advantage if you aren't an expert in something.

Using Experiences to Define Your Brand

We can choose to wander through life as victims of chance, or we can look at the experiences we have as growth vehicles and signs of our true calling. We've all made choices that took us down a bumpy road. Sometimes we think we are making the right choice, but it turns out to be incredibly wrong — or seems to be wrong at the time, right? The crazy thing about life is that sometimes God lines us up for some experiences that will develop us for that next step.

Perhaps you were raised in a single-parent family. As a result of that experience and your parent's courage, tenacity, and resourcefulness, you learned how to help other single parents raise their families. You may end up as a volunteer or in a career where your heart for single parents gives them a greater chance to succeed.

Someone who feels as if she missed some opportunities because of her race, gender, or disability may share her wisdom from the experience as she mentors others like her. She may work hard to make sure that doesn't happen in the company she works in. It might also make her hardened to those who expect to get help advancing in their career but don't want to work as hard as she did to earn it.

An accident or disease can change the anticipated outcome of life. Those who are resilient enough to adapt and overcome the challenges positively

impact their future. Resilience is a skill that permeates every aspect of our lives. Resilient people are more able to handle the inevitable change that happens in their professional life. Resiliency helps emergency services personnel overcome the tragic instances that are part of their job. It also helps married people adapt when a spouse passes away.

Your experience can strengthen your character and resilience, but it can also be a selling point. I book professional speakers, and there is an unspoken qualification that meeting planners don't realize they want: a speaker who has earned the right to speak to their group. Speakers think that the right topic, degree, or expertise is enough. However, a savvy meeting planner knows that when his attendees approve of a speaker, the meeting is a success. Audiences can be fickle. The better a meeting planner (and the speaker bureau) matches the needs and preferences of the audience, the better the meeting planner looks at the end of the speech. Demographics and life experience are important things to look at in the booking process.

This isn't just true with speakers. In every place where people work together in teams, finding the right fit is crucial to team success. Life experiences shape who people become. Someone who is older might be more compassionate and professional than someone who is just entering the workforce because they have years of experience dealing with difficult or challenging situations. Some charities prefer to hire staff members who have experienced the same challenges that the charity's clients face because they want the staff to be empathetic.

Our experiences often shape the values that drive us and the stories that we have to tell. The stories from our life are one of the best ways to teach others and create a legacy. Regardless of what your experiences are, they can be a powerful part of your personal brand. Be grateful for the experiences — good and bad — and the associated learning because they could be preparing you for the next big step in your life.

Use the Experience Inventory exercise on the next page to make a list of all the experiences you've had in your life. The only list many of us ever write is the professional experience summary for our résumé, but there is so much more to do with such a list. You might need that list to convince yourself that you should be doing something you aren't doing now. For example, if you have enough experience as part of a married couple, you might qualify to lead a class at your church for couples who are engaged to

Experience Inventory

List your experiences here. Take nothing for granted. If you've been a parent or spouse, put it here. If you've been a student, managed people, or herded children, write it down. If you were abused as a child or spent time as a homeless person, include it in the list. These experiences might provide proof to yourself and others that you've earned the right to do certain things.

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Experiences You Want to Have

Some people look at this as the list of things they want to do before they die. Be serious but have some fun with the list too. Maybe you want to be a company president or raise \$1 million for your favorite charity. Maybe you'd like to be a lottery winner or visit all seven Wonders of the World. Perhaps you'd like to become a college graduate and you never even graduated from high school. Remember, anything is possible.

What are some experiences you'd like to have?

What do you need to do to have those experiences?
