

Why your leadership brand matters

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What is your personal brand?

When you walk out of the hui... what do people say about you?

Your personal brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room. It's your reputation. Actually, it's more important than your reputation. Because your reputation happens whether you're in control of it or not.

Your brand is what happens when you become intentional about shaping your reputation.

Whether you're aware of it or not, you are always transmitting information about who you are and what you stand for. This is especially true in our social media saturated world – people will have already found you on LinkedIn and have seen your TikTok and have already formed their beliefs about you (Watkins 2021). This should feel empowering, not scary! Because we control these things!

According to the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL), your brand:

reflects your priorities, the values you stand for, the offerings or promises you consistently deliver, and how you go about delivering them. It illustrates not only what you deliver but also how you deliver it (2019).

Why is your personal brand important?

Being aware of your brand is important because your credibility and influence is largely dependent upon what others think of you.

The CCL lists the following reasons to consider how important your brand is:

- A powerful brand can enhance your ability to achieve your goals
- Your brand can help you broaden and deepen your impact
- It differentiates you from others based on your values, strengths, and experience
- Your brand is an important way to be authentic and a true advocate for yourself



Not to mention that much of professional and personal success depends on persuading others to recognise your value (Avery and Greenwald 2023).

The challenge with our personal brand is that many people feel it's a bit icky, cringey, or even manipulative. In fact, *kind people are particularly reluctant to try and influence others because they don't want to manipulate anyone. And smart people are more likely to misunderstand the way influence works. So if you're a smart, kind person, you have a double liability that keeps you from being as influential as you could be* (Chance p. 6).

But we are social creatures, and to achieve great things, you may find you want or need to get people on your side.

You get people interested in you and your goals because they feel something about who you are, your story, and what you're talking to them about (Chance p. 173). We have the strongest bonds with brands we like, identify with, and feel emotionally connected with (Chance p. 187).

If you're keen to achieve great things, winning people over is an incredibly useful skill to have.

How do you build your brand?

First, you need to decide what you want to be known for.

What makes you special, unique. What you can do that no one else can.

The following ideas will give you an idea of your values and what you want to be known for.



How would you like to be perceived by others?

What do you want people to say about you when you're not in the room?

What most stands out about you and your mahi?

What do you want to be known for?

You can – and **should** – include qualities that come naturally to you, but you may also want to consider your role, your organisation, your kaimahi, your external stakeholders. If you work in a hospital, being empathetic and caring is just as important as having attention to detail.

Also, you not only want to ensure you know who you are, but that you think positively about who you are and what you can offer. The strongest brands are built confidently and create a positive sense of self in your own mind (Kaputa p. 15).

Essentially, personal branding is always about authenticity, but it means showing yourself in the most appealing way (Kaputa p. 25).

To do this, you need to like yourself and feel positively about what you bring to the world.

Think about what you want to achieve

Let's remember our brand qualities from page 2 and take it a step further. What do you want to achieve?

I want to be known for _____ so that I can deliver _____.

Key questions to ask:

- Do the brand qualities from page 2 best represent who I am and what I can do?
- Is my brand something that creates value on the eyes of my organisation?
- What risks am I taking in living this brand? What are potential barriers to me inhabiting this brand?
- Will this brand get me where I want to go, or is it what people around me expect of me?
- What can I offer that others can't?

Important note to remember: you may find that your perceived weaknesses and liabilities, in a different context, can be viewed as positives.

Before you start to change yourself to fit a certain mould, you may consider asking yourself if a change in context may be right for you.

Is your brand really... you?

We need to be authentic in our brand. According to branding expert Norm Smallwood, *espoused-but-unlived* brands create cynicism because they do not deliver what they promise.

If your brand includes "organised," yet you walk into every hui five minutes late and don't have an agenda prepped, you're not organised.

If you tell your kaimahi you value boundaries and a good work / life balance, yet you consistently work well beyond a 40-hour week and even into weekends, your behaviour tells a much different story than the one you wish you were telling.

Every behaviour you choose, every word in a Team chat, every decision you make adds to your brand. Quite literally, everything you do sends a message to people about who you are and what you value (Smith 2020). You must **reinforce your desired brand in all of your interactions** (Watkins 2021).

Because with your brand, your credibility, and your reputation, **perception is everything** (Caputa p.192).

It is a tight-rope walk between empathy and control. It requires a firm resolve to be known for your mission, values and purpose, and an action plan to translate your vision into reality – a reality that reflects on your reputation and your credibility (Khanna 2021).



Consider your time at work, and answer the following questions:

- How do you spend your time?
- With whom do you spend your time?
- Where do you allocate your resources (inc. time, mental energy)?
- Where do you NOT allocate your resources (inc. time, mental energy)?
- In what situations do you assert yourself?
- In what situations are you more deferential?

You can at least be honest about your brand, and turn your negatives into assets.

You're not disorganised – you're a fast-thinking creative who values ideas over structure!

You're not a workaholic – you're a dedicated high achiever who expects the same from her team!

And if you're in a new role or have gone through a restructure recently, you may need to reshape your brand. It's important to get out there and establish your brand early and with impact, as your early actions in the new role will have outside impacts – for better or worse. Essentially, you need to consider your words and actions from the very beginning, or at least as soon as you can (Watkins 2021).

It's not all about you

When personal branding expert Catherine Kaputa thought about how to rebrand herself, she took what was true, but needed a reframe. Her background as an Asian-art historian wasn't getting her where she wanted to go in marketing, so she thought about what her skills could do for the people she wanted to work for. She rebranded herself as “a marketer for difficult products.”

According to Khanna, our brand should also help us **turn the spotlight away from you and toward those you serve. That's when you start creating magic as a leader.**

Her three pillars of brand construction?

- **Expression** – Khanna says this should be a signature style and voice – “unique, yet consistent.” Think about your audience – how can you best reach your audience? What parts of yourself would benefit them, and how can you showcase these parts of yourself?
- **Emotional intelligence** – the first step to building EQ, Khanna says, is self-awareness. She says that understanding the range and root causes of your emotions and how to use them correctly can help you to effectively identify who you are and how you interact with others.
- **Presence** – Khanna says that mindful, focused people exude presence. You want both gravitas and compassion. Ways you can do this are to:
 - ◇ Practice pausing and recentering so you can be poised and deliberate
 - ◇ Become a master communicator. This includes eye contact, posture, body language
 - ◇ Practice, practice, practice

Try thinking “outside-in.” Instead of considering your brand from your perspective initially, first of what reaction you want from your target audience (outside), then figure out what you have to do to get that reaction (Caputa p.190).



You and your brand are a work in progress – and that’s a good thing

Smallwood says that your brand should evolve in response to different expectations you face at different times in your career.

How do we do that? You cultivate self-awareness.



Keep asking yourself and regularly checking in:

- What do I value?
- Do my values reflect who I am?
- What am I known for?
- What do I want to be known for?
- What else can I be doing to build my brand and tell people who I am?

How do you know if your brand is working for you? What’s next?

Personal branding strategists Avery and Greenwald leave us with these thoughts:

A strong, well-managed brand benefits you in several ways. It enhances your visibility, particularly among those who matter to you and to the things you hope to accomplish. It can also help you **expand your network and attract new opportunities**. And on a deeper level, the process of building one can help you **uncover, celebrate, and share the unique abilities you bring to the world**.

Let’s break this down into practical steps to decide if the reputation we’re inhabiting is working for us:

- Am I visible? To the right people?
- Am I achieving outcomes that matter to me?
- Is my network expanding? Am I connecting with people I want to connect with?
- Am I finding new opportunities? Are these the opportunities I want?
- Am I able to celebrate and share my authenticity, skills, and unique strengths?

We have a huge amount of control over our credibility and reputation.

Dialing in our branding is the most effective tool for shaping our reputation and using our influence for good.



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