

# Your Personal Brand: A Career Advancement Must-Have

By Jeanne Knight  
Career and Job Search Coach

Consider a scene from the 2008 Kevin Spacey movie, “21.” In an interview for a prestigious scholarship, the main character, Ben, tells his interviewer, Professor Phillips, that money is the only thing between him and fulfilling his long-held dream of attending Harvard Medical School.

While the Professor appreciates Ben’s situation, he points out that only one person can win the scholarship and that 75 other candidates have “resumes just as impressive” as Ben’s.

The Professor notes bluntly, “Unfortunately, desire just doesn’t figure into this much, Ben. The [scholarship] is going to someone who dazzles ... someone who jumps off the page. Ben, it’s all about the essay. You really need to explain to us what makes you special. What life experience separates you from all the rest? What can you tell me, Ben, that’s going to DAZZLE me?”

While this is a scene from a movie, it reflects well the harsh reality of today’s competitive workplace. No matter how much you want — or how right you may be for — a position or a promotion, if you are unable to set yourself apart from your competition, you will lose to the candidate who does.

So, how do you “dazzle” the person making the decision regarding your next advancement? Take a cue from the marketing world and build a personal brand.

As in the retail world, where the Starbucks mermaid or Amazon.com logo assure their customers of the quality experience they will encounter when they patronize those firms, your personal brand represents the unique value you promise to those who hire you.

Your brand is defined by the accumulation of experience, skills, and talents that distinguish you from others who do the same work as you. Like a retail brand, your personal brand encourages those who would employ you to trust your ability to deliver above par quality.

You may be wondering, why do I need a personal brand? Doesn’t my resume speak for itself? In the words of author and business management “guru” Tom Peters, who coined the term “brand you,” — “Be distinct or be extinct!”

In a business climate where linear advancement and the 30-plus-year career with the same company are going the way of the dinosaurs, to remain competitive, it is imperative that you shift the way you define yourself away from the blandness of the job titles and descriptions used by HR and toward the dynamic and compelling catalog of assets and qualities you possess. If the opportunity for advancement — or the need for a new position — arises, you don’t want to be caught off guard looking “vanilla” in a sea of vanilla.

Begin to develop your personal brand by asking yourself insightful questions about your stand-out experience, skills, and talents, such as:

- My background is unique because ...
- What makes me different from others who do the same job as I do is ...
- As a [insert career title here], I’ve developed a reputation for ...
- At the heart of my experience are these three strengths: ...
- My former managers and peers would agree that the reason I am so good at what I do is ...

- I have a natural talent for \_\_\_\_\_, which makes me better than most at what I do.

The two most important investments you can make in this “self interviewing” process are time and thought; so, please don’t cheat yourself. This is not an exercise that can be completed in 15 minutes; it requires thoughtful soul-searching and reflection on your career.

Many of us chafe at “bragging” about our accomplishments and skills. We tend to downplay our achievements and gloss over what makes us great — a hazardous tendency in today’s competitive marketplace. To ensure that none of your assets fall victim to omission by modesty, solicit feedback from current or prior bosses and colleagues — anyone who would be willing to provide you their honest input. Outsiders’ perspectives help us see ourselves in a more objective light, can validate what we suspect might make us special or unique, and can mitigate any anxiety we have about showcasing those gifts to the world.

Once you’ve collected your own thoughts and others’ input, look for themes. Determine which skills, talents, and experiences repeat themselves. Which make you feel most proud? Which reflect best what you love to do? Which do you do better than anyone else? These are the building blocks of your personal brand.

As in the retail world, only part of the power of a personal brand is found in delivering on the unique value promised. Regardless of your unique strengths, your brand will only be as effective as how compellingly you communicate it.

Consider automaker BMW. What if, instead of, “The Ultimate Driving Machine,” BMW employed the slogan, “A Really Good Car?” Which slogan do you think commands the \$50,000 - \$100,000 price tag attached to most of BMW’s models?

Like BMW, you must promote yourself powerfully with language that commands the attention of an employer through compelling, value-driven branding statements.

Instead of, “I’m a great listener,” you might say, “I have the ability to listen to people so that they truly feel heard and understood. For that reason, I am able to build trust and long-term relationships with even the most difficult customers.”

Instead of, “I’m great at closing deals,” you might say, “I specialize and have a proven track-record in identifying, pursuing, and successfully closing complex, multi-million and -billion dollar technology contracts that meet customers’ specifications and propel my employer to new levels of revenue and profitability.”

A persuasive personal brand that convincingly and enthusiastically promotes the exceptional value you bring to an organization is your best tool in today’s competitive workplace climate, and is well worth your effort and time.

---

*Jeanne Knight is a certified Career Coach and Resume Expert who helps individuals navigate career transitions. She offers career and job search coaching as well as resume writing services. You can contact her at [jeanne@careerdesigns.biz](mailto:jeanne@careerdesigns.biz), or via phone at 617-968-7747, or through her website at [www.careerdesigns.biz](http://www.careerdesigns.biz).*