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What is the secret to branding yourself?

The SIX P's of Personal Branding, in order of priority.

POSITIONING

The first is positioning, and frankly, positioning reigns. It is the most important step. It sounds simple, but think again. The truth is, many of us have a very challenging time saying exactly what we do. For instance, you must be able to tell others:

- What problem we solve
- What solution we provide
- What result we produce
- What guarantees we provide
- And to whom we provide all of this

Believe it or not, one of the best ways to start positioning is to define what you do not do!

PACKAGING

This involves taking all of your positioning and being able to clearly articulate it. Packaging is the action side of positioning, and involves getting the message on your business card, on your website, and in other collateral.

And you can't be too careful about clarity. A great exercise for young executives is to go around the table at a future meeting and have the person next to you introduce you and do the elevator pitch for your business. Being introduced by others in a networking or referral situation almost effortlessly forces clarity.

PROMOTION

This is the act of creating buzz. Once you have clearly defined what professional service you provide, how and to whom, and once you are able to clearly and successfully transmit this into verbal and written communication, you can start putting the processes in place to get the word out. Promotion is often referred to as the business development or marketing part of personal career development. We could write a book on this piece alone, but suffice to say that it is critical work for a professional service provider.

Remember you are not a commodity. You are not a car or a carton of milk, so you need to market above that. We know that as people connect with people, business follows. People do business with people with whom they have rapport. People like to do business with people who are familiar to them, and people like to do business with people who have great reputations. So ask yourself: "Do you have strategies in place for the continual and ongoing promotion of your business? And do you update and fine tune these programs on a regular basis? Do you keep track of what works and what is not working?"

PERSUASION

Persuasion is interesting. This is sales, or the turning of your prospects and all those people in your circle of influence who are aware of your positioning into referral sources and/or clients. And if you learn (notice I say learn) to master this art of converting those to whom you have promoted into expanded opportunities or actual clients, then you have a booming business, or certainly the makings of one.

We could do an entire seminar on persuasion, but it includes that very important skill of listening, asking questions, discovering the need (very specific needs) of each client, and then finding and providing solutions.

It includes being creative, solving problems and meeting the objectives. And the art of persuasion is above, all else, the ability to ask for the business.

I will remind you that an extremely important part of this art of persuasion is also an understanding of when to say 'no.' If you haven't read "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie, I recommend you do.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is last, but definitely not least. Remember your reputation is paramount to moving your business forward. A bad job gets ten verbal broadcasts into the world at large. A good job gets but three accolades, we are told. So performance, in short, is about meeting the expectation of your client, going the extra mile, and getting rave reviews.

Now performance is much more than just getting the job done satisfactorily. It is about superior communication with clients at every step of the way. It is about responsiveness. Always keep any promise you make and try to deliver on that promise earlier rather than later. It is about accountability and nudging and encouraging your client to keep pace with getting their desired result in place quickly. And then, of course, in today's world, it is the value added. I always try to deliver more than I tell my client I can deliver. I would encourage you to do the same.

P.S.

P.S. is the postscript -- all the subtle behaviors and habits that collectively make for your client liking you better, feeling more comfortable working with you, wanting to engage you for another project, maybe even finding a project for you because they value your contribution so highly. They may even put you on retainer and keep you around as a consultant. These collective subtle and subliminal behaviors, over and above the five previous P's, that make your client say, "I want to find a way for us to work together again."

What are these ?

Consider pleasantries, such as ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ – the beside manner stuff. Consider returning phone calls as quickly as possible. Consider quick and efficient email return. Consider showing up on time and not leaving people to wait for you. Consider full disclosure on every issue always. Consider billing on time. Consider cashing client checks when they come in, and not letting them sit for three weeks.

Consider mirroring your client’s form of communication. There are some people who still want to use the phone. There are others who want short two and three word email updates and answers. Follow your client’s lead on this.

We hear much these days about professional services providers facing the challenge of separating themselves from commoditization. How many lawyers are there in the Valley? How many financial advisors? How do we stand out?

Positioning is not about features and benefits. It is not about commoditization. Your professional service is not just about drawing documents, filing tax returns, or getting someone a loan or selling someone a house. You SOLVE a problem, alleviate pain, and add value.

Why is personal branding so important to successful career building?

Nothing in this world stays the same. Our parents did the same thing with the same company, the same firm, and the same union for their entire lives, so their career was affiliated with a business, a law firm, an academic institution, or a retail enterprise. Our careers in 2007 are affiliated with us. Career self-reliance comes from within. I will guarantee that at least 80 percent of those who read this will be doing something different professionally in seven years. You will be with a different firm, or maybe in an entirely different career.

How do I use my awareness of personal branding to network more effectively?

When you understand personal branding as the most essential ingredient to your income and personal career success, you prioritize the energy and focus you put into it. You know, we all pay our medical insurance on time, and we all pay our car insurance. Your investment in your own personal branding -- the comprehensive approach as outlined above - is your business insurance. And just as you pay bills monthly, quarterly, and yearly, it behooves you to do the same with your business activity investment.