

## **Renegotiating Your Personal Brand Over Time**

Creating a personal brand is not a one-and-done effort. “Your personal brand story is not a destination. It is a living, breathing organism. You are writing new pages every day. It will evolve. You need to remain agile and open to the change,” says Tombrakos.<sup>23</sup> You must continue to update your personal value proposition, your credentials, your social capital, your cultural capital, and your physical capital over time to avoid stagnation. Great personal brands evolve with you as you grow personally and professionally, and they adjust to changing goals and audiences. Schaad advises, “The decisive factor for effective personal branding is the consistent and universal implementation of your individual strengths and preferences at all levels. Personal branding is therefore not a one-time juggernaut, but an ongoing journey that requires a lot of attention and self-love.”<sup>24</sup>

You should conduct a personal brand audit at least once per year or more frequently if you have an important new goal to align, in order to ensure that your desired brand identity is hitting the mark with your important audiences. If you were doing a perfect job enacting and communicating your

desired personal brand, the brand attribute rankings you give yourself in your brand audit would be a perfect 5 match with the rankings your truth tellers give you when you conduct your annual brand audit. However, realistically, sometimes this will not be the case. If other people are scoring you at a 3 or lower, indicating a lower level of association between you and an important personal brand attribute, you have two options to reconcile the discrepancy. First, you can work on improving how you come across to others by more prominently displaying that brand attribute in your day-to-day interactions. Think about this strategy as either evolving your message (through a revision of your brand stories) or increasing your media reach and frequency. Both of these strategies can help you bolster others' perceptions of you to more closely align with your desired image. For example, if others currently do not perceive you as a strong leader (and you would like them to do so), you might take the following actions to build up your brand message:

- Take leadership training courses to enhance your credentials and gain some new skills and competencies,
- Volunteer to be the leader of task forces, new business units, online business efforts, etc.,
- Take on leadership roles in your personal life that will build complementary skills, such as non-profit board leadership or other volunteer positions,
- Seek out leadership awards and citations.

Additionally, you might want to send out more branding signals about that particular attribute to assure that important others repeatedly receive information about you as a leader, by taking actions such as:

- Increase your social media postings where you are described as a leader by third parties or that mention your leadership role on an internal project,
- Incorporate the words *lead*, *leader*, and *leadership* in your emails and other company communications,
- Encourage your direct reports to communicate the details of a project while you communicate the big picture and strategy,
- Proactively engage with your audiences in ways where you are viewed in a leadership position, such as seeking opportunities to be a keynote speaker or panelist at a conference,
- Host company events with titles such as "Views from our Leaders,"
- Make sure that your personal appearance (including your clothing and personal grooming choices) are consistent with how someone perceives a leader in your company and/or industry.

Conversely, you may ponder whether that particular brand association is either inauthentic to you (something that you desire to be but actually aren't) or is too difficult to credibly communicate. If this is the case, then you may want to pick a new attribute upon which to storyscape your brand. This may involve a minor or a major personal brand repositioning, which would put you back in the visioning stage at the beginning of the process to rethink your unique value proposition.

How do you know if your personal brand is working? Assess your results against your personal value proposition:

- Are you engaging with the right audiences? Evaluate your social network to see if your personal branding efforts have attracted the right people from your important audiences.
- Are you realizing your personal mission and making the difference you want to in the world? Are you achieving it while remaining true to your values?
- Is your value being appropriately recognized and valued by others? Are you being adequately compensated for the value you are creating? If so, you should be accruing new opportunities and rewards, both tangible and intangible, such as raises, promotions, desired invitations, etc.
- Have you gained self-confidence as you executed your personal branding strategy? Arruda reminds, "Perhaps the biggest byproduct of building your personal brand is confidence. The self-awareness you gain from going through the personal branding process translates into self-assuredness. And as your brand begins to pay dividends - opportunities, power brokers, acknowledgement, accolades - you become more and more comfortable in your own shoes."<sup>25</sup>