An Introvert's Guide to Building a Personal Brand

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If I say the phrase "personal brand," what immediately comes to mind? Most people think of large followings, social media accounts, content creation and influencer culture. Therein lies the problem: We conflate what a personal brand *is* versus the actions we take to *market* a personal brand.

At Brand of a Leader, we work with entrepreneurs, CEOs and leaders — the majority of whom have no interest in notoriety. Often, they are introverts who dread the spotlight and feel much more comfortable working behind the scenes. They come to us looking not for a boost in the number of "likes" they receive on social media, but for clarity: clarity of who they are, clarity of how to position themselves and clarity of how to stand out to achieve their goals.

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How to find your unique positioning

There are two key distinctions to make in regard to personal branding: *uncovering* what your personal brand is versus *marketing* it to build visibility. Uncovering your personal brand means obtaining clarity of two key elements: a unique positioning, as well as associations your name consistently evokes in people's minds. For some, it is the modern version of the "elevator pitch." For others, it is their way of combating impostor syndrome. Our unique positioning, when clearly defined to authentically express who we are, allows us

to effortlessly answer the frequent questions of self-doubt: “Why me?” or “What do I bring to the table that is unique?”

As I give talks to audiences across the globe, one of the most common concerns I hear is from individuals questioning whether they have anything that is unique about them to begin with. My answer is an unequivocal “yes” – and a unique positioning helps with that. With the right marketing spin, any authentically dominant characteristic of yours can be packaged in a punchy manner that would allow you to stand out. Where to find it? It could be a core value of yours; your WHY (the reason you do what you do, in Simon Sinek’s words); or even a specific personality trait of yours. Uncovering your brand is an exercise in introspection – something introverts tend to be much more comfortable with than extroverts.

There is an excellent exercise that can help you find your angle, and it is called “the Lifeline.” Here’s how it goes: Take a large sheet of paper, turn it horizontally, and draw a line through the middle of it. On this sheet, plot each of the most significant moments of your life: the “highs” (over the horizontal line) and the “lows” (under the horizontal lines). Start in early childhood, and include all moments of significance, regardless of how insignificant they might feel to anyone else. Don’t limit yourself – this exercise is about shining light on what makes you tick, what resonates with you and what truly makes you who you are. Slow down, take your time with it, and go deep. Once you are done plotting, put your researcher hat on and look for patterns, as well as for common denominators. Most likely there is a running theme somewhere in there – something which fuels you in your highest moments and which drains you in your lowest moments. These might lead to your angle.

For example, when I did the Lifeline exercise myself, I realized that so many of my “highs” and “lows” revolved around having a voice versus being censored (growing up in the Soviet Union contributed to many of those experiences) and around

standing out versus fitting in (the life of an immigrant is wrought with such stories.) It then led me to my positioning around the concept of radical authenticity and my motto of "standing out, speaking up and being radically authentic." This is what my personal brand is about, and this exercise helped me uncover it.

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How to uncover your personal brand descriptors

Beyond the positioning, a personal brand also hinges on consistent associations your name evokes. It's your brand's perception: how people would uniformly describe you. As human beings, we are complex, and we can be described in 100 different ways, all authentic to who we are. A brand, however, is all about the consistency of those associations, which is why you need to intentionally select the adjectives you would want people to associate you with. At Brand of a Leader, we have another simple exercise we leverage with our clients:

Text as many people as you can, and ask them "What three adjectives would you use to describe me?" Look for patterns and for common denominators to help you finalize your list, and don't exceed five descriptors. If you are working on your leadership brand, an effective twist on this exercise is to send this question to your employees. Keep in mind: This fun exercise becomes a lot more "real" and a lot less "feel good" when you collect anonymous replies!

When you are clear on these two elements, your unique positioning and your brand descriptors, you want to ensure that you express them as frequently and fully consistently as possible. People use them to "brand" their curriculum vitae (CV), to re-write their LinkedIn bios and bylines and to answer the common icebreaker of "So, what do you do?" as well

as the common interview question of “What makes you different from other candidates applying for this role?”

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Uncovering your personal brand does not require extroverted personality traits. In fact, your introverted tendencies to reflect, think deeply, and self-assess will make the process feel similar and effortless. If you want to market your brand, however, some extroversion will be required: after all, when you build visibility as a human being, you can expect a higher number of people wanting to engage with you. For extroverts, this is a dream come true. For introverts, this isn’t draining – as long as the attention remains contained to the online world.

Whether you are an introvert or extrovert, taking the time to understand what makes us unique and how to easily express it to others is priceless. From becoming an inspiring CEO who attracts high-quality talent to pivoting to a new career path to unearthing our differentiator as a professional as we seek a new job, our unique positioning is something we will carry forward with us – and it will directly help us achieve our goals.

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