How to Build a Personal Brand in 5 Steps

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I once heard a saying that hit me hard. It goes like this: “We all die twice: the first time when we take our last breath and the second time when our names are said for the last time.” Powerful, right?

It made me think of personal branding. First of all, most things make me think of personal branding, because I own a personal branding agency, but there’s also another reason. You see, personal branding is becoming a buzz concept of sorts, with many people fearing that it’s simply a fad. To me, however, personal branding is about much more than social media likes or selfie videos or a follower count. To me, personal branding is a powerful tool that allows us to build equity in our names. And what, if not our names, stays with us forever, until our last day and perhaps even beyond?

As an entrepreneur, I work hard on creating equity in the corporate brand of my business — my personal branding agency called Brand of a Leader. Yet I am also well aware of the non-linear journey my business will likely experience (I have faced a business crash in the past and know full well that no business is immune). Even if we continue to rapidly scale as we have to date, we might decide to eventually exit. And what happens when we exit or lose our business? We feel that we exited part of our identity along with it.

A personal brand protects us from that. It protects us from the ups and the downs and the pivots along the way, giving us constancy and portability. And the best news for many of you:

Personal brand can be built entirely off social media! Here are the five steps we employ to build entrepreneurs‘ personal brands at Brand of a Leader and recommend you follow to build yours:

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Step 1: Identify what makes you unique

What makes you stand out from others? You might not be able to think of anything that makes you stand out in your particular vertical, but the good news is that it doesn’t matter. A personal brand is about WHO you are and not WHAT you do.

Start by identifying the strongest and most pertinent aspects of who you are. What you determine will become the cornerstone of your personal brand.

As a company that works uniquely with entrepreneurs, we understand that no two entrepreneurs are alike. That same idea applies to how each person will determine what makes them unique. What we do is a series of deep dives to unveil what’s prominent about the individual, which can emerge by asking a series of questions:

- What are your core values?
- What is your personality?
- What is your expertise?
- What is your story?
- What is your WHY?

Without a differentiator, there is no brand – there is simply a reputation, so take the time you need to identify yours.

This step is crucial.

Step 2: Gain clarity on your target audience

As business owners, we all know what a target audience means. But how it applies to personal branding varies from the corporate marketing term we're used to.

When our agency is working on building a personal brand strategy, we focus on two target audiences. The first one usually reflects the target audience of the entrepreneur's business (typically their core client).

The second one is entirely different – it is an audience that is not being monetized in any way. I encourage you to think of an audience of people that you would want to inspire with your personal brand.

Step 3: Figure out your brand descriptors

A brand is all about associations and the consistency of communicating them. When we talk about brand descriptors, we're trying to determine how you want to be perceived. As human beings, we can all be described in a hundred different ways. However, if we're all things at once, then there's nothing that actually sets us apart.

I suggest building a list of three to five words that you would like people to consistently describe you with. Then build a list of three to five words that you don't want people to describe you with.

Want to have a quick self-awareness test? Text 10 people who know you well enough but are not overly close to you, ask them how they would describe you, and see whether their adjectives

match those on your list.

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Step 4: Narrow down what you're going to talk about

This brings me to content pillars – the topics you want to be associated with. We get this question all the time at Brand of a Leader: "I am ready to put myself out there, but what am I going to talk about?" When you're choosing the topics you want to become synonymous with, I recommend sticking to two to four.

First, identify one or two key topics that will allow you to build your credibility. Then pick an additional one to two topics that will humanize your credibility. These can be anything you are passionate about. If you were going to a barbecue with friends or even employees today, what are some of the things you would most definitely be talking about?

Step 5: Choose a platform that works for you

We all need platforms to build visibility. However, I am not only talking about social media platforms. Social media gives scale, but it is possible to build a very strong brand by writing a book or giving talks. Seth Godin is an indisputable thought leader in marketing, and yet his social media presence is underwhelming. Rather, he has published a plethora of bestsellers, gives high-impact talks and has a uniquely awesome daily newsletter. Choose one platform that you can go all-in on, and start building your visibility on it before adding another one to your self-marketing mix.

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And there you have it, fellow entrepreneur: Five steps that will entail a lot of soul-searching and internal deep-diving. If you follow these steps, you will be much further ahead than people who go in the completely wrong order – first choosing a platform, then deciding what they should be talking about and thinking about their audience – never becoming intentional about their brand descriptors or a unique differentiator. Happy brand building, and may your name be talked about for decades and centuries to come!

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