How to Stand Out: Make Yourself Equal and Then Make Yourself Different

Knowing what makes you different gives you a competitive advantage that cannot be matched.

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Standing out is one of the toughest things to do in a crowded market. You are too busy chasing your dream job and wanting to do your passion project for a living that you forget to make money. How do we go about it?

Make yourself equal and make yourself different.

What do others expect from you?

I always tell people to deliver what other people do not expect from you. Back when I was the CEO at Leigh Steinberg Sports & Entertainment, we would tell our athletes to surprise people by presenting themselves in a different manner from how others perceive an athlete normally behaves.We taught the players to make sure they were always the first to hold a door and say “thank you.” A simple action can go a long way.

Challenge others to re-evaluate their perspective on who you are with your unexpected actions. Catching someone by surprise allows us to make a bigger impact on those around us who expected something else. Use this surprise in your favor by making it into a competitive advantage.

Create a competitive advantage.

Surprising people also means that you tend to have a competitive advantage over the rest of the field. You have something different to offer, which helps you to get noticed.

What we want to do before leveraging your advantage, though, is make ourselves equal to our competitors. Show how you possess the same attributes as your competitors, that you are equally deserving of consideration.

Simply saying “I’m different” does nothing to convince others of your value. Prove it. Show them that you have the same skills as your competitors. The same knowledge. The same desire. Then, show them how different you are from the rest.

If you cannot convince someone you are equal first, trying to convince them that you are different becomes more difficult.

See separation in action.

Whether we’re applying for jobs, dreaming about what we want to do next in our career or just meeting people, we want to make ourselves their equal first.

Recently I went into a business meeting and, because of my career history, they were expecting me to act like a sports agent. They were expecting more of what they had received in the past from other people in that industry, one based on greed and insecurity.

I showed up and made myself equal, as I still possess the skills and situational knowledge of a sports agent. But, I also made myself different from other agents they had met before with an abundant attitude. Unlike most sports agents, I believe that there is more than enough of everything for everyone and this approach resonates with people who do not expect it.

Differentiation means success.

Making yourself different means you are more likely to have long-term success.

Renowned business strategist Michael E. Porter teaches us that, “The fundamental basis of above-average performance in the long run is sustainable competitive advantage. Though a [person] can have a myriad of strengths and weaknesses vis-a-vis [her] competitors, there are two types of competitive advantage that a [person] can possess: low cost or differentiation.”

Competitive advantage is broken down to two simple things: being cheap and being different. Which would you prefer to be known for?

With a differentiation strategy, a person seeks to be unique in an industry, selecting attributes that others in the industry perceive as important and positioning themselves to meet those needs.

Be the same and then be different.

You must remember to come into a situation humble and make yourself equal first, then get to work on differentiating yourself. Your competition never quits, and neither should you. Your work on yourself needs to be consistent if you want to maintain your competitive advantage. Keep striving to be different, but don’t forget to make yourself equal first.

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