

Chapter 4

BE CLEAR

Today you are YOU! That
is truer than true! There
is no one alive That is
You-er than YOU!

—Dr. Seuss

Expressing your personal brand should be as easy as breathing. It's who you are and what you are all about. But what I'm talking about here is *actively managing* your personal brand, and that takes a bit more effort. Building an expertise in branding takes years, whether you're talking about branding a bucket of bricks, a box of plant food, or you. But my goal is to teach you shortcuts to help you crystallize what you are all about and clearly communicate that personal brand to the people in your world in a high-impact way that is authentic to who you are. This is your branding edge.

I've boiled it down to seven main strategies for personal branding success, and we will go through them one by one. Each one is important, and they are all interrelated, building one upon another.

Remember, you are the brand manager in charge of your brand. In order to turbocharge your career, you must take an active role in this. In my coaching programs, I work with individuals over the course of months to bring clarity to their brands and put an action plan in place for clearly expressing those brands. Each of these principles starts with the verb “be.” That is very deliberate; I did that on purpose. While you naturally express your personal brand (it is a naturally state of “be-ing”), you need to be a *participant* here—you need to *do* something. These concepts will not benefit you unless you actively manage your personal brand. This book will guide you to do just that.

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Seven Principles of Personal Branding

You can download the seven principles as a one-page summary to help you remember these critical branding strategies at YourBrandingEdge.com/BookExtras.

Be Clear

To build your personal brand, you need to be clear about who you are and what you have to offer. We're looking for clarity about what is unique about you and what is core to your brand. This is the first of the seven principles. Who are you? What are you all about? In order for us to build an action plan for clearly expressing your brand, we have to know what it is we want to express. Makes sense, right?

Brand managers take time to get clear in their minds about what critical qualities they want to be expressed. They ask pointed questions: "What does my brand stand for, and what do I want my consumers to think about my brand?" "What qualities do I want them to associate with my brand?" And in the case of a new product introduction or extension, "What new qualities of my brand do I need to convey?"

You Are Unique

In the beginning of this book, I told you that you are unique. You are one of a kind. Take the quality of "funny." Everyone reading this book has a sense of humor in varying degrees. You might have a very dry sense of humor, while someone else has a more "slapstick" sense of humor. Your personal brand is defined in part by how you express the quality of humor, and the world needs all of these various degrees of that quality.



Think about comedians like Bill Cosby, Ellen Degeneres, Jim Carey, Chris Rock, Dane Cook, and Jerry Seinfeld. Each uses different kinds

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of humor. Is there only demand for one comedian in the world? Of course not. We love them all! There's a whole comedy channel dedicated to showcasing different types of comedians. Not all comedians will appeal to everyone, but there is value in each comedian's unique perspective on our world.

And that's an example of just one quality! Multiply that by all the other distinct qualities you have, and you can see how you are truly unique.

You want to be very clear about who you are because of this uniqueness. It's personal to you; it's *your* branding edge. It's like a signature, and everyone's signature is a little bit different. It's imperative that you understand your uniqueness so you can convey it to others clearly.

When you're in middle school, you just want to fit in. Standing out, being different, being one-of-a-kind can be uncomfortable for young people who are just beginning to understand who they are and can cause social awkwardness. But for marketers, being unique is what it's all about, because no one wants to buy what they perceive as "me-too" products. People seek out something special, something one-of-a-kind. The same applies to people. Those who are different, unique, and one of a kind tend to stand out in a crowd and find it easier to "make a name for themselves." Actors who can find their own style have more earning potential and can end up with roles that advance their careers in exciting and dynamic ways. They have effectively "turbocharged their careers." Some examples include Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson, Katherine Hepburn, Dustin Hoffman, and Tom Hanks.

When you are talking about personal branding and its impact on your career, you absolutely want to be different. Brand managers work very hard and spend tens of thousands of dollars to understand the nuances of their brands versus the competition so they can highlight those differences in their marketing efforts. That's what you want to do, too—understand your personal brand. Find out how you are different and then celebrate that. Shout it out to the world, and make people see how different you are and what great contributions you have to offer.

What Are You Good At?

During a corporate training session at a major toy company, I asked a group of professionals to write down twenty qualities about themselves or twenty strengths of their personal brand. One woman looked completely dumbfounded. She stared down at the blank sheet of paper and finally said,

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10. Who do you think you are? (Part I)

Take some time to write down at least three of your qualities or skills in each of the following areas:

- **Skills:** These are usually specific job-related skills, the “what” of your job (forecasting, analysis, planning).
- **Hobbies/talents:** These are your professional and personal passions or gifts that you have to share with the world, which are also reflected in your personal world (horseback riding, creative writing, organization).
- **Attributes:** This is the “how” of what you do and is usually more attitudinal (cheerful, creative, funny).

You should have at least nine qualities, skills, and attributes on your list. As you move forward, you will hone in on the ones you think are most core to who you are. Future exercises in this book will use what you identify in this exercise.

As you identify these qualities and skills, think about how each gets expressed in your life. If you are creative, do you wear colorful clothes? If you are organized, do you have a super-neat desk? Write down how someone would know that these skills and attributes are a part of your brand. To help you in this exercise, you can download a list of qualities from YourBrandingEdge.com/BookExtras.

“Rahna, that’s got to be the hardest thing you could’ve asked for!” She was stumped. She had no idea what to write and, sadder still, she had no idea what she was good at! This is a woman in a very well-known company that conducts annual formal performance reviews, and *still* she didn’t know.

Unfortunately, I see this all too often. People have no idea what value they bring to their world, what strengths they have, what qualities they have to contribute.

This is a crime. This is why I do what I do. All people need to know what they are good at. If people understood their own strengths more clearly, they would have more self-esteem and they would seek out opportunities to maximize those talents, and *rock their world!*

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List of Qualities

In one session I conducted, someone asked for a list of qualities to choose from, as she lamented that she could not think of any qualities on her own. If you are struggling with coming up with qualities, here's a partial list of qualities to choose from:

Approachable	Efficient	Inspiring	Persistent
Calm	Empowering	Joyful	Problem-solver
Caring	Fun	Kind	Self-aware
Competent	Funny	Knowledgeable	Smart
Confident	Hard-working	Organized	Steadfast
Creative	High energy	Passionate	Tenacious

You can download a more complete list of hundreds of qualities at YourBrandingEdge.com/BookExtras.

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11. Who do you think you are? (Part II)

Building on the previous assignment, answer the following questions:

- How would you describe yourself?
- What are you really good at?
- What do you like about yourself?
- What don't you like about yourself?
- What is your current work style?
- What is your place within the company? Think in terms of budgetary responsibility, percentage of total employee base managed, percentage of total sales volume generated/managed.

If it's not an easy exercise for you, even that fact is an indicator that you need to really focus on this. But don't be alarmed. Simply take the time now to identify what is great about you. Self-awareness is a critical part of strong personal branding.

If you don't know what your talents are, *go find out!*

One of the assignments calls for you to ask several of your business colleagues, your girlfriends, your spouse, your golfing buddies, or family members to tell you at least four things they appreciate about you. You want to ask a cross-section of people from the different areas of your life so you can get a well-rounded picture of what's great about you.

*Getting in touch with
your true self must be
your first priority.*

—Tom Hopkins, author,
sales trainer, speaker

Ask for qualities they feel you express, and seek to understand why that adds value to their lives. What is it about you that is so great? Why are you so important in their lives? What value do you bring to them? Why do they seek you out? And be sure to ask for both the positive and the negative.

My husband will tell you that I don't really have a great sense of time. I get lost in my work, and I'm always late. But he also knows that I'm passionate, that I'm creative, that I love my work, and that I have high energy and enthusiasm for life. These are things that are all part of my brand. You want to understand all the different aspects of your brand.

Try to be as specific as possible. You want to understand the nuances of these qualities in order to understand what makes you unique. You want to understand the subtleties about your strengths and how you are different from everyone else.

So please, if you care about advancing your career in amazing ways, find out about what Tom Peters referred to as your "default" brand. It is a foundational piece of information for radical career growth both inside a corporate environment and on your own. Understanding your unique value helps you "sell" yourself to others. And make no mistake about it: In your career, you are *always* selling yourself.

If you were in the Indy pit crew, you would need to understand all the nuances of your car's engine in order to squeeze maximum performance

out of it. The same applies to your personal brand. You must understand the nuances of your brand in order to turbocharge your career.

I can guarantee that as you hear back from those friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members, a few key qualities will bubble up. You will hear the same types of comments over and over again—because we are who we are, whether we are at home or at work. We may have slightly different aspects of those qualities show up more in one environment than in another, but those core strengths will show themselves in many areas of your life.

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12. Who do others think you are?

Ask three or four people to answer the following questions. Encourage these people to be honest in their feedback. This is important learning, as it will allow you to see yourself as others currently see you. In addition, please answer these questions for yourself.

The people you ask should be from several different areas of your life, including:

- Workplace connections (colleagues, employees, senior management, clients)
- Family
- Friends
- Community (religious, civic, political, leisure activities)

Ask them these questions:

1. How would you describe me?
2. What would you say are my greatest talents?
3. What areas would you like to see me grow in?

What Is Your Backstory?

To further clarify your brand, it can be helpful to identify past influences in your life. How did your brand develop into what you are today? Where did your brand come from?

Every brand has a story. It doesn't matter whether it's the story of how Coke was started in the 1800's or how Spotify launched as a start-up

in 2008, there is heritage that goes along with every brand. The roots of a brand can affect and build that brand. Brand managers and public relations specialists understand that it is helpful to manage the heritage story. Many brands have a strong story that goes along with what they are all about. Hewlett-Packard got started from two guys putting together a computer in a garage. Bill Gates quit Harvard in order to start Microsoft. Brands have stories that go along with them, and people love to tell those stories. That's a big part of branding.

The same principle can apply to you as well. What's your story? Trace your passions back because understanding your story will help you convey to others why you are who you are. For example, my backstory is that I spent many years in corporate marketing departments, building some of America's strongest brands, like LEGO toys, Miracle-Gro plant food, Build-A-Bear Workshop, and Texaco gasoline. When I went out on my own, I had to really analyze what my core strengths were in order to convey why someone should hire me. I did exactly what I am telling you to do in this book. I soon realized that all those brand-building skills could be applied to people, too, and that was much more rewarding to me. That's how I got interested in personal branding. That was the genesis of this book and of my adding "personal branding strategist" to my personal brand.

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13. What's your backstory?

Think about why you are the way you are. Can you find clues to your inquisitive nature in your childhood? Have you always been a tinkerer, a dreamer, a reader, an animal lover? Write out some of the major aspects of your back story.

What Do You Want to Be?

So far, we've talked about who you are and what qualities you currently express, and that's critical to understand. But a good personal brand manager will take that to the next level, to ask that next question: "What do you *want*

to be?” The answer to this question is critical and should tie directly to the goals you established in the Goals chapter.

Maybe there are some qualities that you would like to possess but that you don't currently have. Perhaps some qualities are part of your personal brand that you wish weren't. As they relate to your career, explore those qualities that are highly valued in your industry. Think about the people in your industry who have had a meteoric rise in the company or someone you admire, someone you respect a great deal. What qualities does that person express? What qualities and skills are critical to success in your industry?

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14. Whom do you admire?

Write down the names of three people you admire and why you admire them. What qualities do they have that you admire?

These are things you might want to consider adding to your skill set. Don't worry if you don't have these qualities now because we will map out *how* to add new skills. Right now I simply want you to capture the thoughts that come to you. Anyone can add skills if they choose to, and we'll talk more about that in Chapter 10.

Adding to Your Personal Brand

The qualities you admire that are not a part of your personal brand right now could be in the future. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell puts forth the idea that if you want to be a world-class expert like the Beatles or Bill Gates, it takes 10,000 hours to do so. That translates to approximately ten years at three and a half to four hours per day, five days a week. If you're already working in that discipline, it would take about five years to become an expert. While that is a lot of time, it is not an impossible amount of time. It doesn't matter how old or young you are now, you should take the time to continually add to your personal brand. If you're 40 right now, and you live to be 80, you've got as much time ahead of you as you've got behind you. That's a long time to develop a lot of great skills. If you're 20, just think of all

the qualities you can add to your personal brand over time! Even if you're in your 60s and live to be 80, that is 20 years to build your personal brand. That's an entire career to build and grow and *do*.

You can develop into whatever you want. So what do you want to be known for? Think about that and go get it. Add that quality to your personal brand.

What Do You Want to Be Known For?

What do you want to be known for? If you don't want to be the spreadsheet guru, what do you want to be? There should be no limits at this point. Think big. Dream. *Really* think about who you are and what you would like to be. Maybe you want to write a book. Maybe you want to climb Mount Everest. Whatever you want to do, write that down as something you want to be known for.

You Can Create Any Personal Brand You Want

Many people think they have no control over the way they are. They say, "That's just who I am" or "My past has made me the way I am" or "My circumstances have made me who I am."

And while it's true those things may have influenced you or may have shaped you in the past, that sort of mindset is not productive—and not true. You are in complete control of your brand. While it may have influenced the development of your current personal brand, your past doesn't have to dictate your future. We're talking about activating and maximizing your potential. Potential is a current and future activity. If you really want to turbocharge your career, you must develop the mindset that you have control over what you are and what you become.

In college, I was an art history major. Actually, I was a double major in English and art history, which is not so helpful on a resume, as it is not very business-oriented. I did minor in business, but that's not the same. Yet I always knew that I wanted to go into marketing and business.

*God didn't have time
to make a nobody,
only a somebody.
I believe that each of us
has God-given talents
within us waiting to be
brought to fruition.*

—Mary Kay Ash, entrepreneur and founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics

When I graduated from college, I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I kept at it until I got the job I wanted. I convinced one of the top New York ad agencies that I was just what they needed. I was determined and persistent—those are two of the qualities of my personal brand. I got a job in one of the last remaining account executive training programs in the Big Apple. But I always felt as though I was behind everyone else. I felt that because I was not a business major or an MBA out of Wharton, I wasn't as good as others. I was sure there was something they knew that I didn't know. I felt like I needed more work, specifically in the area of numbers—in quantitative skills. I knew that I wanted eventually to be a brand manager, and that I would need to be able to look at a balance sheet and really talk with the financial folks in the company.

So I did something about it. Every time there was any kind of analysis work, I offered to do that work so that I could research numbers, understand spreadsheets and see how “cost of goods” worked. I did all kinds of analyses and became really comfortable with numbers. Throughout my corporate career, I have managed annual budgets as large as \$72 million. And in one of my last reviews before I left The LEGO Group, my boss said, “You have great strength in forecasting.”

My college friends would have fallen off their chairs laughing about that. But I had taken the time to learn those financial skills because I wanted to be good with numbers. That doesn't mean I was ever going to become an accountant, but at least I'd developed a competency with numbers.

That's what you may need to do. Decide what you would like to add to the list of qualities you currently have. Then, in your action planning, think about how you might go about adding whatever quality you want.

I have been talking about the power of personal branding throughout this most recent recession, and, while there are many who have heart-wrenching stories to tell, others have been energized by the thought of reinventing themselves, daring to dream and explore what they could be. You need to have that same spirit of change, even if you have been in an incredibly stable corporate job for years. Whether we are aware of it or not, we reinvent ourselves daily. Make sure the new you is better than who you were yesterday.

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15. What skills do you want to add to your personal brand?

Answer the following questions:

- What skills are valued in your industry?
- What other skills would you like to add to your personal brand?

Eliminating Qualities from Your Personal Brand

In the list that comes back from your friends or colleagues, there may be some things you don't like. There are always going to be some negative aspects of your personal brand that you'll want to work on improving over time. But don't despair. You can always change. Think about what you were like ten years ago, even five years ago. Are you the same now as you were then? Absolutely not. You may be very similar, but the experiences of your life have changed you. Progress is a natural part of our being, and it is absolutely a part of actively managing your personal brand.

Rebranding Yourself

One question I'm asked a lot when I speak about this topic is, "What if there is something that is part of my personal brand that I don't want to be anymore?" Because we are ever growing, we sometimes "outgrow" aspects of our personal brand that once were perhaps core to who we were, but that we no longer want to be known for. Often, people feel "pigeonholed" into being only one thing.

Change is never a matter of ability; it is always a matter of motivation.

—Tony Robbins, Motivational speaker, author, coach

The solution is to add other qualities and put the focus on those areas that you see as part of your future, not as part of your past. Actors have to deal with this quite often. As actors manage their careers, they will actively seek out roles that are different from

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16. What do you want to eliminate from your personal brand?

Answer the following questions:

- What don't you like about yourself?
- What would you like to eliminate from your personal brand?
- What parts of your job don't you like?

So, what qualities would you like to eliminate? Are you a procrastinator? Maybe you're shy. Maybe you're scatterbrained. This is very personal work, so dig deep!

roles they have played in the past in order to avoid being “typecast” as one particular type of character. Actors who allow themselves to get into such a rut can quickly become bored, so they make specific efforts to avoid this. A classic example is Tom Hanks' career. He started as a comedic actor with a lead role in *Bosom Buddies*, *Joe Versus the Volcano*, and *Bachelor Party*. He made specific strides in stretching his personal brand with very serious roles in *Philadelphia* and then *Forest Gump*.

Now think about your own career. Are you bored with the projects you are being given? Would you like to stretch your wings and try something new? Become known for more than you currently are? All of this is possible if you set a purposeful plan to become more than you are today. You do not have to be limited by what you are today. Build a bridge from today to become what you would like to be tomorrow.

Christine's Story—Be Clear

As owner of Stitch Design Studio in Pomfret Center, Connecticut, Christine Kalafus was principal designer of the elegant window treatments and other furnishings she created for her clients.

Christine was laser-focused on developing, refining, and expressing her brand and that activity transformed her career. She paid her way through college as a licensed insurance agent and earned a bachelor's degree in interior design from the University of New Haven. She was successful in the insurance industry, which made it hard to quit. Sometimes, excellent pay and benefits can cause inertia that can keep us from fully expressing our personal brand. But a life-changing victory over cancer made her realize that life is too short to settle for a career she didn't love. Nine years after college, by then married and the mother of three children, she finally made the leap to pursue her passion.

She had sewn her whole life, but she knew she had to take her skills to the next level. For three years, she apprenticed for a woman who is "a genius at engineering fabric." From this woman, she learned master craftsman skills that became a signature for her success. When she decided to start her own business, she signed up for a class at the University of Hartford's Entrepreneurial Center. That's where she met me; I taught there as adjunct professor of branding and marketing for several years.

Christine reported, "That's where I learned about focusing on one thing; you can't be diverse. You have to understand what your specialty is because that is what is going to carry you." Through her experiences in insurance and her personal life, she gained clarity about her goals, her strengths, and her desires. She then actively pursued those passions.

You Can't Get Rid of a Negative; You Can Only Add a Positive

A vital part of gaining clarity about your personal brand includes determining what changes you would like to make. When I am coaching people on this, I advise them that they cannot eliminate a negative; they can only add a positive. When you are thinking about this in relation to your own personal brand, you need to think in terms of adding some positive quality that will naturally eliminate an undesirable negative quality.

Remember how I said that my husband doesn't think I'm very good with time? That would be a negative on my list: always late. That might be something I would choose to work on, to eliminate, to take off the list.

But I cannot *not* be late. I have to *add* "timeliness" to my personal brand.

How would I do this? Well, I would put together a plan to help me get better at this—maybe I set my watch five minutes fast. Maybe I hang huge clocks in my office, in my kitchen, around my house to help me improve my time management. There's an old saying that whatever you focus on expands. I have found that to be true, so if you focus on adding a new desirable quality to your personal brand, you are bound to improve.

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17. What do you want to eliminate from your personal brand?

Thinking about the negatives, take some time to identify the opposites (or positives) you would like to add to your personal brand. How might you go about this?

What Is Your Leadership Brand?

Many people fall (or are thrust) into leadership positions by their extreme competence in a given area, but they don't give much thought to what type of leader they want to be. If you are leading a team or a project, you need to consider the perceptions of others as they relate to your leadership brand. In our corporate workshops and coaching programs, we challenge leaders to think about the specific messages they convey to

their direct reports, their broader teams, and their senior management and colleagues. These sessions are very personal, as most leaders discover they are passionate about something—customer service, absolute quality, excellence in their field, never giving up. Identifying this aspect of your brand will help as you develop an action plan for how to convey this leadership to interested parties.

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18. What is your leadership brand?

Answer the following questions:

- What do you stand for?
- How can you best contribute to your team, your company, and your community?
- What specific action plans are you executing to project your leadership brand to others?
- Do you have actionable plans in place to increase your exposure to either internal or external target audiences to increase your influence to your colleagues, your clients, and your world?
- What is your personal leadership brand?

Determining the brand of a person is a lot more difficult than determining the brand of a product or service, because people are so much more complicated than a can of Coke. Your light is at the same time ever constant and ever changing—ever constant because it's been with you since you were born and ever changing because you are constantly evolving. So be patient with yourself as you go through this process.

Being clear about who you are and what wonderful things you have to offer is the foundation for all the other principles presented later in this book. It's a lot of thought work. Clarifying your branding edge is the work of a lifetime, but it is well worth the effort.

Once you have thought all this through, you can determine what your personal brand is, and what you would like it to be. Then, you can put a plan in place to express and improve your personal brand.