

PERSONAL BRANDING

PERCEPTION IS REALITY

By Rebecca Knapp LeBlanc



When you meet someone, do you look them in the eye and give them a firm handshake? Do you arrive to meetings early or are you perpetually late? Are you known for being organized or disheveled by your peers? Do you have a tailored appearance? Are you authentic? Are you passionate? What makes you shine and stand out above the rest? How are you perceived by your colleagues, clients and peers?

I recently had the privilege of presenting to a group of college juniors and seniors on the topic of networking – a skill that everyone needs to continuously develop and improve upon as it is relevant no matter what industry or profession you pursue. As part of the presentation, we discussed personal branding and what an integral role it plays in networking. After all, you only have a minute to make a lasting impression on a potential employer or client for that matter. This got me thinking about how personal branding is so often overlooked in our daily lives. Personal branding is a powerful tool that if developed properly, can ultimately lead to more sales, happier guests, future business and so much more – it is the linchpin to our personal and professional success. What is your personal brand and what does it say about you?

Personal branding describes the process by which individuals differentiate themselves and stand out from a crowd by identifying their unique value proposition, whether professional or personal, and then leveraging it across platforms with a consistent message to achieve a specific goal. In this way, individuals can further their recognition as experts in their field, establish reputation and credibility to advance their careers, and build self-confidence. The process is further defined as the creation of an asset that pertains to a particular person; this includes clothing, physical appearance and areas of knowledge, leading to a unique and memorable impression.

No matter what industry you are in, if you want to have a successful career, your personal brand is everything! It's all about your reputation and what unique value you can contribute to a company or your clients. If you type an email, you're branding yourself. If you have a conversation with a friend, you're branding yourself. How you dress, what you eat, and how you talk all contribute to your

brand. We need to be in touch with who we are as individuals and how we want to be perceived. With the surge of social media, we need to manage our brand on a daily basis. What does your LinkedIn or Facebook page say about you? Are they current and do they represent who you are as a professional? What happens when someone Google's you? You need to be your own publicist and manage your image.

Personal branding is how we market ourselves to others and to the world. Your personal brand is what other people think of you and it is unavoidable! People immediately create labels for you when they meet you and that is why it is so important that we know who we are and what we stand for. We need to make sure that we are clearly telling our story through our appearance, our body language and our diction, etc., because perception is reality.

Before developing your personal brand, you need a brand mantra to serve as the foundation of all of your branding efforts. In order to create this mantra, you need to answer the following questions, honestly...

- How do I make people feel?
- How do people benefit by working with me?
- What words do others use to describe me?
- What field or industry am I in (or do I want to be in)?
- What are the words I would use to describe my work?
- What service do I have to offer people?
- What do I do that makes me stand out from everyone else?

Your responses to the questions above become your brand mantra. Your mantra should communicate clearly who you are, it should be simple and memorable, and it should feel inspiring and authentic to you. For example, "dependable and passionate marketing professional." Your

mantra is the back bone of your personal brand and it should be at the root of everything you do.

Every time I make a presentation to a potential sponsor, I am not only representing myself, I am representing my company. From my handshake, to my outfit, to my presentation, everything I do is a reflection on me and my employer. You often hear the phrase that the people don't buy products, they buy people. I whole heartedly believe that and over my last ten years in the workforce, I have witnessed firsthand how true this statement is. Being in sponsorship sales, I am also in relationship management. The first thing I do when I meet a new client is to go out of my way to make them feel comfortable – a relationship starts with comfort. If the client is not comfortable, how can they trust you? I work hard to develop a strong rapport with my clients with the goal that these relationships will turn into long-standing partnerships. My clients are buying my brand mantra and everything I stand for. They are buying my passion and enthusiasm for their brand and for my events. They are buying my customer service. They are buying me.

Take a moment to reflect on the questions I posed at the beginning of this article. Based on your answers, are you someone you would want to do business with or even be friends with? There are so many variables in the world that affect us both personally and professionally, but your personal brand is something you can actually control. It all starts with some self-awareness and dedicated time to develop your brand mantra. Go ahead, you are worth it. You represent the best brand in the world – YOU!

As Senior Partnership Manager, **Rebecca Knapp LeBlanc** oversees experiential marketing and activation efforts for her clients at the Newport Harbor Corporation. Over the last decade Rebecca has developed a passion for brand marketing and has recently become intrigued with personal branding. Check out her new blog – "Bibs, Budgets and Burberry – Finding Balance as Mom, Professional and Fashionista" where she writes about her experiences balancing life as a working mother to son Liam, while still finding time to be fashionable.

Rebecca Knapp LeBlanc
Senior Partnership Manager
Newport Harbor Corporation
Newport, RI
Phone: +1-401-619-1371 x218
Email: rkleblanc@newportharbor.com