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Yes, Your Leadership Brand Really Does Matter



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Whether intentional or unintentional, all leaders have a leadership brand. The right brand can have a huge upside for your success as a leader. Likewise, the wrong brand, significant consequences. After all, what is a brand? In a nutshell, it's the art of aligning what you

want people to think with what they really think. In the context of leadership, what people really think is a reflection of your behavior and effectiveness as a leader. It's what you do, not what you say. A leadership brand helps you define your value proposition and maximize your influence and impact. So, are you managing your leadership brand or is it managing you?

If you aspire to be successful as a leader, it's never too early to establish your brand. A leadership brand is contextual to the role you're currently in or the one you aspire to be in. Building one requires focus, discipline and thoughtful purpose.

Here is an easy six-step process that will help you not only establish your brand but ensure that you live it. It's important that after each step and before you move on to the next step, you write your thoughts down. Validate your assumptions and conclusions with stakeholders who know you well and are invested in your success. This is key to really fine-tuning your language and ultimately nailing the brand that is right for you.

1. Identify your leadership expectations: Begin by describing what you and those around you expect of you as a leader. Who are your stakeholders — team members, customers, superiors, etc. — and what do they expect from you? What are the success attributes of your current or future roles?

2. Describe your *real* leadership self: This step is about conducting a thorough inventory of who you are as a leader today. Be honest with yourself. Take into account the feedback you've received and the results of past assessments. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What leadership characteristics are you already known for?

3. Prescribe your *ideal* leadership self: Picture in your mind a leader who you admire and respect. Perhaps it's someone in a role to which you aspire. How would you describe that person? What are the leadership qualities that make them effective?

4. Express your brand identity: Your brand identity is the message others receive about you. Language is important for effective branding. In this step, consider keywords, descriptors and phrases that best represent your brand. Narrow them down to only those that absolutely capture the essence of what you want to be known for, and consider how you will act to get there.

5. Frame and pressure test your brand statement: In this step, consider all that you've identified and concluded in the previous four steps. Draft a leadership brand statement that connects specifically "what I want to be known for" with "what I will deliver." Make sure you are satisfied that you have crafted a brand statement that truly reflects who you are and what you can do, aligns with your current or future roles, provides value for your stakeholders and is within your power to live and make real.

6. Live your brand action plan: Here is your final and most important step. This is

how you ensure that you will live your brand, making it real and manifest in your day-to-day work. Share your brand statement with stakeholders and seek actionable suggestions as to how, on a practical level, you can live your brand every day. Develop an action plan that you can commit to with specific steps that are achievable and observable. Ask your stakeholders to hold you accountable by creating an ongoing feedback loop to get their thoughts and suggestions on how you are doing. Adjust your plan accordingly.

Establishing a leadership brand is an ongoing, iterative process throughout your career. It will evolve in response to the expectations you face at different times in your professional life. Those who are able to continuously grow with self-awareness and act in accordance with their brand statements are the leaders who will succeed.

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