BUILDING A PERSONAL BRAND – IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The topic of personal branding has become much more popular in recent years. The word “brand” really just equates to the impression others have of you. Often, those impressions are made right when meeting someone (or even before), last long after our interactions are over, and color future experiences we have with others.

What follows are some tips on how to identify what your brand is (the impression you have made on others), build your brand (create a focused impression), communicate your brand (get the word out there about who you are), and change your brand (reshaping the impressions you have already made).

Identifying Your Brand

Your personal brand is the combination of your education, experience, skills, values & beliefs, and personality. It already exists, even though you might not know what it is. An easy way to discover your personal brand is to ask people around you about the 3 to 5 things that they think of when they think of you. All of these things are part of your brand. As with any brand, some people will be attracted by what you offer while others will be less interested in you. This is completely fine! As long as your brand aligns to the work you are doing or what is in demand for your industry and is authentic to you, then you do not need to worry about being everything to everybody. If it does not, there are some things you can do to make a change.

Building Your Brand

You can either take an active or passive approach to building your brand. The passive approach involves:

- Meeting minimum job requirements
- Developing ad hoc relationships
- Engaging in discussions in your field as the topics arise
- Forming a general idea of where you want to be long term

An active approach typically includes:

- Excelling in your work
- Intentionally and consistently developing relationships with professionals in your industry
- Joining professional organizations
- Dialoguing with thought leaders in your field
- Identifying a clear direction for your career

These approaches will help you develop an identity in your field. The passive approach typically takes longer and might lead to a less well defined brand. The active approach requires a larger investment of time and mental energy. Depending on your personality and situation, one of these might fit better than the other. You might also find that some of the active techniques will work for you while others might not. Whatever you choose, building your brand is only part of the process. Once you know what your brand is, you need to find ways to share it with others.
Communicating Your Brand

Please know that you have control over your personal brand. Documents such as your resume and cover letter can be used to highlight qualities and qualifications that an employer will find attractive. How you introduce yourself when you first meet someone also plays a major part. There are plenty of other ways to build your personal brand including:

- Leveraging LinkedIn
- Building a website
- Writing a blog
- Creating a Portfolio
- Developing business cards
- Crafting an elevator pitch or professional introduction

While you can present your brand on multiple platforms, it is important for it to be consistent across all of them. If you are trying to present yourself as an experienced leader but your blog is on the topic of sales, you are presenting conflicting information about who you are. Each platform you use should complement the others and showcase your strongest qualifications and qualities that will make you stand out professionally.

Changing Your Brand

It is not at all uncommon for someone to want to make a change into a new career or industry. When this happens, it typically requires “re-branding” oneself to this new field. The same qualities and qualifications that made you attractive for one industry or role might not be what makes you stand out in a new one. To gain insight on what would leave a positive impression:

- Talk to professionals in the new industry
- Research job postings for common keywords
- Join professional organizations
- Follow thought leaders in the industry on Twitter
- Review LinkedIn profiles of professionals in that industry

Once you have identified what you have to offer that would be appealing in this new sector, start updating your branding materials to highlight these elements. This will likely take some time, so do not feel like you need to make a quick shift. Gradually shifting your brand will help make it more authentic to who you are and keep your connections engaged in what you have to offer.

Leaving a lasting impression is not inherently hard. However, leaving one that opens up opportunities for your career and draws people to you can be challenging. By intentionally crafting your personal brand, you can manage the impressions others have of you. This can help you to be considered highly in the industry where you work and among the people who you work with.