

HUFFPOST BUSINESS

How Are You Building Your 'Personal Brand'?

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Every professional needs to empower themselves to own their careers. We are in a competitive and demanding global, multigenerational marketplace where our ability to articulate our value is essential. How do we stand out and differentiate ourselves? Do we have a specific niche, skill or experience...or is it something about our personality and approach that sets us apart from our colleagues? Look at our current political candidates - some have distinct brands they have built over many years and some are still building or it's been built for them.

Identifying and defining our personal brand is the first step; followed by creating and building our brand; and ultimately articulating and enhancing our brand throughout our career. Many people find this concept challenging but the reality is we must see ourselves as a commodity to be marketed. Being your authentic self, staying true to yourself and engaging in a way that allows you to be the best you can be. That's what personal branding is all about. Putting our best foot forward and being in the driver's seat in managing our career. Having a solid plan for ourselves with specific goals and objectives is the best way to start this process. Embracing the concept of marketing ourselves as a core competency for every professional today is essential. Let me offer the following framework I call:

'The Three Ps Marketing Technique':

Preparation - define and identify your brand

Packaging - create and build your brand

Presentation - articulate and enhance your brand

These 'Three Ps' are cumulative requiring proper time and diligence on each before moving to the next. Along with the 'Three Ps', there are three practices shared by individuals who successfully carve out careers that are satisfying and rewarding. Think of people you know who have effectively created and built their brand going on to accomplish great things. Some people we all know include Albert Einstein, Vera Wang, Jack Welch, Walt Disney, Barbara Corcoran to name a few. What do they all have in common? Three things...

Three Commonalities of Successful Professionals:

- 1. Know what they have to offer*** - their value-add
- 2. Know what they want*** - have specific goals
- 3. Know how to ask for it*** - advocate effectively

'Preparation' is the most difficult and requires us to conduct extensive personal due diligence and assessment to better understand our strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, aspirations, motivations, and needs. It's just as important to ask for feedback from others to gain valuable insights that extend beyond our own. This process will help uncover what those differentiators are for each of us and the value-add that we have to offer. Another important part of the preparation phase is goal setting. We all need to have a mission, a vision for our career and specific goals we want to accomplish. Without a plan, we don't have a direction or criteria for accountability. Both long term and short term goal setting helps us create a road map that allows us to actually achieve that vision. Annual goal setting is a must to enable us to move our career in alignment with our aspirations, while remaining open to unexpected opportunities and exploring new paths and directions. I like to say...plan, plan, plan and then go with the flow.

Once we have completed the first phase of defining and identifying our brand, we are ready to move on to the second phase, **'Packaging'** our brand. This is when the hard work begins of creating and building our brand. The purpose is finding opportunities that allow you to demonstrate and showcase your talents and experiences while building your portfolio, track record and credibility. Your packaging will reflect your style and tell your story in a way that allows you access to the different venues where you would like to execute your presentation. Think of packaging as the many diverse vehicles and tools you use to communicate, to tell your story.

How are you *'packaging'* or building your *'personal brand'*? Here are some specific tasks you want to be sure to complete on a consistent basis in order to build your brand:

- Maintain a current resume, bio, curriculum vitae and/or portfolio - add, amend and edit in a timely fashion
- Update and review regularly – DO NOT allow for a long lag time in-between keeping it recent and thorough with all recent and previous accomplishments
- Keep copies of performance reviews, awards, authored articles, presentations, etc.
- Maintain copies of other testimonials of your work history, track record, expertise, thoughtleadership and credibility
- Create & update this “file” or “scrapbook” regularly providing quick access to relevant examples as needed, capturing stories of your results

- Obtain written references /testimonials from colleagues, managers, customers, clients, staff, professors, staff members, vendors, etc.
- Serve on boards, committees, and/or volunteer organizations providing opportunities to expand network and broaden knowledge
- Solicit other types of opportunities that allow you to grow network and enhance visibility
- Always continue to learn and enhance your own development through training, seminars, courses, certifications, and/or advanced degrees
- Be and stay well read and educated within your profession, industry and community
- Create key alliances and partnerships – align yourself with people you respect, admire and can learn from including mentors, advisors, sponsors and advocates
- Build and nurture long lasting mutually rewarding relationships - give back, be of service and always practice professional etiquette
- Establish a track record and reputation as a content expert others seek out
- Use social media strategically and selectively - create a virtual presence and profile that reflects your personal brand effectively; leverage LinkedIn and other appropriate outlets

Once we have sufficiently completed our '*preparation*' and '*packaging*', we are ready to embark on the '**Presentation**' phase of the process. This is how it all comes together, our ability to deliver our message, articulate the value we bring, and communicate stories of results we have achieved throughout our career. Being visible in a way that is relevant, influential and compelling. Putting yourself in a position to build relationships and seize opportunities to showcase your talents and accomplishments when they present themselves. Becoming your own advocate and articulating your message with ease, confidence and authenticity. Being your authentic self and staying true to yourself. Believing in yourself, trusting yourself and exuding confidence in a sincere and genuine manner. Thinking positively and acting with optimism. **Know what you have to offer, what you want and how to ask for it!** Enjoy the journey every step of the way!

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, a career management firm specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, management training and career development. She is a lecturer at Boston-area universities, a sought-after speaker and presenter, the author of numerous articles, blogs and the book, "*Personal Branding and Marketing Yourself: The Three Ps Marketing Technique as a Guide to Career Empowerment*". Rita was voted one of the top ten executive coaches by the Boston Women's Business Journal .