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Career Smart: 5 Steps to a Powerful Personal Brand

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CAREER SMART

Five Steps to a Powerful Personal Brand



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CHAPTER TWO – (STEP 1) DEFINING WHO YOU ARE



Step One: Who Are You?

Everyone has a personal brand. So what is yours saying about you?

Personal brands are as unique and individual as people are themselves. The key to having a career that provides you with meaning and purpose starts with understanding your own unique personal brand and what it is communicating to others.

All of your words and all of your actions are sending messages to your manager, senior managers, clients, and colleagues. Do you know what your messages are saying to others? Do you know what their perception is of you? It may be a difficult question to ask, but it's an important one.

Shaping and Managing the Perceptions of Others

The strength of your personal brand is fueled by how others perceive you. And those perceptions are formed by the messages you are sending out through your interactions with

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others, the way you present yourself, and the value that you provide to a project, team, or employer.

The way you can shape and manage the perceptions of others is to first, fully understand who you are and second, realize what messages you are communicating to others.

Perceptions are largely formed through your interactions with people—how you treat others including large clients, small clients, potential clients, senior managers, subordinates, peers, and business associates. Are you viewed as an expert in a particular area? Are you a leader or a follower? Are you respectful of others? Do others perceive you as a leader and want to be on your team? Are you organized and calm much of the time, or disorganized and frazzled? How well do you handle stress?

Your brand also includes your personal style and the way you present yourself to others. It includes the way you speak, your dialect, and your language. It's the way you dress, your jewelry, hairstyle and shoes.

I learned a lesson about personal branding early in my career when I had just graduated college and interviewed for a copywriter position at a large Phoenix advertising agency. From 100 applicants I made it down to the final two. The other finalist had four years of ad agency experience as a copywriter. My only experience was a six-month college internship at Ping Golf Clubs. But I had a portfolio full of creative ideas, a confident attitude, and a new black suit that screamed, "I'm a professional with style!"

Although I wasn't surprised they chose to hire the other candidate, I was surprised to learn the reason. The partner who interviewed me said that it was a close call between the other candidate and me, but he shared with me how unimpressed he

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was by my rather “cheap” portfolio case. Even though it was filled with fresh and creative ideas, my new, plastic, \$14.99 portfolio case broadcasted to the world that I placed little value on my work.

That was a big lesson I learned and one that I’ve never forgotten. The way you present yourself and act around others shapes your personal brand and the way others perceive you. Your personal brand is also shaped by your core values, passions, personal characteristics, talents and accomplishments.

To build a strong brand requires a clear understanding of your true authentic self. This means holding up a mirror and defining who you really are. What are your values and priorities? Are you consistent in what you say and do? What are your passions and areas of expertise? Why should an employer or client hire you? What is the value that you provide?

The Five Ingredients of Who You Are

Think about who you are. What do you believe in? What do you stand for? What are your core values? These values, personal traits, and core characteristics make you truly unique, and they can also make you invaluable to the right employer or client. By identifying the five ingredients of who you are, you can develop a powerful personal brand which can lead to more career opportunities and a more meaningful and purposeful life.

Let’s start with a simple exercise. Take out a piece of paper and make five columns with these headings:

1. Values
2. Passions
3. Personal Traits
4. Signature Talents
5. Accomplishments

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What are your core values? In other words, what are the principles or standards that guide you? Examples of core values include: family, religion, integrity, generosity, trustworthiness, compassion, giving back to the community, etc.

Values	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____

You may find it helpful to define your core values by completing one of the following sentences:

“I believe in...”

“I value...”

“I commit to...”

Next, identify your passions. These are the areas of interest that excite you and rev up your personal engine. You are intellectually, emotionally, and physically drawn to these activities. You enjoy reading about them, learning about them, and discussing them with others. Examples include: finance, real estate, stock market, technology, marketing, travel, healthcare, politics, business development, the arts, sports, and the list goes on.

Passions	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____

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You should list 2-4 interest areas that drive your passion. Identify your areas and write them down. Your passions are essential ingredients in your personal brand, because when you understand your passions it's easier to define the kind of work you love and the work you are meant to be doing.

Now, let's look at your personal traits, or the mix of characteristics that shape who you are. These are attributes that help define who you really are. Examples include: strategic, inspirational, logical, creative, personable, forward thinking, customer-driven, results-driven, nurturing, sympathetic, organized, etc. These are some ideas to get you started. Your unique set of personal characteristics helps distinguish you from others.

Think about positive comments you've received from past or current co-workers, bosses, friends, and family members. What kinds of initiatives have they said you did well? Which personal qualities have they admired in you?

Give considerable thought to this exercise. You receive billions of messages throughout your life, yet remember only a few. Why do you remember those few? Because there is truth to them, so they resonate with you. Which positive messages about yourself do you recall?

You should ask others for input, including your current manager, clients, and peers. If you are currently employed at a company for longer than six months, perceptions have already been formed about you. Talk to your manager and peers to understand what they think are your significant personal traits. Is there a mentor or advisor within the company who can provide you with honest feedback? This is not an evaluation on how you *want* others to perceive you. It's an assessment of how they *do* perceive you.

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Personal Characteristics	
1. _____	5. _____
2. _____	6. _____
3. _____	7. _____
4. _____	8. _____

You should list 5-8 personal traits that define your character.

Leveraging Your Signature Talents

Now let's define the next ingredient of your personal brand which is something I call "signature talents." Signature talents are more than specialized skills. They are advanced skills that when combined with your experiences, knowledge, and talents, they are as unique and distinctive as your own signature.

For example, after spending a few years out in the field many sales people develop their own unique style of selling. It's a style that is difficult to teach to others. They may use common selling strategies and tactics, but combined with their personality, experiences, and knowledge they have created their own unique signature talent of selling.

Another example is that when I graduated college, I loved writing and knew I either wanted to be a television news writer or write radio and TV commercials. After several years in radio, television, and advertising, I honed my writing skills and developed my own writing style. Writing is one of my signature talents. My employers can always hire someone else, but that person wouldn't have my same signature style.

So what are your signature talents? In which skills or areas of expertise do you stand out from your colleagues or peers? Examples include: managing people, programs or projects,

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selling, marketing, customer service, technology development, organizational leadership, hiring/training/mentoring employees, presentation skills, etc.

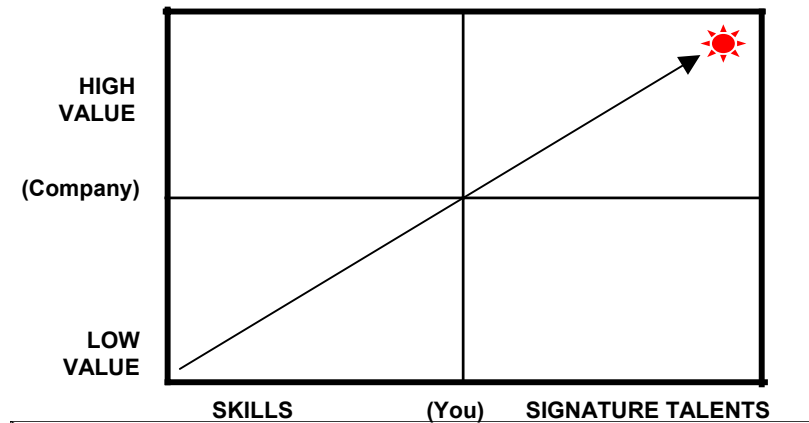
Signature Talents	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____

Identifying your signature talents is crucial for two reasons. First, these talents help define who you are professionally. They boost your credibility, confidence, and uniqueness (and that's what having a personal brand is about!) They are the value you provide to your company or client.

In May 2007, Fast Company magazine published survey results of nationwide salaries. The average salary for an employee deemed a "Self Starter" was \$42,000, for someone considered a "Go Getter," \$37,000, and for someone termed a "Go to Person," \$63,000. This means that when you successfully match your signature talents with a company who values those talents, you'll likely get a higher starting salary.

The second reason I want you to identify your signature talents is because you can leverage them when you want to transition into a new role, company, or industry. Let's say you want to do something totally different and break into a new industry. But, you don't want to start at an entry-level position and take a cut in pay. You can leverage your signature talents to get your foot in the door and start your new career.

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Recently, I was giving a career advancement seminar in Chicago, when a participant raised her hand and said she couldn't do the exercise because she didn't have any signature talents. This shocked me because I had co-presented with her two years earlier and was amazed by her knowledge on the topic which was event planning. I responded by telling her that from my opinion, clearly, she was an expert in event planning. But her response was that she really didn't view herself as an expert in that area.

If you are also having difficulty identifying your signature talents and you have more than five years of professional work experience, I have two thoughts for you. First, many times during our career we find ourselves in a negative environment such as having conflict with a manager, colleague, or client. And if you're in a negative environment right now, you may be hearing some inner voice tell you that you are not good enough to be an expert in anything. If that's the case, then quiet down that voice. I'm here to tell you—and perhaps you are reading this book because you need to GET this message: you DO have expertise that benefits your employer and clients. Or else they wouldn't have hired you!

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Keep in mind that these lists you are creating are not to be judged or challenged by anyone else. They are for you, and you alone to create.

Second, do not judge yourself against all the other industry experts. That bar is too high and not the intention of this concept.

Let me share another story. When I was working for a regional retail chain in Phoenix, my job included writing and producing the company's radio and TV commercials. After two years, the senior managers asked if I could write and produce a corporate video to train our field team on a new product line. I said, "Absolutely!" and immediately went back to my office and started hyperventilating. I had no idea how to write and produce a corporate video. Luckily, I had producer friends who walked me through the steps. Within one year, our company's suppliers started hiring me to write and produce *their* corporate videos.

I continued producing corporate videos for two more years and was offered a job at a global high-tech company as a worldwide communications manager. Even though I had no experience in high tech, in fact, at that time I barely knew how to program my cell phone, I decided to make the transition from retail to high tech. I went from being a confident, successful marketing professional in the retail industry, to being a tiny, little fish in a humungous ocean of about 90,000 engineering, high-tech fanatics. It was intimidating, to say the least.

I wanted to build my credibility, visibility, and personal brand with my network of peers and senior managers. But how could I do it? I decided to anchor on one of my signature talents—being a corporate video expert.

My producer and director friends would laugh me under the table to hear I was positioning myself as a "video expert." Of course, it's only in my mind that I use this term. I've never said it out

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loud, especially since the company has its own corporate video department full of highly qualified producers and directors. But I knew my videos were pretty good and I could share this knowledge and teach other department managers to create their own internal videos—which is exactly what I did. By bringing attention to one of my signature talents, I became the “go to” person for producing internal videos. I quickly provided value to an extended network of department managers, thus raising my credibility and personal brand within the company.

Do not judge your talents against others who are considered true experts in the industry. Instead, evaluate your talents within your current work environment. What expertise or signature talents do you have that are valued by your company or clients?

If you have been working as a professional for more than five years, you should be able to define 1-3 signature talents. If you have been working for less than five years, don't worry if you have not developed any of these yet. Leave this section on your paper blank for now.

The final ingredient of your personal brand is your key successes. Write down your professional accomplishments. These are the tasks or goals you completed that were either recognized by someone else (manager, team leader, etc.) or that gave you pride and personal satisfaction. Whether you have one or 100 on your list, there is no “right” number. Just write them all down.

So many times, we spend countless hours trying to achieve a goal or milestone, and then when we reach it what do we do? We turn in another direction and start running like crazy towards our next goal. We don't take time to celebrate and recognize our accomplishment. In this exercise, I want you to list your successes and take some time to feel good about what you've done. Feel proud of yourself. Celebrating your successes

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validates your efforts and gives you a clearer picture of the value that you offer to employers.

Key Accomplishments	
1. _____	5. _____
2. _____	6. _____
3. _____	7. _____
4. _____	8. _____

Finally, take another look at your lists. Look at every comment you wrote down and ask yourself if it is still a strength that you have today. Is it true? Does it accurately define who you are professionally? If not, cross it off. Keep only those that accurately describe your authentic self.

It may take you a few days or even weeks to complete these exercises. You will know when you are finished, when you look at them and feel confidence. They should give you a sense of calm, pride, and self-confidence. They are the foundation of who you are and the value you give to a company or client.

Identifying the key ingredients in your personal brand gives you three key benefits:

1. Allows you to see the value that you provide a client or company.
2. Gives you credibility and confidence to seek out career opportunities that are right for you.
3. Provides the foundation for building a powerful and sustainable personal brand.

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Writing down the ingredients of your personal brand takes focused thought and introspection, but the more closely you are able to align yourself to an employer who values you, the easier it will be to attain an enriching and purposeful career.

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Chapter Summary

1. Having a purposeful and meaningful career starts with understanding your own unique personal brand and what it is communicating to others.
2. Step #1 is to define who you are. Make your own personal list of the following:
 - a. Core values
 - b. Passions
 - c. Personal characteristics
 - d. Signature talents
 - e. Accomplishments
3. The more closely you align yourself to an employer or clients who value you, the easier it will be to achieve a rewarding and gratifying career.

An insider's guide to getting bigger promotions, better clients, and a richer career life. Whether you're transitioning into a new role, expanding your company, or advancing up the corporate ladder, this book will take your career from ordinary to extraordinary.

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