



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Brand New Me¹

By Kelly Hennigan

“All of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.”—Tom Peters in Fast Company

When a company rebrands itself, it could mean a new name, a reinvented website, or even a marketing campaign with a fresh spin. While the progression through the corporate rebranding process may take significant amounts of time, the end result is typically easily recognizable to the public. At a minimum, the corporation’s target audience is aware that the company is undergoing a change—which could be as seemingly trivial as a logo update or instead run deeper into the heart of the company’s values proposition.

As many of us may not have even actively cultivated our personal brand to begin with, how does a non-corporate entity (i.e., a person) successfully rebrand? How do others recognize your personal brand transformation? Does it require a name change? A personal tagline? A logo? A self-promotional marketing video? In further contemplating rebranding, I noticed some common themes:

1. Be authentic.
2. Consistently manage your brand.
3. Manage your social media reputation.

THEME #1: BE AUTHENTIC

“Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.”—Writer Oscar Wilde

A critical component driving the success of personal rebranding is authenticity. Similar characteristics such as being transparent, being accountable, and having the ability to self-define are also imperative to personal brand. By keeping the rebranding message simple and aligned with your current or aspirational role, your department or your workplace, or your career, you will further reinforce its authenticity. Also, if your rebranding message is associated with a skill that supports potential

problem resolution or that reflects an outwardly client-centric perspective, your rebranding effort may be very well-received by work colleagues, particularly during times of organizational stress.

One of the first steps in authenticity is being able to sell yourself on you. Brené Brown, author of *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*,² moves the reader through this self-reflection process from “What will people think?” to “I am enough.”

Once you recognize and build your own internal brand, you are then ready to outwardly promote yourself to others to further develop your external brand. By being authentic, individuals are able to inwardly understand themselves and subsequently express themselves to others. To rebrand, an individual should focus on his or her strengths, reject weaknesses, and ultimately market any unique or special skill sets to the public.

THEME #2: CONSISTENTLY MANAGE YOUR BRAND

“Be so good they can’t ignore you.”—Comedian Steve Martin

Going through the rebranding effort is an evolutionary process. Maintaining authenticity throughout the journey, as well as consistency and repetition, are prerequisites to conveying your personal brand to yourself and others. Similarly, your brand must be understood—or at least recognized—by all levels of the public. You ideally want to master a skill set such that people can’t help but notice. Cal Newport, a Georgetown University professor, further expands on this concept in his book *So Good They Can’t Ignore You*.³ He maintains the perspective that what you do for a living is far less important than how you do it.

For example, if an individual has a particular skill set for which he or she wants to be recognized—such as being a strategic thinker—then that person must display strategic thinking skills both inwardly



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and outwardly on a regular basis in a variety of scenarios. If work colleagues (particularly those who are influential in the company) are repeatedly witness to these strategic thinking skills in action, then ultimately the strategic thinker will become more broadly recognized. This would first be expected to occur in team meeting settings, then throughout the department, then in the overall business line, and ultimately perhaps even at the organizational level. When others are seeking out that skill set going forward, they will naturally want to involve the individual who has displayed consistent behavior and has built a positive reputation around that skill set.

THEME #3: MANAGE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA REPUTATION

“Owning myself is a way to be myself.”—Media icon Oprah Winfrey

Outside of our work interactions, the ever-present social media has enabled us to truly own our personal brand. Facebook pictures, LinkedIn profile details, Twitter feeds, etc., all reflect our brand. Social media has a number of tools at our fingertips that easily enable personal brand management. For example, building your LinkedIn profile to reflect specific background experiences or accomplishments, as well as including endorsements received from connections, is a relatively straightforward way to brand yourself.

Social media can both further and hinder the personal branding process. The ability to network with industry task force groups, as well as reconnect with college alumnae and former co-workers, are all examples of how social media can be used to expand your brand. If you have a common name, you may want to consider consistently distinguishing yourself on social media sites via use of your middle initial or middle name to reinforce your brand and set yourself apart from others with the same name.

However, it is important to continually be conscious of your social media presence—particularly posts, pictures and privacy settings—and to manage your social media to a level that you are comfortable with others viewing. Ultimately, all social media accounts tie back to personal brand, which is equivalent to reputation. In this day and age, your

reputation is on display to all of those with access to the Internet—which includes co-workers and potential future employers.

(RE)BRANDING AND (RE)INVENTING

Rebranding does not happen overnight; rebranding takes time. In the words of playwright George Bernard Shaw, *“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”*

And, as life goes on, the aforementioned strengths, weaknesses and skills may continue, evolve or perhaps (*gasp!*) become less relevant. When this occurs, new strengths, weaknesses or skills may emerge to fill their void. Individuals must be committed to continuous reinvention.

Rebranding oneself in the workforce at the age of 25 vs. 45 is very different—consider Matthew McConaughey, who spent two decades of his career cast in forgettable romantic comedies (anyone remember *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days?*). At the age of 44, he realized his days as the romantic comedy leading man were likely numbered. Thus, he began to rebrand himself into a serious actor and started receiving critical acclaim. Earlier this year, he received the best actor Oscar for his role in *Dallas Buyers Club*. Similar to Matthew McConaughey, those contemplating rebranding must empower themselves and simultaneously strategize what is achievable when factoring experience, age, and the time frame of the transformation.

In some cases, individuals may want to rebrand by returning to a core characteristic or skill set that can then be enhanced or appropriately modified to accommodate their current situation. Companies have reverted to this tactic in the past as well.

In 2009, McDonald’s realized that it could better serve customers and improve market share by offering a variety of inexpensive latte and espresso drinks to compete with Starbucks. Thus, the McCafé line was born, with advertising focused on the affordability of the McDonald’s beverages. McDonald’s focus on its core competency of inexpensive prices, as well as the timing of the market entry during the recession, better positioned the company to combat Starbucks.

To further expand on the coffee analogy, Starbucks turned the concept of buying a cup of coffee into a way of life. While a cup of coffee could be purchased at a lesser price from other vendors, Starbucks intentionally charges more to cover the cost of their brand experience. Chairman Howard Schultz stated that the stores aim to "...enhance the quality of everything that the customers see, touch, hear, smell or taste" in an effort to enrich the ambiance and convey the brand to patrons. Both McDonald's and Starbucks fit within the themes mentioned earlier in this article related to authenticity and overall brand management.

So grab a cup of coffee and begin working toward managing your personal rebranding process. Fortunately, the good news is that the creation of your own Brand New Me doesn't require a name change, a logo, a tagline, nor a self-promotional marketing video.

In the words of Dave Buck, the CEO of CoachVile, *"Your brand is a gateway to your true work. You know you are here to do something—to create something or help others in some way. The question is, how can you set up your life and work so that you can do it? The answer lies in your brand. When you create a compelling brand you attract people who want the promise of your brand—which you deliver."* ●

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Brand New Me" is the title of an autobiographical song by Alicia Keys about being completely happy with finding yourself.
- ² Published by Hazelden in 2010.
- ³ Published by Grand Central Publishing, a division of the Hachette Book Group USA, in 2012.



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