



Building Your Executive Brand

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Frequently, when I speak with younger executives about advancing their careers, we inevitably discuss their career aspirations and the importance of a strong personal brand. Senior executives and CEOs, too, must be conscious of their brands. A strong, well-established executive brand can give you credibility and authority, much the same way a corporate brand like a Mercedes Benz or Microsoft can open doors and enable success. A brand is not static. It continues to change (hopefully for the better), which is why all career-minded executives must nurture their brands and be intentional about it. Another way to look at it is that we are all our own “chief branding officers”.

What is a personal brand? “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room,” Amazon’s Jeff Bezos has said. We want other people to carry a certain image of us that influences how they think and feel about us. It is how we “market” ourselves to others, but building a brand must be done genuinely and based on who you really are. Especially as a highly visible executive, you can’t fake a brand or it will wear you out. People will see right through it.

One essential point to remember: You have a brand whether you acknowledge it or not. When people meet you in person or visit your profile on LinkedIn, they are absorbing and evaluating your brand. Therefore, if you

neglect it, your brand will be determined largely by what others perceive it to be, rather than what you want it to be.

On that note, let me share a few pieces of advice when intentionally building your own brand:

Think about the authentic net impression you want to create. Each communication, personal interaction or social media post should support this effort, building the brand methodically. It should be a reflection of who you are and who you aspire to be. Consider your strengths and build on them. (An executive’s brand doesn’t have to be the loudest voice in the room—even introverts can build a brand around who they are.)

Whenever I have a meeting or engagement, I ask myself the following: “When I walk out of the room (or leave a Zoom call), how do I want them to think of me?” Answering that question before you have an encounter with others will help you shape your priorities and messages.

Blend your brand with your values. A key to success in any career is to live according to your values. The same goes with building a brand. Your values will shine through your branding efforts—if you post frequently on social media about issues related to diversity and equity, for

instance, people will understand that as being something you strongly value. Therefore, know your values. Conduct a values audit if you wish as a means to explore the foundation on which your brand will be built.

“As executives, we must align ourselves everyday with our core values,” says Isabell Pacheco, FACHE, a board member and chair of the Leadership Incubator for the National Association of Latino Healthcare Executives (NALHE). “If you find yourself frustrated or stuck, it’s likely because you are not aligned with your core values. Your personal brand is powerful and influences the ability to attract, retain and energize the people and organizations that you lead. Your personal brand is also influential in enticing and facilitating new business as well as creating competition differentiation.”

Seek advice. As an executive, it is often hard to get honest input from those around you about your performance and personal self. This includes questions of branding. Find the people in your organization (or outside) who will “tell it like it is.” They will let you know when you’re off brand. Ask them: Does this sound like me? Am I coming across genuinely?

If you’d really like to make an investment, of course, you can hire a personal branding agency, advisor or coach. Whatever you can do to gain honest input earlier in your career will pay dividends as you evolve and grow.

Add to the conversation. With a brand, more is definitely not better. On social media, for example, while persistence pays off, it is not the person who posts or tweets the most often that creates a strong brand. Choose your topics carefully:

- Do they add to and raise awareness of issues discussed?
- Do they help promote you as an expert or ambassador?
- Do they (tactfully) help to promote your organization?

Write down the topics and themes you want to build your brand around and revisit them on a yearly basis. Are they still relevant? Do they still reflect the net impression you want to create? Beginning with the end in mind helps you keep focused on “your” topics.

“Social media has changed traditional approaches to executive branding,” says Isabell Pacheco of NALHE. “For a passive approach, executives should at minimum have a LinkedIn profile. Early careerists have a head start in this technology age since they are brought up and taught to embrace technology. As older executives embrace digital transformation, things to consider are sharing perspectives on existing content and sharing original content on your areas of expertise.”

Establish a cadence. Whether you’re a contributing writer, speaker or active on social media, have a regularity to your contributions. This is a very delicate balance – enough to contribute but not too much to where people stop listening or mute you. As I mentioned, brands are built intentionally, methodically.

Having a cadence doesn’t mean you can’t share something on instinct, but use caution. In the words of football coach and sage Herm Edwards, when in doubt, “don’t press send.”

Align with your company brand. Executives must keep in mind that their own brand is inextricable from the brand of the company they help to run. Virgin’s Richard Branson is the classic example. This doesn’t mean that the CEO’s or leader’s brand has to mirror the company’s, but there should be shared values and mission that make the two compatible.

Remember as you apply for and pursue new jobs that the organization you hope to work for will heavily influence your brand. Let’s say you’re a rising hospital administrator . . . if you choose to work for a small hospital it will contribute much differently to your brand than if you join a large system. An employer will want to ensure that your brand dovetails with its brand, as it is one sign that you’ll be successful as an executive for that organization.

Final Thoughts

Branding is not a perfect art, and there will be bumps along the way as you build your brand. However, if you are intentional in what you do, and ground your actions in your authentic self and your values, your brand will work in your favor to help you advance in your career.

About the Author

Andrew Chastain is president and CEO of the global executive search firm WittKieffer. He is responsible for charting the firm's strategic trajectory while ensuring excellence and exceptional service for the firm's clients. Andrew brings over 20 years of leadership experience to the firm and continues to play a key role in select, high-profile search assignments. As a trusted advisor, Andrew offers his clients a consultative approach with keen strategic insight to deliver proven results. He merges his extensive management and healthcare expertise to identify leadership needs while providing guidance through a rigorous assessment process to identify outstanding leaders for his clients.

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WittKieffer is a global executive search firm dedicated exclusively to organizations that improve quality of life in healthcare, education, the life sciences and the not-for-profit sector. Its industry-specialized consultants deliver solutions across the leadership continuum – experienced, emerging and interim – that build long-term partnerships and successful outcomes. The firm understands leadership, people who lead and the impact they have on organizations and society. Visit WittKieffer.com to learn more.

About NALHE

The National Association of Latino Healthcare Executives is a national organization led by Latino/Latina executive leaders of U.S. hospitals and healthcare organizations and experts in the fields of health care policy and practice. NALHE was founded in 2005 to increase senior-level Latino/Latina representation in hospitals and health systems in the United States. Our goal is to create a future workforce of highly talented Latino/Latina healthcare executives who can meet the challenge of delivering and improving healthcare in our diverse communities. Visit nalhe.org to find out more.