



## TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR SELF-BRAND

*Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie.*

William Shakespeare  
*All's Well That Ends Well* (I, 1)

Branding is about *soft power*. For companies today, it's not the *hard things*—tangibles like bricks and mortar, equipment and inventories—that contribute the most to a company's value. It's *soft things*—the brands and company reputation, the ideas and intellectual capital, the consumer relationships and business alliances—that have the most value.

Like it or not, branding and soft power affect us every day because they influence how we feel about something. Few of us make the decision to buy something after carefully testing and considering the merits of the different brands on the market. No one goes out and does a blind taste test of colas and then selects the one that *objectively* tastes best. Even if it's a more expensive (and consequently more considered) purchase, like a car or a laptop, we will compare hard things like product features and performance criteria, but we will decide based on soft things such as what the brand represents to us.

It's the same with people. It isn't the hard, quantifiable things, like educational credentials, experience, and job titles, that contribute the

most to success. The real power lies in harnessing soft power—strategy and tactics, image and visual identity, words and verbal identity, visibility and reputation, and other branding ideas—all the things that will help attract people to you.

Business success, like brand success, depends on what other people think about you. If people think you are a dynamic business leader, you are. If people think you're a B player, you are (until you change their perceptions). It doesn't matter what is "objectively" true. Perception is reality.

Creating positive impressions in the minds of other people is the work of self-branding. It used to be about "Can you do the job?" Now, many people can do what you do. So it has to be about something more. Above all, branding is a strategic process. The goal is to provide that something more to succeed in a changing, highly competitive business environment (and to be authentic and even to enjoy yourself in the process).

This book is about how you can tap into soft power—your self-branding power—and harness it for career and life success.

## **FIND YOUR "BIG IDEA"**

You are your most important asset. In a sense, you are your only asset. And your ability to maximize the asset that is *you* is the single most important ingredient in your success.

That's why self-branding is so valuable. For people, branding is about achieving greater success, as represented by money, fame, self-esteem, or whatever measure is important to you.

But I am also talking about becoming who you were meant to be, which means that success includes becoming who you truly are. The trick to effective self-branding is to devise a strategy that works in achieving professional and life goals but also is true to you—that brings more of you into the equation.

Branding for people is about finding your Big Idea—your unique selling proposition (USP). You want to represent something special—a belief system you stand for that sets you apart from others. This could be made up of your point of view, your vision, your style, even your mystique—the X Factor that makes you special and relevant.

Branding for people is also about "packaging" the brand that is you and using branding strategies and principles from the commercial world

**SELF-BRAND: A person represents a skill set. A self-brand represents a Big Idea, a belief system, that other people find special and relevant.**

to enhance your identity and communicate your USP. It also means developing a personal marketing plan for reaching your goals, tactics to get from A to B (and through all the other letters of the alphabet, depending on your goals). And it means engaging your target audience without seeming self-promotional and obnoxious. This book will show you how.

## LEVERAGE BRAND POWER

Looking at yourself as a brand has enormous advantages. The truth is that being good, by itself, doesn't guarantee success. We all know talented people who are underemployed, underpaid, or even unemployed.

With branding, you learn how to look at yourself as a product in a competitive framework. Branding is the process of differentiating that product—you—from the competition and taking action steps to get where you want to go.

Branding also requires that you target a market. A market is any group of people that you need to engage with in order to reach your goals. Clients or customers are a target market, as are the prospects you are pursuing. If you work at a company, you should view your colleagues and direct reports as target markets. Don't overlook your boss. In any company, your boss is probably your most important target market. Recruiters, industry leaders, and even competitors are also markets for your self-brand.

Branding shows you how to attract a market. Don't think in terms of what you want to say and do. Flip it. Think in terms of the reaction you want from your target market. And what you have to do to get that reaction.

Branding also gives you a template for developing a marketing program directed at your key target markets. You will learn how to develop

specific brand messages and tactics for maximizing success with your target market as well as methods of measuring your success.

Self-branding is not just good for you personally, it is good for the company, too. Branding teaches you how to be more strategic by staying relevant to the market and the latest thinking. It teaches you how to use advertising techniques to build a powerful verbal identity to express your ideas through signature words and expressions. Branding teaches you how to package your ideas for a strong visual identity, too, so they will break through and be remembered. And it teaches you how to use other branding techniques to build consensus and lead in today's competitive global marketplace.

Any way you slice it, brands win over products hands down. A branded item is viewed as better than its generic counterpart. Brands are perceived as higher in quality. They are in demand. They sell for a premium price.

Generic products compete only on price, by offering a very low price. (And if you're reading this book, I doubt that you want to compete that way.) As shown below, the list of a brand's advantages goes on and on.

BRAND	VS.	PRODUCT
Is bought		Has to be sold
Creates emotional bond		Creates no attachment
Has high visibility		Has low visibility
Is unique		Is a commodity
Endures		Becomes outdated
Has premium price		Has low price
Creates buzz		Is of low interest
Stays relevant		Is static
Is memorable		Is forgettable

## TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR BRAND

My mantra to my clients is “You are a brand!” This book will take you through stories, examples, and brainstormer exercises to help you make yourself a brand.

The first thing you need to do is to commit. You must take an active rather than a passive role in defining yourself and your future.

Developing a winning self-brand requires some work. The left-brain work involves analyzing facts and trends as well as planning tactics. Right-brain work involves tapping into your intuition and creativity as you develop a personal-brand strategy, a visual identity (your packaging), and a verbal identity (your self-brand messages) in order to reach your goals.

Before you can develop a successful self-brand, you need to decide what you want. You need to ask and answer questions about who you are, where you are now, and what you want to do with your life and career.

Of course, for many of us, this is the sticky part. These are the very issues we tend to avoid until we’re in a crisis. Or we live a life in which there is conflict between who we are, what we want, and where we are heading.

I often recognize this disconnect in statements like “I’m doing X now because I fell into it, but I really want to be doing Y in the future” or “I’m in it for the money, but I need something more rewarding in the future.” One client told me, “I went into law because my father is a country lawyer, an icon really, like Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but I hate it. To me, law is drudgery. I long for more creative lifework.”

Even though people want success, some resist self-branding because they feel that it’s unseemly to think strategically and creatively about themselves and then present themselves in the best possible light. It’s too calculated.

I recently met with someone who had this problem. Hal was a talented lawyer in general practice, but his business was struggling. He was referred to me by a friend who hadn’t gone to the elite law school Hal had attended yet was getting top dollar for his legal counsel. Hal’s friend had carved out a high-profile niche for himself as a white-collar criminal defense attorney.

When I talked to Hal about narrowing the focus of his business and developing a name for himself in that specific area, he balked. “I don’t want to resort to selling myself. I have a law degree from a top school, and I won’t stoop to becoming a salesperson.”

Which would you rather be—a top lawyer or a top-credentialed lawyer?

## LIVE YOUR DREAM

Our work fantasies often reflect desires that we have put on hold in our lives. Many people light up when I ask them to describe their dream jobs. “Oh, if I could live my dream, here’s what I’d be doing.” And they go on to recount something that has always intrigued them and been at the back of their minds, but which they have never pursued or acted on.

But as workplace philosophers such as William Bridges and John Whyte point out, desire is too powerful a motivator to ignore. We have all spent too much time doing what we think others want us to do, rather than what we want to do.

In working with all types of clients and situations, I have found that almost anything is attainable if you can conceive of and express it. A few people accomplish this naturally or intuitively, but most of us need a strategy and a game plan for making it happen.

## ADOPT THE SELF-BRAND MIND-SET

Each of us is unique, with a mind, strengths, and experiences that are powerful self-brand assets. Anything that you have ever done or thought about could be an asset. If you think it is an asset, it is. If you see it as a stepping-stone to your self-brand goal, it is. If you see it as a career buster, it is.

*The glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,  
the dial who thy precious minutes waste.*

**William Shakespeare**  
*Sonnet 77*

**SELF-BRANDING:** Self-branding is more than your name, identity, and image. It is everything you do to differentiate and market yourself, such as your messages, self-presentation, and marketing tactics.

Few of us have been taught to think of ourselves in terms of being a *brand*, as something that can be looked at in different ways, developed into a winning brand, and marketed so that we may achieve our full potential.

Few have learned how to rebrand ourselves to stand for something that is in demand rather than something that is no longer in vogue. We don't know how to create positive perceptions of ourselves.

Nor have many of us been taught that we are capable of defining and molding our jobs. We can even create careers and career paths that we feel passionate about.

It's not that ability and performance aren't important. They are. But a talented, hardworking person won't do as well as a well-branded, talented, hardworking person. Effective branding will tip perceptions in your favor and bring greater success.

## BREAK THE DEPENDENCY HABIT

We can no longer count on a career at one company. That was your father's Oldsmobile. And now, Oldsmobile is gone altogether!

We will not only have multiple jobs in our lifetimes; we will have multiple careers.

*Men at times are masters of their fates.*

**William Shakespeare**  
*Julius Caesar (I, 2)*

**Companies focus on what's good for their bottom line. Not what's good for your bottom line.**

Companies merge and split up. There are downsizings and upsizings. The boss who hired you moves on. People get into trouble and point fingers at others. Technology and global economies have made outsourcing of jobs possible in ways never imagined just a few years ago. And managerial jobs are not immune.

With these kinds of changes the norm, you can't count on your company to keep you on the payroll. Even when things are going well, conditions can change quickly. You need to control your destiny.

That's why this book contains a number of brainstormers like the one on the opposite page. As you do each brainstormer, write your responses in the spaces provided in cursive handwriting. Why? You'll likely find that writing in cursive engages the brain and helps you think of more ideas.

When you think as if you were a brand, your goal is to prosper, not just survive. Like any brand manager, you must change your strategy and tactics when the marketplace dynamics change. You look for new opportunities and needs for which *your* brand is the solution.

## **TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR BRAND, OR SOMEONE ELSE WILL**

Self-branding is about making the most of what you've got. It's about daring to put forth a different idea. It's about responding to changes in the marketplace.

Many of us keep doing the same things long after they are not working anymore. Self-branding is about playing an active role in your career and life and learning how to position and market yourself to maximum advantage.

After all, it's a myth to think that you'll be rewarded solely on the basis of your hard work. And if you don't brand yourself, someone else will. Chances are that their brand description won't be quite what you have in mind, as my client Kate found out.



## &lt;&lt; BRAINSTORMER &gt;&gt;

**Who's Looking Out for You?**

Envision the following scenario: One day, a major catastrophe occurs at your company headquarters, causing fear and uncertainty. The economy sours, and your company's sales plummet. Then, your boss walks into your office and says, "Sorry, I have some bad news for you. We have to downsize and your're job is being eliminated."

The job market is dreadful, particularly in your industry and geographic area. What do you do now?

Kate had been with a large food company for 10 years and was working hard running a good-size department. Unlike colleagues with similar responsibilities who had been rewarded with promotions to vice president, Kate languished at the senior director level. So why the disparity?

*Defer no time,  
Delays have dangerous ends.*

**William Shakespeare**  
*Henry VI, Part One (III, 2)*

We all have seen it happen: similar staff and responsibilities, but different compensation and title.

Kate got an inkling of the reason when she was at a large corporate meeting. The executive vice president introduced her to a new recruit as “Kate, the person who handles promotions for Brand X.”

Well, that had been true several years and several promotions ago, when she was a junior employee, yet that was where her brand was stuck in management’s consciousness. Her personal brand was so weak that she was subject to whatever foolish, unproductive brand others associated with her.

Kate desperately needed to rebrand herself as a leader in the company. She took a range of actions aimed at increasing her visibility and changing the perception that her key target markets, her boss and senior executives, had of her.

For starters, she volunteered for a high-profile, strategic project and joined the team that would be making the presentation to senior management. The project gave her a platform for collaborating with executives at her level and above, people with whom she did not interact in her normal job routine.

Kate had to shift her brand from that of assistant to senior management, who *organizes* the material, to that of senior management, who *own* the material.

Her focus is now on capturing the brand she desires. With a change in mind-set, so that she sees herself as a self-brand and not as an employee, Kate is on her way to being branded for success.

## COULD SELF-BRANDING HELP YOU?

Self-branding is for people who are smart and good at what they do but not good at branding themselves effectively. It is for people who have come to realize that they need to take control of their identities. They can’t rely on luck or other people or situations.

It is for people who want to do and achieve more, people who have a problem (job loss, etc.), and people who want to reinvent themselves for a second act.

All of these people have come to realize that there is no security in a job—any job. Security lies in your ability to take charge. It lies in your ability to brand yourself successfully and think in terms of market needs. Security lies in your ability to respond to change and benefit from it

SELF-BRAND MIND-SET VS. EMPLOYEE MIND-SET	
Working for yourself	Working for boss
Internal security	External security
Marketing plan	Résumé
Markets	Clients, co-workers, management
Differentiating	Fitting in
Strategy	Hard work
Relationships	Transactions
Network	Solo
Long-term	Short-term
Planning	Reacting
Sound bites	Business jargon
Packaging	Clothes
Visibility	Low profile
Self-measurement	Performance review

rather than hide from it. Security lies in your ability to develop a strategy and a game plan.

Security lies in you.

## TAKE ACTION—NOW

The bottom line is, branding provides a valuable tool for leveraging the asset that is you. But it is a powerless tool unless you act. See the box on the following page for my list of the top 10 self-branding actions you can take and that we will explore in the chapters that follow.

The first secret of personal branding is that the magic is in you. You can take charge and harness your passion and drive. Become emotionally

and intellectually engaged in your professional and life journeys. Start to create your own luck. Seek your own solutions.

*Why, then the world's mine oyster!*

**William Shakespeare**  
*The Merry Wives of Windsor (II, 2)*

The more self-reliant you are, the more luck and solutions you will find. Start developing options for yourself rather than waiting for them. A surge in self-esteem is one unexpected benefit of finding your own solutions to your situation. And stronger self-esteem will make it easier for you to enact them.

## **TOP 10 SELF-BRANDING ACTIONS**

- 1 Celebrate yourself and your uniqueness:**  
Do a self-brand audit.
- 2 Keep tabs on the big picture:**  
Do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.
- 3 Don't avoid the competition:**  
Go to school on your competition.
- 4 Find the sweet spot:**  
Focus on the right strategy for achieving your goals.
- 5 Harness the power of self-presentation:**  
Learn the principles of visual identity.
- 6 Tap into the power of words:**  
Learn the principles of verbal identity.
- 7 Think in terms of markets:**  
Engage in and respond to the market.
- 8 Expand your network and your visibility:**  
Become known for something by somebody somewhere.
- 9 Execute a self-brand action plan:**  
Develop specific tactics and implement each as scheduled.
- 10 Stay relevant:**  
Measure how you are doing.

**<< IN A NUTSHELL >>**

**The first secret of self-brands:**

**That person in the mirror  
is the only one you can rely on.**

**But that's not sad.**

**It's powerful.**