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The NEW Brand YOU

How to **WOW** in the
new world of **WORK**



Catherine
Kaputa



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THE NEW BRAND YOU

How to Wow in the New World of Work

Catherine Kaputa



N I C H O L A S B R E A L E Y
P U B L I S H I N G

BOSTON • LONDON

First published in 2022 by Nicholas Brealey Publishing
An imprint of John Murray Press

An Hachette UK company

26 25 24 23 22 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022933577

ISBN 978-1-3998-0406-6

US eBook ISBN 978-1-3998-0409-7

UK eBook ISBN 978-1-3998-0408-0

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

John Murray Press policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable, and
recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging
and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

John Murray Press Ltd
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ
Tel: 020 3122 6000

Nicholas Brealey Publishing
Hachette Book Group
53 State Street
Boston, MA 02109, USA
Tel: (617) 263 1834

www.nbuspublishing.com

*Dedicated to the new Brand You,
the most important
branding challenge of all...
branding yourself*

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Introduction

Amazingly, my first job was my dream job. Curatorial Assistant in Asian Art at the Seattle Art Museum.

It was the “old” days. Pre-internet. Pre-Zoom. Pre-email. Pre-laptop. Pre-mobile phone. Pre-digital anything. I was hired sight unseen. My job search was conducted entirely through letters sent back and forth. (Today it would be emails, of course, and video interviews.)

I fought for that job, letter by letter. I sent a cover letter and resume to Henry Trubner, the Curator of Asian Art. It was totally a cold call. I couldn't believe it. I got a reply in four days. In his letter Henry mentioned there might be a job since the museum was planning to do a book on its world-renowned Asian art collection.

Hmm . . . I Had an Idea

I responded immediately. Originally a journalism major before I switched to art history, I pitched myself as “an Asian art historian who can write.” In his next letter, arriving five days later, Henry told me there was another candidate he was interested in and wanted to know what salary I was looking for. Shooting off my response letter a day later, I also sent along some writing samples.

Seven days later Henry sent me a job offer. Sometimes you get lucky. Art museums are notoriously difficult to break in to. What lucky timing!

After graduation, I went to my hometown, Miami, Florida, bought a red Volkswagen Beetle, and set off on a leisurely cross-country drive of 3,297

miles to my new job in Seattle. Packed into the car with me was my sister, our camping gear, and all my possessions.

My Terrible-No-Good-Very-Bad First Day

My first day on the job at the Seattle Art Museum is painful to remember and hard to forget. I was confronted by the director of the museum in the office lobby, who told me I didn't have a job!

The curator (Henry, my letter-writing partner) hadn't received permission to hire anyone, the director curtly informed me. I met briefly with Henry, who told me to come back tomorrow and that he would work things out.

Imagine. I was twenty-one years old. I didn't know a soul in Seattle (my sister had flown back to Florida). Rather than landing my dream job, I was caught in the crossfire of these two gentlemen.

The Antidote to Fear Is Action

The worst thing that can happen on your first day on a new job in a faraway city had happened to me. I had moved over three thousand miles, settled into my new apartment, and poof! My dream job was gone.

Back in my car, I started to cry. It was the feeling you have when you realize that your future has turned upside down. I felt like packing my bags and driving away. But where to?

Then I told myself, "Perish the thought." I returned to my apartment and told my landlady (of three days) about my predicament. She asked if I had the letter documenting the job offer. (I did.) "March back in there tomorrow," she said. "That's your contract."

I marched. It worked. My dream job was reinstated.

After that horrible first-day start, Asian art became my life and my brand. I was in deep, working at the museum and then with my PhD studies.

Personal Branding Crisis #1

I began to struggle with the existential questions of my generation "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" I began to doubt my career choice. So many

thoughts swirled around in my head—“Is this how I should be spending the rest of my life? Life is too short to be in the wrong career.”

After my soul searching, I decided to make a dramatic career change and switch back to my original college majors—journalism and advertising. And I knew where I would do it. The capital of the world.

You don’t need a connection to New York City to feel its influence, but I did have a connection, and that made the city’s gravity a force I could not resist. Heart and head were pulling me.

A Loser Pitch

As you can imagine, with a career change this drastic, it was not easy to get an interview or to find a winning pitch.

Usually interviewers reacted with disbelief when I told them I was trying to transition from being an Asian-art historian to a career in advertising. Then I launched into my pitch: “I’m a hard worker and I want to break into advertising.”

Reinventing yourself is as much about
seeing yourself differently
as it is changing how others see you

My elevator pitch was a dud. My positioning was all about me. It was generic. There was no different idea there. There was no benefit, no problem I could solve, except a commitment to work hard.

The result, you guessed it, is that I got rejected again and again. I was traveling through the well-trodden path of rejection.

Radical Reinvention Needed

I found myself branded, but not in the way that I wanted to be branded. I was branded as an academic, as someone too slow and plodding for the ad agency world.

I was getting worried. I couldn't sleep at night. I knew I could do an entry-level advertising job, but how could I convince other people?

Somehow I needed to connect the dots and reinvent myself from an Asian-art historian to an ad person. I drew up a short list of the things I did at the museum that were marketing oriented, such as organizing, promoting, and marketing Asian-art shows.

Eureka! I had the skills. I just needed to frame them better. I had another revelation in doing the experience-listing exercise. A key ability was generating innovative Asian-art exhibit ideas that attracted a wide audience.

I felt a jolt of adrenaline as my ruminations led to my new pitch, a more provocative positioning idea: "I'm a marketer for difficult products."

I compared marketing Asian-art exhibits in a Western culture to marketing a difficult product. It took ingenuity to come up with enticing marketing campaigns and bold, informative Asian-art exhibits that would draw a crowd. I said, "Hire me for one of your tough accounts where you need an innovative problem-solver."

Positioning Brand You in a Sentence

Just like in the branding world, words and phrases count. My new brand positioning—"marketer for difficult products"—got traction.

It was focused. So simple it was easy for interviewers to remember and repeat to others in the interview chain or file away in their minds.

It was different. I never met anyone else who used the "marketer for difficult products" pitch, so it was white space, an open positioning that no one else owned. It enabled me to leapfrog the competition by focusing not on my strength but on how my strength could solve *their* problem.

Finally, my pitch was relevant and memorable. Every ad agency has difficult accounts that few people want to work on. Plus my positioning catchphrase was easy for interviewers to recall and pass along.

A New Identity in the Minds of Others

I was still the same person but I got a totally different response with my new positioning and elevator speech.

And, it was a true story. Your brand narrative always has to be true.

But something important had changed. My new positioning made people see me differently *as if* I was a different person.

I owned a different position in their mind. My positioning turned my perceived negatives (my Asian-art-history job experience and PhD studies) into positives (could handle difficult brand projects).

It was an eye-opening experience, in a good way.

Oversimplify Your Message

You need to craft a cohesive but simple narrative that points people in the direction that you want to take your brand, even if it involves canceling or downplaying something that you are proud of. You must eliminate complexity and confusion so that you have an oversimplified message that gets through.

You must curate your brand positioning
by eliminating complexity and confusion

I jettisoned some accomplishments that I was really proud of, like the Asian-art book on the museum's collection I had co-authored and the Japanese art book I had translated. Including these accomplishments destroyed my new personal brand identity and made people brand me as an academic, not a marketer.

Best of all, my new brand positioning got me my first job in advertising, at Trout & Ries Advertising. I learned brand strategy and positioning under the positioning gurus Al Ries (now in the Marketing Hall of Fame) and Jack Trout. Thank you, Al! Thank you, Jack! What a great foundation for beginning in the advertising business.

Tweak Your Pitch

Right from the start, I felt custom built for advertising: the creativity, the analysis, the competitiveness, the hallway brainstorming, the gossip. Then,

after I was at the agency for four years, I heard about a job supervising the “I Love New York” campaign at its ad agency, Wells Rich Greene.

It was my new dream job. It was the flagship account at a top creative agency. I’d be part of the team creating high-production-value commercials with celebrities and top Broadway shows. What’s not to like?

There were major hurdles, though. Most of my advertising experience was in brand strategy or on business-to-business accounts. The only television experience I had was for a supermarket chain. Not exactly a good match with the job specs.

Research and Discovery

My copywriter friend Bob, who worked at the Wells Rich Greene ad agency, warned me that I didn’t have a chance. But he did tell me something valuable, “The account is difficult to manage. Your clients are politicians and career civil servants who rarely agree with each other. The last person didn’t stay in the position for long.”

Nothing would have changed my mind. Getting this job would be my entre into the big time, on a highly visible creative account. As poorly qualified as I was, I didn’t want to lose the opportunity to pitch myself. And my conversation with Bob gave me an idea on how to position myself for the job.

Think Outside In

My first ad boss, Al Ries, always emphasizes that you need to think “*Outside—In*.” It’s not about what you want to say (Inside), but what your customers want to hear (Outside).

So in the interview, when the hiring manager asked, “Why are you here? You don’t have the right background,” I was prepared. “My specialty is working on difficult products . . . [*suspenseful pause*] . . . and with difficult clients.” I gave examples of building consensus between stakeholders with entrenched, opposing positions in my current job.

His eyes widened. I could see that my pitch was piquing his interest. Maybe I did have a chance.

Now don't misinterpret. I told a true story in my pitch. I did have experience with tough clients.

But I emphasized that skill and customized my interview pitch based on the "research" I had done with Bob. (I didn't share that he had told me that the challenging aspect of the account was working with demanding clients.)

That's how I got hired as Managing Director supervising the "I Love New York" campaign. I got a lot of television experience shooting commercials featuring Broadway shows and celebrities and learned a lot about the big ad agency world.

I loved it! And that's including the challenge of managing a diverse group of strong-willed clients.

Best of all, I learned an important lesson—don't let not being completely qualified for a job stop you!

The Ever-Evolving Personal Brand

When I decided to leave the ad agency world, I set my sights on a corporate advertising job. This time I got branded as an "agency person," someone totally lacking in appeal because I didn't have corporate experience or an MBA. Through a friend, I got an interview with a prominent Wall Street firm.

On the day of the interview, I got stuck in a snow storm in Boston. Even the trains were shut down, so I rented a car and drove to the interview. Given how hard it was to get the interview, I thought to myself, "I'm making this interview, even if I have to walk through snowdrifts."

I spent over ten years on Wall Street as a corporate global brand and advertising executive, through eight mergers and six name changes. That took some personal branding to stay in the game, given the competitive nature of Wall Street businesses. (But that's a whole other book.)

To show you how crazy it was, I started out at Shearson Lehman Brothers when it was a division of American Express and when I left, it was Smith Barney, a division of Citi. And I never changed jobs!

My corporate career ended abruptly on a perfect sunny day, on September 11, 2001.

A Leap to the Wild Side

I'd like to tell you that I became an entrepreneur as a result of careful planning and a blinding flash of insight—a big idea that I knew couldn't fail.

But it didn't happen that way. The truth is, I was forced into entrepreneurship when I lost my high-powered corporate branding job right after 9/11.

Saying goodbye to a Wall Street job—the security, the prestige, the good paycheck—was scary but exciting at the same time. (Never mind that I thought it was my only realistic option.)

Personal branding makes you an
active partner in your career and life destiny

I had periodically harbored thoughts of doing something entrepreneurial at some point (particularly after a bad day at the office). Now, I had to do it. Truth be told, I was burnt out and yearned for more flexibility and control over my career and life. But I struggled with “What should I do next?”

The concept of personal branding was starting to gain traction in the career world around that time. Looking back at my own experience, I realized that building a fulfilling career takes careful, calculated branding at every turn and that led to launching my own company, Selfbrand. Unlike other career coaches and speakers, I was a personal brand strategist applying principles and strategies from the commercial world of brands to the most important brand you'll ever market, Brand You.

Is This Book for You?

The goal of this book is to take you on a personal branding journey, a journey of self-empowerment—that sense of self-awareness and self-fulfillment that brings happiness and is part of life success. Each of us has ideas, abilities, and a unique contribution to make to the world, whether small or large.

Yet many of us shy away from marketing ourselves or making changes, even when we're not happy where we are.

Whether you want to or not, whatever your work circumstances are, you need to think about personal branding today.

You may not have a choice.

You could be a woman working remotely and worried she's been sidelined on the Mommy track. You could be a talented manager who is burnt out and wants more work-life balance and flexibility. You could have quit during the pandemic and want to make a dramatic career change to something more meaningful. You might be a career coach or professor using this book with your clients or students.

Of course, you don't have to believe me about personal branding. You could rely on luck. But most "lucky" people have personal branding to thank for their luck!

Bye-Bye to the Old

We are living in a time of change, a new world of work and living. The pandemic accelerated trends already happening—a more remote, digital and virtual workplace, a less hierarchical organizational structure, and a realignment of industries fueled by new technologies.

Covid also increased the stress and anxiety of the modern workplace and lifestyle. It's not easy to stand out or plan your career moves in a workplace in flux, especially if you're working remotely.

You may not want to get involved in personal branding, but consider this: The world has changed. The well-trodden path from entry level to retirement is long gone. Branding may not be optional anymore. You need to build a brand, not just have a job to succeed in the new world of work. And if you think you are too busy to brand yourself or you dislike reading books cover to cover, this book is designed so that you can read it in chunks.

Here's what's coming up:

Part I Finding the Right Positioning for Brand You in the New World of Work

Part II Introducing the Top 10 Personal Brand Positioning Strategies

Part III Giving Brand You the Wow Factor

Quo Vadis?

In the aftermath of the pandemic, many people started thinking about the lives they wanted to have versus the one they were living each day. They started to define their concept of success and how to live their lives. Many wanted more flexibility. Others wanted more control.

The pandemic brought about a quest for meaning in others. A 2021 Pew Research study found that only 17 percent of adults now view their job or career as a source of meaning—down seven percent from four years earlier.¹

Others discovered during the pandemic that they like the remote nomad lifestyle. They want to remain Zen and don't want to go back to bricks and mortar ever again.

We can all benefit from looking at ourselves through different prisms. The branding world provides a deep reservoir of principles and strategies for finding your vision and your true north.

Positioning Brand You

Your positioning is the foundation of your brand. The book introduces ten of the most successful brand positioning strategies used by big brands that apply to people too. Are you an innovator who's a creative idea person? Are you a leader who inspires people to exceed goals? Or are you a maverick—everything the traditional leader stands for, you stand for the opposite?

You could choose attribute positioning, building your brand on a specific attribute or strength that defines your value added. Or cause positioning, building your brand around a cause that you are devoted to. Or target market positioning, where you focus your brand on a specific audience.

Personal branding makes you an
active partner in your career and life destiny

Each positioning strategy is designed to give you maximum leverage based on your personality, preferences, and abilities, and each chapter provides a template for kickstarting your brand and looking forward to Monday mornings. To help figure out your optimal positioning, you can try my hack, the online Personal Brand Assessment Test in Chapter 3.

Do You Need to Brand?

Personal branding will always be critical as long as talented people have trouble marketing themselves, as long as people want to change careers and “re-brand” themselves for a second act (or third, or fourth), as long as people have to compete through any time of change like the new world of work, as long as people feel marginalized, stuck, or invisible or as long as people want to go out on their own with their own business.

As long as these dynamics exist, people will be looking for ideas and actions that will give them an advantage.

Branding is a great tool because it makes you an active partner in your career and life destiny.

Having desires and goals and then working to accomplish them, is as close as we get to the idea of success, and it’s available to everyone, even with our flaws and limitations.

There is no magic wand, but personal branding can be magical. With the right branding, everything can fall into place in terms of how to live and succeed in the new world of work.

**PART I:
FINDING THE RIGHT POSITIONING
FOR BRAND YOU IN THE NEW
WORLD OF WORK**

Chapter 1

Know Thyself: Discovering the New Brand You

One of the earliest insights in the wisdom of civilization is the advice of the Oracle at Delphi, “Know Thyself,” inscribed in the seventh century BC above the Temple of Apollo.

The maxim seems simple, so basic. How can I not know myself? Not know what my strengths are or where I belong in the world?

Do you know who you are? Maybe you do. Maybe you don't.

Self-knowledge is not easy. If it was, there wouldn't be so many professional development experts developing online assessment tests to aid in self-discovery. I even created one! (There's a link in Chapter 3.)

Success vs. Happiness

What's the goal of all of this self-discovery? For most, it's about success and happiness, however you define them. If you have both, what more could you want?

To be happy, you must heed the Oracle's advice to “Know Thyself” and create a positive sense of self in your own mind. You must build a sense of self-awareness that blooms into self-actualization, of being who you were meant to be.

But to be successful, you also need to build a positive identity and reputation in the minds of other people. Other people hire you. Or promote you. Or buy from you. Or follow your leadership. Or fire you.

You can't do it alone. You can craft your personal brand, but you don't control it. That power also belongs to other people.

Other people determine your reputation. Other people are also behind your success. Each of us already has a brand in the minds of others, so you might as well make it a strong brand. Especially if you want to compete in today's dynamic anything-can-happen post-pandemic workplace.

That's why you need to learn the currency of personal branding. You need to create a unique brand identity that builds on who you are, your personality and your strengths, and the realities of today's workplace.

Attach an Idea to Yourself

What is branding, really?

Marketers attach an idea to a product, an idea that *positions* the brand with a unique image and identity in the minds of customers.

Personal branding is about attaching an idea to yourself
that's focused, different, and relevant
and gives people a reason to choose you

Likewise, you need to attach a unique positioning idea to yourself in the minds of your "customers"—your boss, colleagues, clients. A positioning that clearly articulates how you are different from competitors.

An Idea That's Focused

You want to attach an idea that positions you in a single sentence. In clear simple language. So simple that anyone can understand, remember, and repeat it. You don't want to be a complicated I-can-do-everything brand.

Rather than going for a "big, complicated" idea, go for a "small, focused" idea. The best positioning ideas are very targeted and specific, not convoluted. Is your positioning idea crisp and clear? Can you write it on the back of a business card? It has to be as simple as that.

An Idea That's Different

You've got to fight the natural instinct to copy the competition. Does your positioning idea set you apart from competitors? Being a me-too brand like "Team player committed to customers" won't get you anywhere. It's so over-used and commonplace, the words don't have any meaning anymore.

You'll always be viewed as the generic, so you'd better have a low price.

You know you've found a different idea when you find the *white space*, a need in the marketplace that no one else is filling or no one else can satisfy in quite the way you will.

Of course, be prepared. When you're different, you'll stand out. Personal branding is all about standing out—in a good way—not as a showboater. Look at Marie Kondo and her different take on tidiness. Not many people thought much about decluttering their lives, that is until Marie Kondo made organizing your stuff a Zen experience with her trademark phrase "spark joy."

She stood out from other organizers because she emphasized joy not order or control. Her KonMari Method of keeping only what sparks joy and throwing out the rest made her immensely popular. Kondo has appeared on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* as well as two Netflix series. A clip of Kondo yelling "I love mess!" became one of *Time* magazine's top ten memes of the year in 2019. Imagine—Kondo became a global brand all because of her fresh take on clutter.

Having a different idea for your brand is powerful. There are many people competing for your job, your opportunity, your _____. It will position you apart from the crowd.

An Idea That's Relevant

Is your brand relevant in today's changing times? What problem or problems do you solve? Think about this. You probably won't get a free ride in the new world of work. You've got to be perceived as bringing value in the current fast-paced business landscape, or you'll be yesterday's news.

Ask yourself, "Where is my industry going?" or "Where is my company going?" or "Will what I do be valuable in the new world of work?" If you're not sure, it's time to get some answers.

An Idea That's Memorable

Finally, it pays to craft your brand positioning idea into an easy-to-remember-and-repeat sentence or catchphrase. You'll be using variations in different settings—job interviews, your online profiles, and networking events.

Nobody pays much attention to dull or wordy narratives. We're living in a time of communication overload, so follow the branding model and make it easy for people to remember you and what you stand for.

Your positioning is your differentiator,
a short phrase that captures
what's special about you and why it matters

Marketers use catch phrases, memorable analogies, and other tricks, and you can too. For example, a financial services executive named Edward, who wanted to get hired in a business role in a dynamic digital company, pitched himself as having the “mind of a businessman and the soul of a creative.”

Because he was targeting highly creative companies, Edward emailed a PowerPoint presentation, rather than a traditional resume, to show his creative design and writing skills. It worked. He got a job offer.

Confusion Is Your Enemy

The purpose of positioning is to give you a simple process for establishing a focused brand idea and voice.

The biggest mistake that people make is trying to appeal to everybody. It's like a brand with too many features and too many benefits. A brand that tries to appeal to too many market segments ends up appealing to no one.

It may seem counterintuitive, but you're stronger when you narrow your focus. It's true for products, and it's true for people. You're more effective when you try to appeal to a very specific target audience with a singular idea.

Beware of making a radical about-face in what your brand stands for, like

Ralph Nader did. Nader is an activist well known for his attacks on the establishment, beginning with his 1965 car safety exposé, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which has sold over a million copies. In 2022, he tried to publish a new book, tentatively titled, *Twelve CEOs I Have Known and Admired*. It was so off-brand, it's been rejected by publishers.¹

Branding Is About Subtraction

Branding involves letting go. Your brand positioning has to be true and authentic, but you don't have to include everything you've ever done or every strength you have.

Being a Jack or Jill of all trades
is Nowhere's-ville in branding

You must curate your brand and settle on your best positioning idea. You have to be ruthless about how you edit the story you want to tell.

Anything that others could claim just as much as you can, eliminate.

Anything that is complicated, eliminate.

Anything that bogs people down in the past and not the future, eliminate.

Confusion will doom you. And once someone's mind is made up about you, it's almost impossible to change their opinion.

As your focus becomes narrower, something unexpected happens. You eventually become known for your one positioning idea. Your personal brand becomes established.

Better Branding Wins

Sometimes clients tell me they're better than many of their colleagues. They have better credentials, better experience, better whatever. But they're not doing as well as others or didn't get the promotion or didn't get the sale.

It may seem unfair, but being better is often not enough. You need a *different better*. And you need to market your different better.

The truth is “ability” is often not one of the most important attributes for success

The “better” product, by objective standards often doesn’t win in the marketplace. The product or person with better branding wins out. You’re looking for a different better—a *Unique Selling Proposition (USP)*—a position that no one else has in your competitive set.

Think of your ideal positioning as the conceptual place you want to own in your target customers’ minds. You want to stand for something important to your target audience that’s different from others. People need to understand how you diverge from standard expectations.

Hard Work + Branding = Success

You might wonder if you should get involved in personal branding, because your hard work should speak for itself. I wish it were so. It rarely does.

Throughout my career, people have told me, “Work hard and you’ll be successful.” They should have told me, “Work hard and you’ll be successful... maybe.”

Hard work is important, but it’s not enough, even if you show up early every day at company headquarters and your labor is in full sight. If you work remotely from home, much of your hard work is not visible unless you put it on your boss’s radar.

Hard Power vs. Soft Power

Success takes two types of power: *hard power* and *soft power*.

Hard power is the tangible, fact-based things you can put on your CV—your experience, degrees, jobs, education, certifications, achievements, and awards.

Of course having the goods is important, just like hard work is important, but it’s not enough for success.

The real power today is soft power (or personal branding power)—the invisible, intangible qualities and abilities you can't put on your CV that propel success today.

Soft power is your image and reputation. Your communications ability and verbal identity. Your network and partnerships. Your executive presence and visual identity. It's your visibility in your company, community, or industry. Your ability to connect with others. Your trustworthiness. Even your personality, and especially your likability.

Personal branding power means:

Having a *purpose*, your *why* you do what you do

Having a *positioning*, your *what* you do differently than others

Having an *action plan*, your *how* you bring value and accomplish goals

Begin with Free Association

Before we get into a formal analysis of the best positioning for Brand You, do this exercise.

Take out a blank piece of paper. Write down your name. Then write down whatever first comes to mind as your brand positioning statement.

The idea is to capture free thinking before your mind is contaminated by research, facts, and group think. Your gut and intuition may have powerful ideas on how to brand yourself.

You can do a version of the exercise by yourself or with a few other people to create an *ideation tree* or *mind map*. It's a great way to explore different ideas and options in a visual format. The best ideas and strategies often come through brainstorming with the type of free association you do with others who have different backgrounds.

Early in my career, I was trying to break into advertising after a career as an art historian specializing in Asian art. Brainstorming with a friend led to a breakthrough idea, positioning myself as a “marketer for difficult products” since it took creativity to come up with innovative Asian art exhibits that attracted a wide audience in the United States.

It's All About Perceptions

When people see you, what thoughts pop into their minds? That is what branding is really about. The reality is that your brand is what other people say about you when you're not around.

When it comes to branding,
perception is more important than reality

If people think you are management material, you will be. If senior leaders think you are mediocre, you won't be on the fast track until you change their perceptions. If people don't even think about you at all because you're invisible working remotely, you've got a perception problem too. Following branding principles and strategies can help you create positive, meaningful perceptions about Brand You.

How can you find out what others think about you? Listen. What do others compliment you on? What do they criticize you about? Ask for feedback after you make a presentation. If you work at a corporation, your annual review will tell you a lot about what your boss thinks about Brand You.

Think Outside In: Customer First

To brand yourself well, you have to begin with your target audience (Outside). You need to understand their problems and needs. You need to step inside their shoes before you figure out what you want to say (Inside).

Brand experts often put together a *customer persona*, a detailed description or visualization of an "ideal customer." Your "customers" are everyone you need to influence to achieve your goals. So if you're in a company, your "customers" could include your boss, senior managers, and team members. If you are an entrepreneur, it's the customers for your products and services.

Try to imagine your typical customer as a specific person: How do they look? What's their lifestyle? What makes them tick? What are they worried about?

What benefits do you bring that they want? Do you connect with them

emotionally? Drill down. What vexes them? What challenges do they face? How do they like to consume information? Even if your target audience is a group of colleagues at your company, you should find this exercise immensely helpful.

What is your target audience looking for?
How can you be that person?

Go to School on Your Competition

If you need to compete in a crowded, competitive marketplace, you need to know who your competition is. We all have competitors (though you might not like to refer to them that way).

It's a fact. A competitor is anyone who is pursuing the same goal or target market that you are pursuing.

That's why it's important to understand your competition and what they stand for, and how you are not them. Analyze them in a short *competitive analysis*. Know what your key competitors' strengths are and, most importantly, be able to define their weaknesses. Ideally, you want to position your strengths against their weaknesses and reposition their strengths as less important attributes.

Your goal is to be perceived as clearly different from competitors in an important way. Try to frame your differentiator in a sentence. Fill in the blank:

Unlike others who do what I do, I _____.

Brand Audit: The SWOT Analysis

Marketers often use a handy analysis called the SWOT analysis, a snapshot look at a brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The SWOT analysis can be a useful tool for you too, especially in today's fast-changing world of work. It is an intensive look at your strengths and weaknesses in a real-world framework. It will help you focus on your strengths and deflect your weaknesses. It will help you zero in on opportunities and threats on your professional horizon.

For example, in my own SWOT analysis done during the pandemic, I realized that in the current world of work, many people would need personal branding skills in order to stand out and succeed. The move to remote and hybrid settings and technology-driven changes made personal branding more important than ever. The new world of work wasn't a threat for me personally, but an opportunity.

Doing a periodic SWOT analysis will keep you on track, especially in today's dynamic world.

Personal Brand Audit: The SWOT Analysis

1. Strengths: Write down anything that you are good at and love to do. Write down what your boss, clients, or colleagues give you high marks on. Include skills, abilities, and personality traits that contribute to your success.

2. Weaknesses: Write down what you're terrible at and hate to do, or areas where your boss and friends criticize you.

3. Opportunities: This is wide open. Write down anything that could be an opportunity for you. A key is to look for unmet or new needs brought about by the new world of work.

4. Threats: What's changing in your industry that keeps you awake at night about yourself, your career, business, or the economic outlook.

How-To and How-to-Think

To create a personal brand, you need to create a clear identity of who you are not only in your own mind, but in the minds of others.

You're looking for a positioning that is authentic. (Contrary to what you might think, good branding always has to be true.) You need a positioning that is different from others and gives people a reason to choose you. Being a generic, one-of-many brand won't cut it, nor will a brand that's mired in the past.

In the personal branding mindset, you are your most important asset—an

asset like education and career achievements that no one can take away from you. Personal branding shows you how to increase the value of that asset, both in terms of self-actualization—becoming who you can be—and in terms of maximizing your career success.

Personal branding is always about authenticity,
but it means showing yourself in the most appealing way

The best place to start in defining your brand is simply to begin with the truth. Who you are and can be. Personal branding is also about self-empowerment. You must take control of your career narrative and career destiny especially today. No one can do it for you.

A Brand For All Seasons

There will be strong economies when jobs are plentiful and weak markets when the job market is dismal. There will be one constant, though: You will need personal branding to be in charge in the new world of work, a world scarred by a pandemic, buoyed by technology, and undergoing rapid change.

You have to stand out and stand for something of value. You need a positioning that meets a need in the marketplace and clearly differentiates you from others.

We're all on camera now. We all need to be producers of our brand narrative.

As a personal brander, you must always be relevant, find new opportunities, and stay on top of how you are perceived by your target markets.

We spend too much of our time following rules or simply plodding ahead. We don't see an opportunity or how the world is changing in ways that affects our livelihood. Make some time to ruminate about what's happening and how it affects you.

Then take charge of your brand. Commit to taking an active rather than a passive role in defining yourself and your future.