

Personal Branding: A Tool for Career Success

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Abstract: - There is a rising need for individuals to take responsibility of the advancement of their own learning and careers for various reasons. Career ladders are rapidly shrinking because of the increasing competition all around us. Career development has become the primary responsibility of people working in the Organization. Therefore the need has arisen for personal branding which will be an effective way to eliminate one's competitors and to climb the ladder of success. The objective of this study was to find out the need for personal branding, awareness of personal branding among people and tactics of using personal branding for building one's career. Our exploratory study examined and reviewed historical facts and past literature. Questionnaire was prepared and got filled by various people working in different fields. It was found that people are somewhat aware of creating self brand and there is a significant influence of personal branding on one's career growth. This study also showed that improving one's personal style, creating online profile, building strong relationships, enhancing your qualification etc assists in building one's personal brand.

Keywords: Personal branding, career, growth, competition, employee.

I. INTRODUCTION

Personal branding came about in the mid 90's from the concept that, as companies have used branding successfully to attract their target audience, so successful professionals do the same. Global thought leaders such as Tom Peters (who coined the phrase), Peter Montoya, William Arruda, David McNally and Karl Speak have popularized the concept (personal brand coaching.com).

Developing one's personal brand is essential for the advancement of the career and development as a leader. Personal branding, much like social media, is about making a full time commitment to the journey of defining yourself as a leader and how this will shape the manner in which you will serve others. Employee's personal brand should represent the value they are able to consistently deliver to those whom they are serving. Managing the personal brand requires them to be a great role model, mentor and a voice that others depend upon.

Branding isn't just for companies anymore. There is a new trend called Personal branding. Successful branding entails managing the perceptions effectively, controlling and influencing how others perceive you and think of you. Having

a strong personal brand seems to be a very important asset in today's online, virtual, and individual age. It is becoming increasingly essential and is the key to personal success. It is the positioning strategy behind the world's most successful people like Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, Bill Gates, etc. Everyone has a personal brand but most people are not aware of this and do not manage this strategically, consistently and effectively. One should take control of their brand and the message it sends as it affects how others perceive them. This will help them to actively grow and distinguish themselves as an exceptional professional (Rampersad, 2008).

Regardless of age, position and business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are the CEO's of our own companies: Me, Inc. You are not defined by your job title and you are not confined by your job description (Peters, 1997). This study was set out to find the need of personal branding and different ways of improving one's personal branding that can help an employee in career growth. To get the answers historical facts, various articles and past literature were reviewed. Exploratory research method was used in this study. Primary and Secondary data were used for research. The paper makes several contributions to the increasing conflict on career development in competitive environment. The study focuses on how to brand oneself that can help significantly in career growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Personal branding is the process of developing a "mark" that is created around your personal name or your career. You use this "mark" to express and communicate your skills, personality and values. The end goal is that the personal brand that you develop will build your reputation and help you to grow your network in a way that interests others. They will then seek you out for your knowledge and expertise (Lake, 2009). According to Suster, if people don't control their messaging somebody else will and their potential customers will form impressions about them shaped by somebody else or by nobody at all. That's why it's important to establish a brand, know what one's key messages are and communicate them often and simply. He is of the view that personal branding is the most important way to proactively control one's career development. It will affect one's ability to get the right jobs and promotions as well as the ability to attract talent and capital (Suster, 2013).

Personal branding- the discovery, understanding and marketing of an individual's unique attribute- is a concept brought to the mainstream by Tom Peters in 1997 with his seminal article: "The Brand Called You". To determine a unique brand most literature suggest a self assessment based on a short list of open ended questions such as "who am I?", "how have I gotten here?", "where do I want to go?", "who is my target audience?". In addition to a self awareness assessment, the typical brand plan also includes an action plan to build a presence on social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and twitter (Martino & Wagstrom, 2011).

As defined by Minchington (2006) brand image is the image of the organization as a great place to work in the minds of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market. Therefore employer brand also is an important aspect that has overshadowed and synchronized all other factors which had their individual importance like customers, relationship, PR, networking, two way communication etc and is now the prime factor for the turnkey of success (Sentindranil, 2008). Another study suggested that in popular imagination, personal branding is often equated with high-octane, flesh-pressing showmanship. But there are other, sometimes better ways you can define yourself and your reputation. Taking the time to reflect and be thoughtful about how you'd like to be seen and then living that out through your writing and your interpersonal relationships (and even your décor) is a powerful way to ensure you're seen as the leader you are (Clark, 2013).

III. NEED OF PERSONAL BRANDING

Development of one's personal brand is extremely important for the success in career and also to develop oneself as a leader. Personal brand aims to attract people by offering something of value. It acts as a trademark and an asset that one must protect with continuously molding and protecting it. It helps others by having a relationship with you and by being associated with your work and the company you serve. Personal brand enables us to be a better leader, a more authenticated person who can create greater overall impact. Personal branding is needed as it helps others to recognize your talent, capabilities and the qualities that distinguish you from your competitors. Becoming aware of the way others see you helps you identify blind spots within yourself. Then you can work on those blind spots to help you become more internally congruent. Personal brand is what other people think of you and if one tries to improve that image, it will help positively in building their goodwill and thus, creating a chance for career growth. The need of personal branding can be outlined as:

- To provide greater focus and direction in your career/business.
- To help differentiate from your competitors.
- To help stand out from the crowd.

- Help connect with your target audience and build trust.
- Enables one to thrive even during economic downturns.
- To be able to command higher compensation.

IV. TACTICS FOR BUILDING ONE'S PERSONAL BRAND

What do you do when you are just starting out in your field and don't feel that you are too much experienced? What if you are a professor or someone who has spend 10 years excelling in their fields but still want to get an advantage over others who are competing to climb the ladder of hierarchy in organization? How do you brand yourself when you are not sure from where to get started or what to say? Here are the few tactics that one can use and try to develop so as to create your personal brand:

- ❖ *Write about what you have learned:* Every time you read/learn/see something interesting take an hour afterwards to write down your take on it (on a blog is best). Share what you find most thought provoking, or a lesson that you will apply to your own life, or a personal story about a time you saw what you learned about actually happen. Pass on good information that you have learned, while adding your personal touches. This will help you to find your voice among others (Konrath, 2012).
- ❖ *Use what you find as a connection tool:* Whatever interesting stuff you find in your field, use that to advance your personal brand. Keep a database of interesting resources and list of people whom you want to impress and the track of what they are interested in. E-mail them a link with a short note. Employer wants to hire people who are passionate about their work and who are eager to learn. Therefore, brand yourself using the knowledge you are gaining to build relationship with the people who can help you to get where you want to be.
- ❖ *Discover your brand:* Brand discovery is about figuring out what you want to do in your life, what are your goals, what you do and who you serve. Don't select your domain just for the sake of doing it. But try to find it yourself which is the field in which you are appreciated often and where your passion lies.
- ❖ *Business card:* It doesn't matter if you're a teacher, CEO, or a consultant, everyone should have their own business card. The card should contain your picture, your personal brand statement (such as Boston Financial Expert), as well as your *preferred* contact information and corporate logo if necessary (Schawvel, 2009).

- ❖ *Improve your personal style:* It is extremely important as to how you portray yourself and it will help you to stand out from the crowd. Present yourself in a way that people appreciate you and you leave a long lasting mark of your presence in their mind.
- ❖ *Your online profile:* You can improve your brand by creating your personal profile on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc. These profiles are the combination of your resume, cover-letter, references, documents etc. Use it to create your own personal advertisement to search jobs or meet people.
- ❖ *Strengthen the command over language:* No matter whatever your mother tongue is, try to get a command over language you speak. "First impression is the last impression" cannot be ignored.
- ❖ *Gain experience:* Building your brand begins with keeping a track of your past achievements and gaining new experiences. Your achievements are the foundation of your career brand. Take new and challenging assignments that will make you multi-skilled.
- ❖ *Enhance your Qualifications:* To excel in your career you may need to complete necessary education or training. Increasing your qualification helps in building your personal brand. Though it is hard in terms of time and finance, find a way to do it. You may even adopt self- learning.
- ❖ *Create an effective career portfolio:* One of the amazing tactics for building your personal brand is to develop your career portfolios and impressive resume (online and printed). Let the world read all about the benefits of your brand. You may include mission statement, detailed accomplishments, samples of work, articles and working papers, speech, transcripts, awards and honors, testimonials and much more.
- ❖ *Become an expert:* Nothing builds credibility in a personal brand more than establishing yourself as an expert in your field. Write articles, attend conferences and meetings, give speeches and presentations, get quoted by offering your thoughts, ideas to journalists and reporter.
- ❖ *Build strong relationships:* Word-of-mouth marketing is considered to be the best tool for promotion. Thus, nothing is more powerful in building your brand than what your friends, colleagues, clients, customers and former bosses say about you and your skills. Keep in good contact with your network and be sure they know about your recent success (Hansen).

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The research was done using primary and secondary data. During the research work interactions with respondents from various fields and of different profiles were conducted. They included CA, principal, IT professional, professors, R&D Engineer, managers, senior consultant, project manager, chief officer, C.E.O etc. Data comprised of the tactics used by the people working in different fields to improve their personal brand and thus carving a way for their career growth. Post data collection and cleaning, cross tabulation of the data on a spreadsheet was done and then it was exported to statistical software. Then the data was analyzed and past literatures were reviewed to get answers for the research questions and objectives.

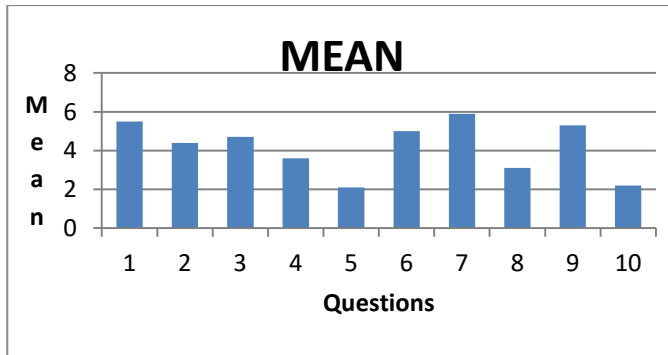
It was found that employees do take pains to gain new experience. They are keen towards enhancing their qualifications and skills and also they believe in building strong relationships with their colleagues, clients and former bosses. However, there are other important factors which they forego and it adversely affects their success in career. Those factors are-

- They don't have many followers on their online profiles.
- They don't seem to be enthusiastic in developing their career portfolio.
- They are not interested in attending conferences, giving presentations and writing articles.
- People don't give much time in checking and updating their job profile on job portals.

Mean of different factors

	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mean
1.Take pains to gain new experience	30	2.00	7.00	5.5
2. Share new information with your boss	30	1.00	7.00	4.4
3.Working in a domain you are expertise in	30	1.00	7.00	4.7
4.You often check and improve your job profile on job portals	30	1.00	6.00	3.4
5. Followers on Online profile	30	1.00	4.00	2.1
6.Command over oratory skills	30	3.00	7.00	5.0
7.Emphasis on enhancing qualifications	30	5.00	7.00	5.9
8.Satisfaction with your career portfolio	30	1.00	6.00	3.1

9.Relationship with colleagues clients and former bosses	30	2.00	7.00	5.3
10.Interest in attending conferences, presentations and writing articles	30	1.00	3.00	2.2



The mean of different factors was taken out. Respondents had to give the scoring from 1 to 7. Score 1 being the lowest and 7 the highest. After the data was received, it was transferred to the spreadsheet for cross tabulation and using the statistical software mean was calculated by dividing the total score of each question with the number of respondents which was 30 in this case.

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most job seekers are not proactive in building their personal brand, letting their actions speak for them when looking for jobs/seeking promotion. Employees should remember, if they don't brand themselves today, others will tomorrow, and while they may be happy and secure in their job now, they really never know what will happen in future. Following are the suggestions and recommendations that can help people in building personal brand and thus, leading to career growth:

- Employees should define success, and try to create their personal brand and then set out to meet their career and life goals.
- Employees should spend some time identifying their target audience for their personal brand. Information is power, and a well-researched target list will give them the confidence to move forward in reaching out to the people who need to know about you.
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- Employees should try to instill positive attitude, manage stress and be confident. If they apply this

attitude others will enjoy interacting with them and will definitely value their contribution.

- One should try to cultivate the curiosity. Bosses prefer employees having up to date knowledge and awareness and it keeps them in the good books.
- Employees should try to work to a higher standard and continuously look for ways to improve their work. When others get to know that an individual is efficient and effective, they feel confident in offering new and important tasks.
- One should try to keep his/her network strong and focus on relationship building. They should search out new professional associations as well as online networking communities and make efforts to be a part of those networks.
- Construct a professional website or blog where one can publish all their ideas, thoughts and articles. They should seek out conferences and meetings where they can give presentation and speeches.
- Employees should try to make their career portfolio strong and let the world read all about the benefits of their brand. An individual's brand needs to have a strong online and offline presence.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that people are aware of personal branding but still there is a huge scope for improvement. The study on personal branding highlighted many tactics that can help people in career success. Endeavor should be made on improving one's career portfolio, trying to have more followers on one's online profile and attending more conferences and workshops that help to sharpen one's present skills. However, employees are taking measures to develop their brand by showing one's enthusiasm to gain new experiences, working in a domain they are expert in and having good command over oratory skills. Employees can still focus on specific areas which evolved from this paper in order to have more successful career. Branding is about building a name for oneself, showcasing what sets one apart from others and describing the added value person bring to a situation. Therefore, steps should be taken by everyone to pay attention towards their personal brand in the future. The suggestions of this paper may help in this direction.

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