

Knowledge



DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND AS A LEADER



JJ Lynch reveals how he discovered his personal brand and challenges quality professionals to do the same

In today's workplace outstanding performance is no longer enough – particularly if you want to progress your career or represent your company in the very best light. Image and visibility are now essential components of both career and business success. You are a brand and you need to know what your brand stands for. A brand is a promise.

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, says: “Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room.” Your personal brand is an identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in your audience, of qualities and values you stand for.

Jay-Z, the rap artist, understands the power of personal brand and what sets him apart. He once said: “I’m not a businessman, I’m a business, man.”

So what sets you apart? Think of yourself as a product or service. Why would anyone want to buy you? Having bought you once, would they buy you again? Here’s the acid test – if you didn’t have any products or services, would people still buy you?

Imagine yourself as a billboard. The best billboards use no more than seven words and nine syllables (because this is what the brain can digest in the short time we usually have to read a billboard). What would your billboard say about you?

In order to fully understand, define and develop your personal brand, you need to identify your ‘why’. Your ‘why’ is the reason

why you do what you do. It’s what makes you passionate about what you do, it’s the essence of your unique brand.

It took me years to find my ‘why’. I was greatly influenced by the work of Simon Sinek in his excellent book *Start With Why*. Sinek believes that in business it doesn’t matter what you do, it matters why you do it. He analyses leaders such as Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs, and discovers they all think in the same way – they all started with why.

When I attend networking events I’m often asked: “What do you do, JJ?” I never respond by saying, “I’m a trainer,” or, “I’m a motivational speaker.” My response is always the same: “I make leadership easy.” Because that’s my ‘why’. I’m passionate about leadership and even more passionate about making leadership easy. It’s what excites me.

What is interesting is the response I get when I tell people that I make leadership easy. There is always a follow-up question: “Oh, how do you do that?”

This gives me the opportunity to talk about what my company, Leading Edge Leadership, does, and to expand on the premise that leadership is simple but it is not easy – and at Leading Edge Leadership we make leadership easy by keeping it simple.

Having identified your ‘why’, the next step is to define and articulate your brand – succinctly. It’s not easy to be succinct, but the simpler your message the more powerful it will be.



Image (left to right): Barack Obama, Jay-Z, Ernest Hemingway and Jeff Bezos, knew how to communicate their brand, but what is your personal brand?

Barack Obama captured the power of simplicity beautifully in his slogan, “Yes we can”. So does BskyB in its strapline, “Believe in better”, and Apple with “Think different”. Think of the most powerful words and phrases in any language – please, thank you, I’m sorry, I love you – they are always the simplest.

The American novelist and journalist Ernest Hemingway was renowned for his economical and understated style of writing. There is a lovely story told about the time when he was in a smoky bar in London in the 1920’s and his colleagues challenged him by saying he couldn’t write a complete story in six words. To cut a long story short, he did. He claimed afterwards it was his greatest work:

“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

Hemingway’s story asks so many questions without the need for a question mark. Does your succinctly defined ‘why’ ask lots of questions? Will you always get a follow-up question when

you tell others what you do? When you have identified, defined, and can articulate your personal brand succinctly you are then in a strong position to show leadership, irrespective of your position. You can lead without title because you know what you stand for.

The big successful brands know what they stand for – think Kellogg’s or Heinz. Brands are consistent. Brands ooze personality. People talk about brands.

Are people talking about you and your personal brand?

JJ Lynch is an international leadership trainer, facilitator, author and motivational speaker. He is Managing Director of Leading Edge Leadership, a London-based leadership training company and author of the best-selling book *How To Win – in life, business and everything else*.

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