

What Is Your Personal Brand and Is It Effective?

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Now more than ever, it is critical that you understand that you have a personal brand and that it impacts your performance as a lawyer. So read on to see if you have a personal brand that works for you.

I get asked regularly what it takes to be a successful lawyer. Having been a practicing securities lawyer for many years and having worked in numerous legal settings, I think I had a pretty good idea in general. That is, until the economic shift occurred. It then seemed that all we knew about building a successful practice was being questioned and all bets were off on a sure fire way to be a successful lawyer.

One fact will always remain true, regardless of our economic climate. In order to be a successful lawyer, we must be competent at our trade. Well, tell me something I didn't already know, right?

However, our image as lawyers has not gotten any better and the economy has gotten worse for us. That's why I give so many speeches and seminars all aimed at helping us lawyers clean up our image and reclaim our good name via a healthy personal brand. At the heart of personal branding is the notion that in order to project a strong personal brand, we need to be self-confident of our skills and who we are on the inside.

I give lots of tips to lawyers on how to survive this economy and thrive. All my tips are based on the fact that as lawyers, we need to go back to basics in order to attract and keep clients. Gone are the days of being competent and having clients line up at our door. As lawyers we now have to realize that there is a necessary balance between smart marketing of our business and the human element to our practice. Being humane and understanding the human element behind our practice is the only way to succeed and stand out these days. Mixing concern for others, kindness and sincerity with a smart and powerful personal brand is critical. But we also have to realize that, in addition to being a lawyer, we have to run a business. So we must be effective business owners.

What Makes You Unique As A Person & As A Lawyer?

People buy people. We do NOT buy your service as a lawyer initially when we first see you in public.

As I define a personal brand (<http://purisimage.com/2011/02/what-is-personal-branding/>), it is what I would remember about you if I saw you in a roomful of other attorneys networking. Personal branding is marketing. Marketing is standing out and being unique. How do you resonate with people? How do I remember you when you are no longer in the room? Why?

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In marketing, we often point out that 75-80% of all buying decisions are based on emotions. Odds are, you will remember how you felt about a product or service long after you have forgotten about the actual product/service content. So what emotional value does your personal brand as a lawyer *and as a person* have for me?

Your USP

So, what is unique about you? I call this your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Some things to consider as you ponder your uniqueness and USP:

- What path did you take to get to where you are?
- What obstacles have you overcome?
- What is your natural talent(s)?
- What are your hobbies?

Your Story

Now you need to take your USP and turn it into a Personal Connection Story (PCS) that you can share over and over again with people you meet while networking. Your PCS has to be crafted to be genuine and natural to you to show your human side. It needs to flow naturally. Remember, we can tell if you are being fake or disingenuous.

Appearances- Are They Deceiving?

So if this is the case, then how would you describe the way you want to be remembered as a lawyer using adjectives? Remember, you want to stand out from your fellow lawyers and resonate with people. So do you want to have a personal brand that is happy, confident, and thoughtful? Or maybe serious and silent? Often clients say to me that they want their personal brand to be competent. But can I visually see your competence? Personal branding is visual at first. Humans are visual beings. We are attracted (to network, get to know and do business with) those people who catch our eye, grab our attention visually and stand out as unique.

First Impressions

First impressions are everything. Studies have shown that we form our first (and pretty much final) impressions of others within the first seven seconds of meeting them. Thus, first impressions are based on appearances alone- seven seconds does not give us enough time to assess another's brilliance as a lawyer.

If you don't dress and act the part of a successful, qualified lawyer then no client will ever treat you as such, nor compensate you in that manner. We call it "power dressing". While this is just a small sliver of your overall personal brand, it is the starting point for an effective personal brand.

I recently gave a speech to a bar association. Afterwards a lawyer approached me to say that she was tired of having clients that would not pay her enough and some were not even paying at all.

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I spent some time with her and together we determined that the personal brand she was projecting was not one of a successful and qualified lawyer. Not only was she not dressing in well-fitting garments, but she was not dressing professionally at all. Her hair was unkempt and she had on not one bit of make-up. The only brand she was projecting to clients was one of a disheveled, partly-competent lawyer who was desperate for business and did not care much for herself or her clients.

How you dress is a reflection of what is going on inside you as a human being. I encourage all of you to spend some time assessing what you look like on the outside. If it is not the image you want to project, then next assess what is going on in your personal life and how that is psychologically impacting you. Your morale might need a boost. If you are unable to dress the part of a successful lawyer, get help. We are out there.

Litigation

If you are a litigator remember the jury is human. Thus, your client must appeal to their gentle and human side as well as to their intellectual side. Research shows that how your client appears before the jury makes an impact on their verdict. In my experience consulting for the defense: the degree of your client's appearance having an impact on the jury is based on the charge your client faces (i.e., murder, rape, robbery, forgery, etc). For certain charges and crimes, there is no distinction in the jury's mind regarding your client's appearance- they just don't care what the client looks like. For other charges and crimes, a jury is more impressionable and thus your client's physical appearance (haircut, hair color, clothing cut, shape, color, facial hair, demeanor, mannerism, etc) could make a big difference.

Behavior and Communication

Your personal brand is about all you do, say and are as a person first and a lawyer second. You want the entire package to work well.

Take time to understand your clients' goals, needs and timeframes.

What is the end result they need from you? What is their expectation of you? Is this expectation one you can meet and manage or is it too high? I've worked with many lawyers who have often never stopped to understand and communicate something as simple as the due date of a deliverable for a client because everyone is so busy. However, what could be more important than really taking a moment to understand what your client really wants from you?

Keep in touch regularly with your clients.

I am talking about going that extra step that will leave a lasting impression in your client's mind that you are a good human being with a strong personal brand. This lasting impression is very necessary in this economy, as it will set you apart from the numerous other lawyers practicing in your area. It is very crucial to be the one person your client thinks of when they need something done or has a question. This makes your services invaluable and necessary. So take your clients out for a cup of coffee.

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Understand how you think and relate to others.

Not everyone functions the same. We all tend to process data and communicate differently. I spend a lot of time in my seminars and one-on-one consultations having lawyers answer various questions about themselves in an effort to identify the way they function best. We then take this data and apply it to the lawyer-client relationship and strive to achieve an action plan so that there is good communication between the lawyer and their clients based on this understanding. So how do you process information and can you discern quickly if your client processes information the same way so they “get” your advice?

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