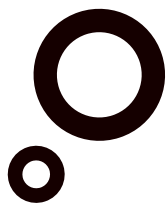


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PERSONAL BRANDING FOR BRITS



How to promote yourself,
raise your profile and get ahead...
without sounding like an idiot

Jennifer Holloway

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

Journalists. They can be a harsh bunch – hard to win over and with a string of other contacts to call if you don't manage it. I should know...I spent 15 years of my career responding to their varying requests, from my early days as a naïve press officer to the latter ones as a savvier media executive.

If ever there was a job where you needed people's buy-in to be successful, that was it. It didn't matter how good your story was, if a journalist didn't rate you, your chance of it appearing in the media was slim to none. Instead, you had to build relationships and stay on people's radars if you were to have any chance of standing out from the press office crowd. It didn't take me long to realise the only real differentiator I had was me...so I used it: every time I picked up the phone, every time I sent an email, every time I met someone in person. I made sure I connected on a personal level before I even considered talking business.

It worked and I got my stories (and me) on the front page of the national papers as well as on TV and radio – including *The Today Programme*, *BBC Breakfast* and *Sky News*.

But it's not just jouranalists who need winning over. No matter what your job and whatever your sector, the more people buy into you, the easier it becomes to find a job, bag a promotion, start a business, land a new client or just get ahead at work.

As for me, whilst I had a knack for seeming comfortable in my own skin, making people believe I was über-confident, in reality it was little more than a veneer of self-assurance. My wafer-thin armour would deflect doubt for weeks, sometimes months, then crack with the smallest of prods: a throwaway remark from a boss, a piece of well-meant feedback from a colleague, a mickey-take from a friend.

3 - WHY READ THIS BOOK?

People didn't see it but I'd go home and blub my eyes out. Then I'd pull myself together, patch up the armour and head back out again.

After a decade and a half of doing PR though, something altered and I fell out of love with my job. As part of figuring out what had happened, I had some executive coaching and, as people often do, decided that was the career for me. I got my qualification, set up shop and started the long, challenging task of gaining and retaining clients. Every piece of work I pitched for was like a job interview: I had limited time to go in, sell who I am, explain what I do and hope they liked what they saw. More intimidating was the fact I am my business, so getting buy-in to me was more essential than ever.

Just as it had in my PR days, my strategy of selling me before I sold my services continued to work and my business grew. However, not long in I realised I didn't want to be a little fish in a huge pond of thousands of coaches. I wanted my own puddle where I could do things my way and mark myself out as different. Looking at the issues I was helping clients with, I realised most led back to the fact the person lacked confidence. They didn't know who they were so they didn't know who to be or what to do. In other words they didn't know their personal brand. Bingo!

I reworked my whole proposition and started again, specialising in personal branding for business. Only this time I was selling something that, at the time, few people knew about and even fewer wanted to buy – a pretty tough challenge.

To begin, I set to work defining my own personal brand in a way I never had before, really thinking it through and focusing on all the great stuff I bring to the table. And an amazing thing happened...

My veneer of self-assurance grew thicker. I started spending a lot more time in the Land of Self-Confidence, a wonderful place

where everything's rocking and rolling: you love what you do, other people love what you do and success is your best friend.

It's not my permanent residence though. I still take trips to the Land of Self-Doubt where nobody rates you and it's a dead-cert you're going to fail...you might know the place. But because I've got a road map for the Land of Self-Confidence (my personal brand) I find it easier and quicker to get myself back there.

That's why I wrote this book – to give people a steer on how to create their own personal brand and, just as importantly, get it out there so they can spend more time in the Land of Self-Confidence too. Or to put it another way, I want people to be more successful just by being themselves.

I'll be straight with you though: none of what you'll read in this book is rocket science. It's simply common sense stuff that tends to get forgotten as we go about our busy lives. So let's get on with refreshing your memory...

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INTRODUCTION

If you're a Brit reading this book – or from any other country where modesty is the order of the day – congratulations! You've already overcome the biggest cultural hang-up to your personal brand: that it's 'not the done thing' to have one, let alone tell anyone else you have one. After all, arrogance is not an attractive quality.

So here's the good news: the book you have in your hands is especially written by a Brit (me) for Brits (you) to avoid the arrogance entirely and provide a guide to subtly blowing your own trumpet without sounding like an idiot.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book isn't just any old guide to personal branding, it's a practical guide. What that means is, alongside the 'thinking bits' about what personal branding is and how it works, sits a shed-load of tools and techniques to apply that thinking in the real world.

The book is set out in two parts: the first focuses on **Creating Your Personal Brand** by defining it (if you don't know what you're selling how can people buy it?) then checking how it's perceived by others (is what you're selling what people are buying?)

The second part moves on to **Promoting Your Personal Brand** (because there's no point keeping a good thing to yourself) in three key places: in the office, out and about and online.

The first part – **Creating Your Personal Brand** – requires a bit of time and a lot of thinking, but if you're serious about your career or business I'd recommend starting there. However, if you've a pretty good idea of what your brand is already, feel free to skip straight to the second part – **Promoting Your Personal Brand**.

Whichever chapter you're reading, I've included lots of real-life examples to show you what I'm talking about, although some names have been changed to respect confidentiality. There's a round-up of Dos and Don'ts at the end of each section as a reminder. Plus you can always do what I do and write extra notes in the margin as you go along.

THE PRIMARY RULE

By reading this book you've become part of the growing band of people who realise that hiding your light under a bushel is no longer the canniest thing to do: people who want to move their career to the next stage; people who realise they can't do their job until they've got buy-in from their team; people who understand their personal brand is their company brand; people who are leaders of tomorrow establishing their credentials today.

Whatever reason you have for wanting to work on your personal brand, they all lead back to one primary rule:

People buy people.

I don't mean literally (that would be illegal). What I mean is, when you 'buy' someone, you like them, trust them, value them and/or respect them. It's a well-known phrase but there's a bit to add that often gets overlooked:

**People buy people
and it's your personal brand that tells them
what they get when they buy you.**

For a great example of that, think about salespeople. Sometimes you go into a shop not expecting to buy anything but walk out with a bag in your hand because the salesperson had a personal brand you liked. Other times you walk away without the thing you went in for because their brand didn't work for you.

Here's what I'm talking about...

My friend decided she was going to buy a new Audi A4 – sure as eggs is eggs. She drove to the nearest dealership, met the salesman and thought, “I am never going to buy a car from you.” His handshake, tone of voice and attitude told her everything she needed to know about his personal brand...and she didn't buy it. So she got in her car, drove 12 miles to the next dealership and bought the A4 there.

That's people buying people in action, but it's not just reserved for salespeople – we're all buying or not buying people whenever we come into contact with them. You may be nodding your head thinking, “Uh-huh, she's got that right.” You may even remember times you've instantly clicked with someone or others when you were instantly turned off.

When you consider how many people you've come into contact with over the course of your career or business, and how their buy-in (or lack of it) has affected your success, you start to realise the importance of a personal brand. Plus when you consider how many more people you'll come into contact with, and how their buy-in will affect your future success, you start to realise why working on your brand with the help of this book is a marvellous idea!

Here's what I'm talking about...

Let's pretend you work in an office (indeed, maybe you do) and 5pm has rolled around. You've got an urgent job to finish and need help, so you approach a colleague who's packed up for the day and is in the process of putting their coat on. When you tell them what you need, do they slide their coat off, put it back on the hook and say, “Let's get started”? (A sure sign they've 'bought' you.) Or do they hurriedly button up their coat, avert their eyes and walk away with some vague mumble about it being parents' evening – even though you know they don't have kids. (A sign they probably haven't.)

THE PAYBACK

As well as helping your career or business, here are 10 other ways you'll get payback from spending time on your brand:

1. Defining your personal brand gives you the confidence to be yourself.
2. Being yourself is a lot easier than trying to be someone else.
3. By focusing on what's great you add clarity to your brand.
4. You can pinpoint the thing that really makes you stand out from the crowd.
5. Promoting your personal brand helps you sell your benefits.
6. By selling the benefits people know what they're buying.
7. Doing this consistently helps people trust what they're buying.
8. People like to put things into neat little boxes in their mind, so you give them the box to put you in.
9. By having you in a neat box, it's easier for people to sell you and your benefits to others.
10. If you don't do it, you'll get left behind. Need I say more?

FINAL OBJECTIONS

If you're still thinking, "What the chuff do I need a personal brand for?" here are a few of the objections I've heard over the years, along with my response:

"It's not relevant to me."

If you have a job and think the only reason you'd promote your personal brand is to get another job, think again. Promoting your brand is what you need to do to ensure you keep the job you already have.

The same applies if you're the boss of your own business; you might think you can't be fired, but your clients can certainly find someone else to deliver what you deliver.

“I’d be embarrassed to blow my own trumpet.”

My advice: get over it. Modesty is indeed a virtue but you can take it too far and while you’re busy being a shrinking violet, your colleagues and competitors are getting promotions and winning contracts that should have been yours.

“My work should speak for itself.”

The days when hard work and determination would get you to the top are over. They are no more. They have ceased to be. This attitude is as useful as a dead parrot because everyone’s so busy running to keep up they don’t have time to pay attention to what you’re doing.

Here’s what I’m talking about...

After 15 years with the company, my client had recently been promoted to the Board, along with a colleague who’d been there only three years. He told me how unfair this was as, “Gary only got the job because he’s good at blowing his own trumpet, but I think my work should speak for itself.” My response was, “Really...how’s that been working for you? Gary got to where you wanted to get to a lot quicker – so maybe he’s doing something right.” There’s a balance between all style and all substance but the fact he’d taken five times longer to become a director suggested he’d got that balance wrong.

“I don’t want people knowing everything about me.”

Nor do they want to know. You decide which bits are worth shouting about and stick to those. And if you don’t want people knowing you spend your spare time re-enacting The Battle of Hastings or building scale models of Big Ben out of matchsticks... don’t tell them.

“I can’t be bothered with all that.”

Ever heard the phrase, “You snooze, you lose”? Enough said.

BACK TO BASICS

I've already mentioned this book offers a practical guide to creating and promoting your personal brand, but before we knuckle down to the hard work, a little bit of background might hit the spot. Having learnt never to 'ass' 'u' 'me' people know what I'm talking about (especially my other half) let's start here:

WHAT IS A PERSONAL BRAND?

As I said on page 12: people buy people and it's your personal brand that tells them what they get when they buy you. It's the complete package, the whole shebang, everything and the kitchen sink – and it works a lot like any other brand.

Here's what I'm talking about...

Imagine you're in the supermarket looking at shelf upon shelf of washing powders. Essentially, they all do the same thing: get your clothes clean. So how do you choose which one to put in your basket? Each powder has a brand, conveyed through its packaging, colours, typeface, advertising, etc that subliminally delivers messages about what else you'll get besides clean clothes. It might be 'I wash clothes and I'm kind to the environment'. It might be 'I wash clothes and I save you money'. It might be 'I wash clothes and they'll smell like a sea breeze'. Learning about the 'and' helps you identify the thing that matters most to you and, with it, which one to buy.

The same applies to your personal brand. It's about telling them what they get 'and' who they get it from.

Your 'what' is the tangible stuff – the readily quantifiable aspects of your brand that let others know what you bring to the table: what qualifications you've gained, what knowledge you've learnt, what experience you've built up, what work you've done, what results you've delivered...what the hell you get paid for.

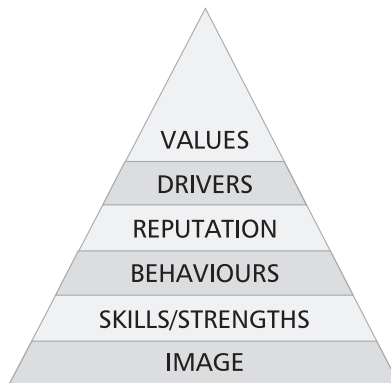
Your 'who' is the intangible stuff – the part that tells people who it is that's bringing that what to the table: your personality, your character, your attitude, your morality...what that hell it is that makes you tick.

You need both parts to be working positively in your personal brand in order for people to want to buy it.

However, if either your 'what' or your 'who' isn't working, that buy-in can't happen – for example, if you're a technical whizz at your job (a positive 'what') but a boring dullard to work with (a negative 'who'). Or if you're great fun to work with (a positive 'who') but useless at your job (a negative 'what').

THE PERSONAL BRAND PYRAMID

When I started working with clients I soon realised that just defining them by their 'what' and 'who' wasn't enough because their brands were more nuanced than that. So I came up with a format that reflected that – the Personal Brand Pyramid:



(And if you did GCSE Sociology at school like I did, yes, it looks a lot like *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*.) To explain a little more, here's a brief overview of the six elements that make up your personal brand, which we'll cover in much greater depth later.

Values

Your Values are principles by which you live your life, the moral compass you use to define right and wrong. Think of them as the foundations upon which your personal brand is built. (Which is ironic, because they sit at the top of the pyramid.)

Drivers

Your Drivers are what you hold to be important to you, the things that motivate you to do what you do, to be who you are, that push you to succeed.

Reputation

In a nutshell, your Reputation is what you're known for (or want to be known for), the thing you communicate so clearly people think of it the instant they hear your name.

Behaviours

Your Behaviours are what give you your personality and character. They're what you say and do as an outward communication of those deeper Values and Drivers.

Skills/Strengths

Your natural talents, the things you excel at, whether technical or behavioural, plus your knowledge and experience – these are your Skills and Strengths. And last, but certainly not least...

Image

Your Image is the packaging for your brand – how you look (your clothes, body language, eye contact) and how you sound (your tone of voice, volume, language). This forms the base of the pyramid because your Image is where people first access your brand, gathering clues to the other five elements.

The top three elements in the pyramid are what I call the 'intangibles'; they're the emotionally-based, deep and meaningful stuff that deliver a lot but can be hard for others to get a handle on. The bottom three elements comprise the 'tangibles'; they're based on logic, in so much as people can readily see what you're wearing, hear what you're saying, tell what you're good at and experience your behaviour.

Today, the emphasis for sharing your brand with others is shifting from the tangible levels to the intangible ones. To put it another way: these days the 'who' is just as important as the 'what'.

BUSINESS IS CHANGING

No real surprise there, we all know things change, but the difficult bit is realising what you need to do differently to keep up with that change. Let me give some examples of what I mean:

Change 1 – The job for life

As we know, the 'job for life' no longer exists. Now transience is the order of the day, moving around to progress your career. In fact, one survey by Execunet in 2012 revealed that corporate leaders are changing jobs every 3.3 years (lessening from 3.6 years in 2005).

Career planning is no longer just something you do when you're ready to move on, it's a constant process of keeping in touch, nurturing your contacts and sowing the seeds of opportunity in people's minds.

Change 2 – The 9 to 5 office day

Something else that doesn't exist any more is working in the office, 9am to 5pm. Now, you can be working on the train, in the coffee shop, at your kitchen table, before the kids go to school,

after the kids have gone to bed, even after you've gone to bed. Great as that is, it means you become less visible and if people don't see you around, they don't miss you when you're gone.

The challenge is to find ways to maintain a presence even when you're not in the office – to make sure people know the part you play. Which leads me to the next change...

Change 3 – Reputation spread

Sometimes the opposite happens: thanks to the viral nature of today's communications, everybody knows who you are even though you might not want them to. Before, what went on in a company stayed in a company, but now people's reputations, good or bad, can spread worldwide at the touch of a button.

That's why it's important to spend time building a positive reputation so, should something go wrong, you've got some credit in the bank to stand you in good stead.

Here's what I'm talking about...

An international survey by Burson Marsteller found that 50% of a company's reputation is directly linked to its CEO's reputation. It's something that Richard Branson, king of the personal brand, understands well. He spends time putting himself out there, building a positive reputation, so that when his companies hit problems (as they often do) he still gets reasonably favourable press. Plus he keeps his reputation as an astute businessman.

Compare that to Tony Hayward, the CEO of BP no-one had heard of before the 2010 oil disaster off the US coast, who had done nothing to build up any reputation credit. With no buy-in to his brand journalists found it a lot easier to rip him to shreds, even when what he was saying was fair comment. (Although complaining "I'd like my life back" didn't help his cause.)

Change 4 – Growth by profits

Companies are no longer looking to grow simply by making profits, they're looking to grow by making cuts – and that includes job cuts.

So ask yourself this: when your boss is sitting with their list deciding who should stay and who should go, or your client is wondering which suppliers to ditch, what have you done to prove your worth? How will they know you are an asset to their business and not just a commodity?

Change 5 – Decisions based on logic

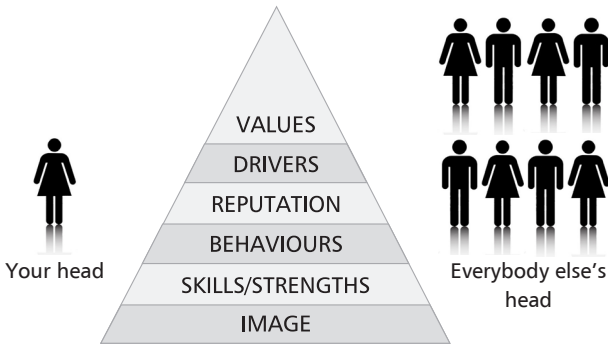
One final change – and the one that just keeps growing – is the amount of choice we have, which means making decisions is a whole lot harder. In the old days, logic would take care of it; if two people were interviewed for a job and one had a qualification the other didn't, the qualified person was usually hired. Simple.

Now, every person is qualified, so logic won't cut the mustard. Instead we have to take our decision to a more emotional level, looking for a connection with the person themselves – do we like them, do we trust them, do we buy them?

What's required today is to set out your stall not just with the functional value of your skills (the 'what') but the emotional value you offer too (the 'who'). The stronger the emotional connection you offer, the better the buy-in to your brand.

WHERE YOUR BRAND EXISTS

For the most part, this book is about defining and sharing what you see as your personal brand. However, it's important to realise that your brand exists in two places:



It starts with a first impression that takes literally the blink of an eye. That's because, according to a study conducted at Princeton University in 2006, you need only one-tenth of a second to gather all the information necessary to suss someone out. We're not talking an in-depth character assesment – more an initial 'Do I like them or not?'

Primarily, it's their trustworthiness you're gauging, though the study also showed we quickly rate someone's attractiveness, likeability, competence and aggressiveness too. Now, you may be thinking, 'I've got a tenth of a second to work out all that...how the heck?!' It's a lot easier than you might think though because your brain's doing it without you even realising. Here's how:

When our brain experiences something for the first time, its primary need is to understand how to react to it. Specifically, the amygdala (a small part of your brain responsible for emotional response) is on standby to implement our fight, flight or freeze reaction. This goes back to prehistoric times when if a caveman happened upon an animal, he had to quickly decide if it was something to eat (in which case to fight) or something that might eat him (requiring flight or freeze as a response).

To help decide the best course of action, our brain instantly goes searching for clues. So when you meet someone for the first time,

all five senses start gathering data to feed your grey matter. Your sense of sight will look for visual clues; for example, an expensive watch could give you an idea of someone's wealth. Your sense of hearing will listen for clues; a regional accent could give you an idea of someone's upbringing. Your sense of touch will feel for clues; a firm handshake could give you an idea of someone's confidence. Your sense of smell also picks up clues; a strong whiff of cigarettes could give you insight into someone's lifestyle. On the odd occasion, you may even use your sense of taste to gather clues (though licking people's faces isn't the best etiquette).

But a clue is only useful when you can interpret what it means. How your brain goes about that is by evaluating the clue against the mental 'reference library' you've built up based on a whole host of things, including your family upbringing, memories and experiences, cultural stereotypes and even social expectations.

So if you meet someone who's wearing the same watch as you, your brain might think, 'Hey...I've got that watch and I'm a fantastic person, so I'm going to assume this person is pretty fantastic too.' It may not be true of course, but in the absence of other information (which your brain will carry on gathering the longer you spend time with the person) it goes with its initial instinct.

You need to remember though, not everyone's reference libraries contain the same information (they've not lived the exact same life you have), so the same clue could be interpreted different ways.

For example, you might spot the person's watch and think, 'That's the same watch my boss wears – and he's a complete prat – so I'm going to assume this person is a complete prat too.'

Or as the American writer EB White said, "Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts."

Here's what I'm talking about...

Psychologists at the University of Pennsylvania asked 2,741 Americans to rate anonymised tweets written by 7,296 different people. The volunteers were asked to categorise, among other things, whether the message was written by a man or a woman and whether they were young or old. The scientists found people can judge a tweeter's gender, approximate age, education and broad political opinions with more than 75% accuracy, solely from the words they use. Here are some examples the study said can instantly give the game away. (Warning: you might be about to cringe.):

Women – cute, shopping, love, hair, my, husband, chocolate, gorgeous, make-up, dinner

Men – beer, game, government, fantasy, political, data, football, police, against

Under 24s – I, me, my life, crying, friends, sleep, bae [I had to look that last one up, as I'm an old codger.]

Over 24s – new, our, via, poverty, jobs, park, families, awesome [That last one would seem to add to the American stereotype.]

With a 75% accuracy rate, stereotypes have their place in helping us form our impressions of people – particularly the initial ones, where we have only a few clues to go on. But never lose sight of the fact: they're not 100% accurate.

Remember that whilst you're gathering clues about the person you've just met, they're doing exactly the same and bingo – your brand has been created in their mind. (And according to a study by the University of Minnesota, the opinions we form in the first minutes play a major role in determining the course of the relationship.)

It doesn't stop there though. People will carry on picking up clues every time they come into contact with you, building a clearer picture of your personal brand. So it's up to you to make sure you

give yourself the best chance possible that people's perception of you is the one you want them to have.

YOU CAN'T PLEASE ALL THE PEOPLE

As a final bit of background, there's something important I want to share with you. Pay attention now, because this is the key to personal brand happiness:

Not everyone will buy your brand – accept it.

That's exactly as it should be because trying to make everyone a fan of your brand is like trying to get Madonna to act her age – you're on a hiding to nothing. I've seen people try though.

Here's what I'm talking about...

I was once delivering a workshop to a group of people who had never met before. When I got to the bit where each attendee shares their first impression of the others, one guy said, "We can't do this. If I'd known we were going to be getting feedback I'd have come into the room an entirely different person." Needless to say, his credibility disappeared faster than a chocolate biscuit at a Weight Watchers meeting.

However, if you can embrace who you are – even the imperfections – you can be successful just by being yourself.

Here's what I'm talking about...

In the early days of my business, the first personal brand I worked on was mine. I spent many hours honing and tweaking it and, once I was happy I had the best version of me down on paper, I moved on to the next stage: getting feedback.

I drew up a list of people whose opinions I valued – ex-bosses, colleagues and clients – then sent them questions asking what their

perceptions of my brand were, so I could match them with my own. The answers rolled in, some of which made for great reading.

Finding out I was seen as ‘immune to the temptation of following the majority’ and ‘the person who makes stuff happen’ was a real confidence boost. Others hit a nerve, like the one that said, ‘You have a strong style, like double espresso, but sometimes I wanted tea.’

When I read that I was mortified because it highlighted all the things I knew to be my weaknesses – being too full on (not just a single but a double espresso), not listening (I hadn’t even known they’d wanted tea) and having all the subtlety of a brick (aka ‘a strong style’). I went to bed and cried, blubbing to my other half that I may as well quit now because no-one would ever buy my brand.

When I woke next morning the very first thing I did was go straight back to that particular email to re-read the comment and beat myself up a bit more (admit it – you’d probably do the same).

Then it hit me...

If you had to come up with a metaphor for the brand I’d just spent weeks defining, double espresso would fit the bill, so the perception of my brand was spot on. The fact this person wanted tea didn’t really factor into the equation; I’d never been anything other than coffee with them because coffee is what I’ve got to offer. Adding tea to the menu wasn’t an option (it’s just not who I am).

What was most liberating though was realising I didn’t have to. The purpose of my personal brand isn’t to get everyone buying it (there’s not a single brand in the world that everyone likes). Its purpose is to convey what I have to offer and who is offering it, clearly, concisely and authentically...nothing more, nothing less. I could just continue being who I am.

That person did me a huge favour and ever since I've made sure the fact I'm a coffee person comes across loud and clear, from the way I dress to the design of my website, the blogs I write to the workshops I deliver, the picture on my profile to the biography that goes with it. That added clarity has led to a lot more coffee fans buying my brand and for those who find double espresso a bit full-on, I've accepted it's nothing personal – I'm just not their cup of tea (pun intended).