



Building the Best Organizations in the Insurance Industry

YOUR PERSONAL BRAND IS CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS

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Chances are you can think of a few things to say about each of them based on the impressions you've gathered about their personal brands -- however unconsciously -- complete with triumphs, missteps, and various forms of public humiliation and scandal. And depending on what those critically managed (not always successfully) impressions are, and by how many they are held, the lives and affairs of the Trumps, Stewarts and Palins are influenced. After all, Trump wants you to tune in to *The Apprentice*, Stewart wants you to shop her collections at Macy's, and Palin wants to sell lots of books.

By now, we know you don't have to be a regular feature on the evening news or a sidebar on Huffington Post in order to elicit a response ranging from indifference to jeers and cheers. You have your own public and it's their impressions of your brand and the messages you send that can determine career trajectory and business success.

Don't Blow It

From a botched presentation to senior management to a CLM (career-limiting-move) after hours with colleagues, when the spirits are flowing freely and the boundaries of acceptable rhetoric and behavior blur as the night wears on -- as long as you recognize that you are in charge of your personal brand -- you have the opportunity to avoid or at least minimize those errors.

Here are some obvious mistakes that can harm your personal brand, excerpted from [360 Degrees of Influence \(McGraw-Hill, 2011\)](#).

10. Inconsistency

You just pulled off the impossible and brought that important project in on time and under budget. Don't follow up this success by blowing off what you think is a relatively trivial project. If you want to give the impression that you can deliver, then deliver on everything, great and small.

9. Over-promising & Under-delivering

On the other hand, don't tell colleagues or clients you can bring in that important project early and at half the cost if you are not absolutely sure that you can do so. And even then, you're better off insuring that the project is done right and on time. Make sure your delivery matches your promise.

8. False Expectations

Along the same lines, don't set the bar so high that there's no way you can reach it, much less vault yourself over it. Don't wave off help if it's offered or neglect to take a break if you need it. Don't pretend you can do everything perfectly. You can't.

7. Social Media Misuse

An example of how to lose a job in 140 characters or less is the story of the would-be Cisco employee who Tweeted "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the

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daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." A Cisco employee responded, "Who is the hiring manager? I'm sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web."

Twitter is a terrific social tool, a way to relay information quickly and efficiently, and with the chance to impress others with your wit. Because it's the essence of the instant response, however, people sometimes tweet before they think. Best to think before you tweet.

6. Being Invisible

Some people are afraid that if they stick their necks out (metaphorically speaking), they'll get their heads cut off. This might be a fine survival tactic in toxic organizations, but in thriving companies, this is a recipe for remaining, year after year, in that same small cubicle on the far side of the office.

5. Mixed Messages

Don't tell colleagues you value their time and then show up late for meetings; don't tell clients you value their business and not return their calls. Don't tell people you care and then behave in a careless manner.

4. Not Practicing What You Preach

This is similar to the previous point, aimed at your own behavior.

How many moral-values politicians and preachers have been busted for "walking the Appalachian Trail," as it were? Former South Carolina governor and family man Mark Sanford was once mentioned as a possible Republican presidential candidate before he took his alleged hike on that trail. In fact, he was traveling to Argentina to consort with his mistress. So much for that.

Don't tell others of the importance of family as you destroy yours.

3. Keeping Bad Company

In some ways, this is obvious: If you want to be seen as an upright person, you shouldn't hang out with criminals.

But it's about more than simply avoiding crooks. Are you planning to run for public office? Then perhaps you should quit the men's-only private club. Do you tout your record as a responsible steward of the environment? Then why are you sitting on the board of a corporation that routinely pays fines for illegal dumping? Friend of animals? Don't wear fur!

Avoid entanglements and deeds that cast doubt on your message.

2. Fighting Battles You Can't Win

You've heard the term "he's fighting above his weight class?" The idea is that someone is outmatched by his opponent, and not only can he not keep up, he might get hurt as a result.

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Having ambition is great, but having that ambition get ahead of your ability is not.

1. Failure to Stand Out from the Crowd

You're smart, energetic, competent, and ambitious. Congratulations, so are millions of other people.

Credentials, education, accomplishments, privilege, and connections can all mean a leg up on the competition. But most often, they are just the price of admission to join the game. What really counts is what you do once you are given the chance to prove your mettle.

If you pull even with everyone else, you won't be influencing much, let alone in any direction you wish. Creativity and superior communication skills can widen the gap between you and the pack until you learn the art of influencing in every direction.

If You Want to Get Ahead, Always Keep Your Personal Brand in Mind

A personal brand is inescapable if we buy into the idea that we all send out messages and signals others inevitably interpret and act upon. Making sure that we manage our personal brand by living our values and communicating consciously can give us a leg up on the less aware competition.

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