Your Personal Brand

Last week I had the privilege of representing SCORE in several seminars throughout the state of Alaska. When I came home many of my friends asked “What did you think about Alaska?” I enthusiastically responded by saying beautiful scenery, breath-taking glaciers, and friendly people. But one asked a very unique question: “What did you learn in Alaska?” I was able to give an immediate answer that I will share with you in today’s column.

I was visiting with one of the attendees in these small business marketing seminars and this CEO asked me “we have been talking today about our company’s brand, but do you think that one’s personal brand is also important? Great observation!!

I believe that your personal brand is just as critical as your company brand. How do you think your customers, associates, employees or peers feel about you? Your answer to that question defines your personal brand.

Whether you're a small-business owner or a solo entrepreneur, you need to pay attention to your personal brand. "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding," management consultant Tom Peters writes in "The Brand Called You." He says that "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

What is a personal brand? Perhaps the most succinct and descriptive brand definition comes from marketing expert John Jantsch, founder of Duct Tape Marketing. He defines branding as "the art of becoming knowable, likable and trustable." That's how most of us likely feel about companies such as Apple, Disney, BMW and Nike. If we don't manage our personal brand as diligently as these companies manage their company brand, people will assign a default brand to us. And this may not serve us well.

In the days of social media, it's more important than ever to manage what others feel and say about us. In a recent article, Brunaa Martinuzzi, the author of The Leader as a Mensch: Become the Kind of Person Others Want to Follow suggested several tips that will help you manage your personal brand so you can have more power and control in your business. I will share a few:

**Increase Your Awareness of Your Identity:** What distinguishes you from the pack? How is your product or service special? For example, what is your personal trademark? Is it speedy service? Is it going the extra mile to exceed expectations? Whatever distinguishes you, be clear about it so you can articulate it and do it with perseverance.
**Deliver What You Promise:** Every day, with every client and every person you serve, at every touch point, consistently deliver exactly what your brand promises. Anything less will not do. Doing so will create the positive stories that people will tell about you.

**Make Quality a Non-Negotiable:** Do people immediately associate your name with quality? Whether you're dealing with a major client or a small one, whether you're making a presentation to 100 people or two people at the local diner, be stunning. Don't cut corners, and don't short-change people. Instead, adopt a craftsman's approach to what you do and make your name synonymous with quality. Quality is a watermark for trust. It's a sorting mechanism for prospects and customers looking for what you sell.

**Keep Your Word:** Your word is your branding iron. Be known as someone who keeps his or her commitments, such as showing up for a meeting, being on time for an appointment, getting back to people on an article you promised to send or following through on any action item you undertook in a meeting. The list of small promises we make is long; be sure to keep each one of them.

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