

Brand You: Tips for Executives

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Many healthcare executives, surprisingly, give little thought to their personal brands. As an executive, you have a brand whether you like it or not, and cultivating your brand is more important than ever, particularly as you consider your career growth and success.

What is a personal brand? A classic definition comes from Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room,” he has said. What is it that people say about you when you’re not around? If it’s not what you want, can you shape a new, stronger executive brand?

The answer is yes. Brands can be built, strategically and proactively, by many means: daily interactions with colleagues and peers, the work you produce, the emails you send, attendance at events, speaking engagements, writing opportunities, your resume, your LinkedIn profile, volunteer activities, board service, and so on.

A brand is not something you build overnight. It is the result of a gradual, purposeful process in which you create a professional self that others know and respect. The mindset that you carry is important—being open to new ideas, change and growth are qualities that help to define your brand.

A Fluid Phenomenon

A brand is far from static. It is, in fact, very malleable and something that an executive should constantly cultivate. “Just like company brands, personal brands can be turned around after a losing streak or optimized to speak to a new audience,” notes the “[Global Guide to Personal Branding for Executives](#),” created by the BlueSteps career service of the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC). “Your personal brand is something you can proactively work on and strengthen.”

Based on our experiences, we offer a few pieces of advice to follow:

- 1. Be genuine.** This is perhaps the great distinction between one’s personal brand and product brands. Product marketers can to a large degree manipulate consumers depending on the market they’re trying to reach. This is very hard to do for personal branding, as people quickly sense you’re trying to be something you’re not.

Identify your core values—make a list of what is truly important to you. Is it quality? Honesty? Integrity? Let your values guide your actions and communications so that your brand aligns with who you really are.

Remember that your brand does not always need to be positive and optimistic. As a leader, being genuine often means you have to share the good, bad and ugly about situations and not please everyone. Being genuine is a must – and it strengthens your brand.

- 2. Focus.** Don't try to be all things to all people. If career mobility is important to you, establish yourself as an expert and thought leader in specific topic areas so that you can gain the respect of employers. Polish your elevator speech so that it crystallizes your career hopes and vision. When we speak with executives about their careers, we can easily draw distinctions between those whose goals are focused and those whose goals are scattered.
- 3. Offer real value.** Whether it's on the internet, in an article, at an industry conference, or in a work meeting, look to provide high quality content and opinions. "Can you inform, entertain or otherwise add to your audience members' lives, without being too generic or disingenuous?" asks [Brandon Harris](#) of NuMedia Agency. "Think deeply about where you can provide significant value to your target audience."
- 4. Get honest feedback from those whose opinions you value.** One of the greatest challenges executives (especially CEOs) have is that few people around them want to be completely straight with them, whether out of fear, caution or respect. Find the people in your organization (or outside) who will "tell it like it is." We both have groups of professional contacts whom we turn to for candid advice and straight answers. We are able to ask them: Does this sound like me? Am I coming across genuinely? Their input is invaluable.

Is More Better?

Conventional wisdom might say that if you want to get your brand recognized, you have to get "out there" as much as you can. Find as many touch points with your "consumers" as possible. This isn't always the best advice. Remember that silence and humility can also speak volumes about you. "We can all strive to communicate less, but deeper and more meaningfully; to prioritize listening and observing over speaking; to be less

motivated by ego and more by larger purpose; and to focus on self-expression over self-promotion," says writer and marketing strategist [Ana Andjelic](#).

Being calm and measured in your branding can be just as powerful as being aggressive and highly visible. Introverts can build brands which are just as strong as those of extroverts.

You and Your Organization

Everyone is in part defined by the organizations where they work, and that organization's brand rubs off on you. For this reason it is absolutely critical when assessing a new employer that you consider its brand and yours. Is there fit and consistency? Do you want this organization to be part of who you are to other people?

Perfect alignment between your and your company's brands is not required, but they should be complementary. Ask yourself, says author [Deborah Himsel](#), "Is your company's target market of interest to you, and are they the kind of people you enjoy pleasing? Are you passionate about working to fill the needs of that market?"

A highly regarded employer can contribute positively to your brand. Some executives, however, are defined too much by their employers. This is usually the case after a long tenure when the leader has not taken the initiative to build their personal brand. Being largely defined by your employer is a real risk that you must always confront as part of your ongoing brand-building.

Diverse Executives

In our experience, if you are a woman, person of color and/or member of other group that is underrepresented in executive circles, it is more important to leverage personal brand building to establish and communicate your brand. You may confront implicit biases which contribute to what others think of you. In many situations – job interviews, for instance – you may offer a nontraditional or unique background and set of experiences. It is even more important for you to strategically relate your brand to others – to communicate your values, outline the importance of your experiences, clearly spell out your capabilities, and discuss skills which are transferable to different roles or situations. Your resume and bio are vitally

important as a chronicling of qualifications and competencies that speak directly to your brand and how it has been consciously shaped through your varied professional experiences.

Final Thoughts

We are all constantly evolving, and your brand must evolve, too. Be sure to check in on your brand from time to time: How are you coming across to others? Are you relevant? Are you genuine? Continue to shape the way that people perceive you so that, when you're not in the room, your brand speaks for itself.

Resources on Executive Branding

[3 Things to Avoid While Building a Personal Brand](#)

[7 Steps to Build Your Personal Brand](#)

[7 Reasons Why Executives Should Build a Personal Brand](#)

[10 Golden Rules of Personal Branding](#)

[The 10 Pillars to Creating a Personal Brand in a Digital World](#)

[The Global Guide to Personal Branding for Executives – AESC BlueSteps](#)

[Personal Branding for People Who Hate Personal Branding](#)

[The Power of Personal Brand for Black Managers](#)

[Want to Create a Personal Brand? Don't!](#)

[What Women of Color Need to Know About Building a Personal Brand](#)

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About WittKieffer

WittKieffer is a global executive search firm dedicated exclusively to organizations that improve quality of life in healthcare, education, the life sciences and the not-for-profit sector. Its industry-specialized consultants deliver solutions across the leadership continuum – experienced, emerging and interim – that build long-term partnerships and successful outcomes. The firm understands leadership, people who lead and the impact they have on organizations and society. Visit WittKieffer.com to learn more.

About NAHSE

The National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE) is a non-profit association of Black health care executives founded in 1968 for the purpose of promoting the advancement and development of Black health care leaders, and elevating the quality of health care services rendered to minority and underserved communities. NAHSE's purpose is to ensure greater participation of minority groups in the health field. Visit NAHSE.org to learn more.