



The Top 10 Secrets to Mastering Your Personal Brand

By Brenda Bence

What do Sir Richard Branson, Barack Obama, and Suze Orman all have in common? They have each built powerful personal brands that have propelled them to the top of their businesses, their careers, and their lives. How did they do it?



Like other successful personal branders, they took the time to define, communicate, and protect their brands. You can be sure they followed all of the top 10 secrets below to achieve their great successes. There's no magic to it,

really: You can apply the same personal branding principles to your work and life, not only to achieve your goals but to *surpass* them.

Secret #1

You already have a personal brand, whether you want one or not, simply by virtue of being you in the workplace. It's up to you to determine where your personal brand is strong and where it could use some improvement. Then, it's up to you to make changes as necessary to make it as strong as possible.

Secret #2

Your personal brand exists in the minds of others in the way they *perceive, think, and feel* about you. Think about your favorite corporate brand for a moment. It can be the best "functioning" product of its kind in the world, but if the public fails to *perceive* it as the best, it won't be successful. So, it's critical to keep in mind that your personal brand is not what *you* think it is but what *others* perceive it to be.

Secret #3

A common misconception about personal branding is that it's self-centered and all about *you*. But the truth is, **personal branding is all about your audience** — i.e., the person or people you most want to impact with your brand at work and in your career. Just as corporate branders must offer a benefit to consumers in order for a product to be a success, you must fulfill a need your audience has in order for your personal brand to be a success on the job.

Secret #4

Since your personal brand exists in the minds of your audience, the only way to determine if your brand is

successful is to find out how your audience perceives you. If there is a gap between what your audience thinks and feels **about you and what you want** them to think and feel about you, your personal brand should be adjusted and strengthened.

Secret #5

The only way to have a strong personal brand is to **carefully define it**. Many people believe that personal branding is all about how you "execute" your brand, but true personal branding starts with a crystal clear definition. Until you define it, your brand is just a vague premise with no real foundation. No corporate marketer would dream of putting a product in the marketplace without a clear definition of the brand. That definition tells the marketer which consumers to target and where to focus advertising dollars. On a personal level, your own brand should do the same.

Secret #6

The best brands respond to both emotional and functional needs. In the workplace, functional needs are the tasks you perform on the job and are typically listed in your job description. The emotional needs that you fill forge a very important connection with your audience. For example, if two accountants are equally qualified, the one with a stronger personal brand will be the one who is reliable and precise. That accountant's audience can take comfort in the knowledge that the work will not only be done but will be done on time and well!

Secret #7

The best personal brands are credible, so you must prove that you can deliver what you promise. It isn't enough to simply *say* that you can fill a need at work; you must *show* that you have the experience and/or training to do it. Seek to prove it with your background, your education, and the unique qualifications you bring to the job.

Secret #8

Your personal brand is built 24/7 and 365 days per year not only through what you say but, even more



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importantly, through what you do. This doesn't mean that you can't be human or make mistakes, but it means that you need to think about behaviors that could damage your brand. Even when you're not on the job, if someone sees you drinking too much at the local pub, it could get back to your manager...who might begin to wonder about your reliability. There's no need to be paranoid, of course, but unless you're behind closed doors, make sure to think before you act.

Secret #9

While it's important to avoid negative behaviors that can undermine your brand, it's also important to **be consistent in how you communicate your brand.** If Nike's ads suddenly focused on encouraging you to become a couch potato, you wouldn't know what to think, would you? Just as Nike is consistent in promoting sports and fitness in all of its advertising, you must be consistent in how you present your personal brand every day at work.

Secret #10

Even though your personal brand is all about your audience, **it never makes sense to pretend to be someone you're not.** You won't be happy in your career, and it's hard to remain consistent with a "fake" personal brand. So, the task is to find out what your audience needs, and align those

needs with your own unique *strengths* and your unique *character* traits. Your personal brand will then reflect who you really are, which will not only bring you greater success in your career, but greater fulfillment as well.



You don't have to be famous like Suze Orman or Barack Obama to benefit from defining, communicating, and protecting your personal brand. But you can certainly learn from their examples and take advantage of the same personal branding secrets that have helped these heavy hitters reach their full potential.

About the Author

Brenda Bence, branding expert and certified executive coach, is the author of *How YOU Are Like Shampoo*, the only start-to-finish book for defining, communicating, and taking control of your personal brand at work. After graduating from Harvard Business School, Brenda developed mega brands for Procter & Gamble and Bristol-Myers Squibb. She now travels the world speaking, training, and coaching on corporate and personal brand development. For more information, visit www.HowYOUAreLikeShampoo.com.

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