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# Personal branding

by Ananda Barrett

The days when we just had to be good at our jobs are long gone. We have another 20 or 50 people around us who are also very capable in their jobs.

So how do we actually stand out from the crowd? How do we make ourselves more visible for the right reasons?

It really does come down to personal branding. Branding is a buzz word these days and regardless of age, position or the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding.

We are the CEO's of our own companies: 'Me Inc.' and our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called 'You'. It's that simple, and that hard.

What is a brand? In advertising terms, branding is the 'image' created in the minds of people when they see or hear a name, product or logo.

Enthusiastic owner/managing director John McKenzie says people often go straight to a name or logo. They don't understand the elements like attributes, personality and values that make up the essence of a brand.

Think Oprah, Madonna or a little closer to home, Jonah Lomu. They are high performing personal brands. Mr McKenzie says Lomu was a bank teller, earning millions by playing rugby.

"He has managed his own personal brand very well, with the releasing of CD's, car

stereos, and clothing. And although he's had a marriage break up and health issues, he still comes out as a very strong performing personal brand."

The benefits of being a strong brand are tremendous. As a strong brand you can command higher pay or fees, thrive during economic downturns and you can transition your business or career with ease.

"World businesses today understand their culture and what they stand for and they employ people more based on their fit to the company's culture and brand," Mr McKenzie says.

"There are lots of people in their thirties that look, act and dress like they're fifty but with a bit of work on physical fitness, dress sense and attitudes, they can reinvent themselves," he says.

Why would you want to look and act like you're 50 when you are only 32, allowing yourself to be left behind?

We should align our values with the values of the company if we want to be successful. What is needed in any organisation is someone who is the brand champion, someone who understands the culture and brand position of the business and drive that within the business.

Mr McKenzie says staff are recruited on whether they fit to the culture and brand of the business and from there it means there will be consistent messages and behaviour within the business because everybody is rowing on the same stretch of the river.

Creating consistent messages and sending those messages to stakeholders in the business, will ultimately mean that everyone is on the same page and the general perception is a good one.

Nearly all personal branding gurus agree that cultivating an image and marketing it, takes real work. 'Branding coaches', as they are called, have been very successful overseas and are waiting in the wings to help you with that hard word.

Mr McKenzie says it might sound shallow but these professionals provide life coaching on how to dress, act and who to associate yourself with.

Does this mean we are just pretending to be someone we are not and does the personal brand have any depth?

Mr McKenzie says that personal branding is not simply applying an attractive veneer but learning to get credit for who you are, which really means understanding what your values are and learning to make your values relevant to other people.

"It is like any brand, if you are not real and are actually faking it, you will notice it. Knowing who you are is very important in creating a positive personal brand.

We have the power to influence people to see us exactly the way we wish to be perceived simply by defining who we are, our strengths, values, goals, personality and presenting these points in a compelling, persuasive manner," Mr McKenzie says.

"People will judge you, so why not take some control of how you are judged."