

Introduction to new book on personal branding

Are you aware how others perceive you? E.g. managers, colleagues, clients, suppliers, collaboration partners, members of your network, headhunters, or even the public at large. Do you know what impressions they have of your professional skills and your personality? What do others expect from you and remember about you? What do they think, believe, and say about you? What impression do you make and what kind of impact do you leave behind? Did you realize that you already possess a personal brand, and that it is made up of the image *others* have of you?

Personal branding is more important than ever. We are living in a world heavily focused on individuals. We focus on them and on their personas, personalities, stories, and finally their personal brands. We analyze and assess them. No matter how well we know someone, we hold opinions about him or her. With certain people, we build good relationships. We see a reflection of ourselves in them. We have respect for their abilities. We identify with their attitudes. They guide and inspire us. We are fascinated and seduced by them. We recognize and reward them. When it comes to certain other people, we distance ourselves. We disagree with them. We challenge them. We envy them. We find their qualifications inadequate. We get into debates and argue with them. We dislike their personalities. We laugh at them and trash them in front of others. That is how their personal brands are diminished. So how do you come across to others? Are you aware how your personal brand affects your job and your career?

If you want it and you've got it, then flaunt it!

Glenn Jacobsen's book on personal branding was published in June 2017. It is written in Danish, but it will be translated into English later this year. The Danish title is: "*If you want it and you've got it, then flaunt it!*" Meaning that if you have something relevant, attractive and at best distinct to show in your professional life, and moreover even something you are really dedicated to, that can help you achieve your personal goals, you should make it obvious. Do not hide. Believe in yourself. Make it happen.

It picks up the thread of his book on strategic branding from 1999 (published by CBS Press, now DJØF Publishing). At that time, he described the development of the branding discipline from a marketing and communications activity to a competitive strategy and management tool, rooted in and supportive to the business strategy in an organisation. No longer were brands just products and services; now they encompassed entire companies and organizations as corporate brands. Thus the book's title,

"Branding in a new perspective". At the end of that book, he included a sort of postscript on personal branding in the job market. At the time, his thought on this – much like a footnote or stray thought – represented an entirely new way to look at branding. By now, personal branding has become more important than ever, among other driven by growing individualization and media developments.

Your personal brand is your unique quality – the image others conjure up when they think of you. Personal branding is what you are doing actively to define, present, communicate about, and manage yourself. In short, demonstrating and being the personal brand you want others to perceive. Hence the title. It all begins with the courage, will, and ability to be just who you are and to make a positive difference for yourself and for others by striving not just to be recognized but also to be acknowledged. All told, that intensifies the impact you have on others and the value you offer.

Who are you, and how will you apply your personal brand? Once you have defined yourself and, in short, "got it", you should drop all hesitation in showing and using it – assuming you have the desire, courage, and ability, and assuming you are "somebody" with something on your mind, someone who is passionate about a relevant and substantive cause, someone who stands out from the crowd.

The empirical basis for the book is 101 personal in-depth interviews with across sectors, industries, types of jobs, responsibilities, skills, genders, ages, and much more. Some of the interviewees are very well known to the Danish public, others aren't, but they all have personal brands.

Personal branding as a phenomenon, a concept, and a discipline

In the book, Glenn Jacobsen describes personal branding as a phenomenon, a concept, and a discipline.

It is a *phenomenon* at a time of increased attention to the individual person. Business has become a "people business". Several current trends and developments are propelling the evolution of personal branding, among them individualization, existentialism, authenticity, and the need for attention and acknowledgement (sometimes expressed as narcissism). Various media have an accelerating effect on these developments. Some personal brands are created and maintained via the media. These "media personalities" are widely familiar but rarely admired. Personal branding is an individual and a social phenomenon. It occurs within each of us, and it occurs in the interaction with other people and our environment. Relationships begin and end with people. Your person(ality) becomes an ever more important part of your work product, regardless whether your role in your profession or your organization is that of board member, manager, specialist, or talent. Your person and your personality are perceived as strongly as your professional skills are ... if not more strongly. Some need to brand themselves to a greater degree than others do, but it is a basic requirement

for everyone in the workplace to have a personal brand. Some deploy it actively and with success, others lack the ability or desire to do so.

It is a *concept* made up of the somewhat odd mix of person and brand. On the one hand, you are a "person" encompassing your identity (who you are), your personality (what you are), and your persona (the person you show to others). Your "person" is fundamentally pure and "genuine". On the other hand, you are a "brand". That is your image, how others see you, and how you see yourself – not necessarily the real you. The concept may thus involve an intrinsic contradiction. Avoiding such contradiction and making any sense requires that your person and your brand is in balance. That means you do what you say you will do, and others see and acknowledge the person you would like them to see. That is why the balance is also associated with authenticity. Your personal brand emanates from the core of your personality, your professionalism, and your personal leadership. If you hold a managerial position, you must manage yourself in order to manage others. Managing yourself requires you to choose, find, know, believe in, and be yourself. Moreover, it requires you to pace and position yourself. You need to be somebody to make something of yourself. Your personal branding and communication are deciding factors in the success you achieve on the job and in your career as a whole.

It is a *discipline* enabling you to define, stage, communicate, and manage your personal brand from the inside-and-out. Personal branding is a process of personal development aimed at letting you work toward being and experiencing an better and stronger version of yourself. It helps you choose and succeed in the moves you make in your career. How actively and how seriously you want to work on your professional branding is up to you. Several avenues are available, ranging from inadvertent, casual, and explorative discovery to the deliberately planned approach. For good reason, you need to choose your own approach, the one that will work best for you and the one with the highest likelihood of helping you realize your goals and reach your potential.

Key messages about personal branding

In the book, Glenn Jacobsen sheds light on personal branding from several angles. Certainly, the argument goes, we are all in a position to discover our personal brand and work with it in a professional manner to an appropriate extent; and certainly, for some, doing so will make the difference between success and failure on the job. That said, the book is not just a celebration of personal branding. There is no such thing as a rose without thorns. The negative aspects of personal branding are given due consideration as the author discusses the untoward aspects of individualization, counter-trends, disadvantages, and pitfalls. The author's overall message is that balance is the Holy Grail: It is about selling yourself, not selling yourself out. It is about being on fire to light up others and burn away the fog, not burning out. There are three key messages in the book.

What others think, believe, and say about you is your personal brand. Is it working for you?

No matter who you are and what work you do, you already possess a personal brand. It consists of your image or reputation and the impression others have of your professionalism and person(ality). Everything about you is sending out messages. Every interaction with other people in your professional life, every touchpoint, is a moment of truth for you. You need to make every touch point a proof point. The devil is in the details. You are constantly being tested, measured and assessed. Regardless how superficially or deeply others know you, they hold opinions about you. They may be speaking about you to others. They do not necessarily perceive you to be the person you really are – or wish to be – rather, they see you as the person they believe you to be. Perception is reality. Whether right or wrong, deserved or undeserved, to your advantage or disadvantage.

What is *your* personal brand, then? Said another way: What impact do you have on others, and how do they see you? What is that perception doing to help you in your job and in your career overall? Would you be able to manifest as an even stronger version of yourself and thus exploit your potential to a greater extent?

While you are at it, give some thought to what you would like others to think, believe, and say about you. Consider what you would like them to expect of you and remember you for. If possible, stand out from the crowd. Sure, biologically you are unique like anyone else, but your workplace personal brand may not be. Sure, we all have personal brands, but some are more powerful than others. If you have a relevant and engaging agenda and you want to advance in your career, you will not get far hiding. Be passionate about your skills and about your accomplishments. Blaze a trail being who you are and who you want to be. Be true to yourself.

Take charge of managing your personal brand. Do not let others define and, in a worst-case scenario, diminish you

You cannot choose not to have a personal brand. It is there already. But you can indeed choose the degree to which you are aware of, take responsibility for, and actively work on your personal branding. In other words, who is running your show? Are you the shepherd or the sheep? If you do not make your own personal brand, someone else will make it for you.

Option one: You choose to be more or less indifferent to how others perceive you. In reality, such a choice lets misunderstanding, ignorance, and prejudice determine who and what you are perceived to be. Perhaps you then let others position themselves against you to gain visibility at your expense. *Option two:* You choose to take charge of managing your personal brand. You accept that you to some extent are competing with others to achieve your goals, and you take a strategic approach to your person. That is your optimal mental foundation. You choose to be personally engaged in developing, managing, and shaping your personal brand. You define, stage, communicate, and manage it. You beef up your impact as a communicator. All because you decide that your personal brand is going to enhance your opportunities at work and in your career.

Personal branding, then, is a deliberate choice. It is up to you whether and to what extent you are perceived to be the person you aspire to be. It is up to you how powerful you want your brand to be. Naturally, others have opinions of you, but do not let those

opinions define you. Be the one to define you, right from the core of your professionalism and your personality. Be your brand; live your brand. Stand behind, and stand up for, yourself. Find your own way. You are in possession of all the raw material you need to become every bit as good as, and to be perceived as, the person you wish to be.

Express a strong personal brand in your own right and as an ambassador for your employer

Never forget that you are part of a larger context. At the personal level, your personal brand exists in the minds of others. Your brand and your success will depend on those others. Your brand is worth exactly what others think it is worth. Applied at the appropriate time with honest, genuine, and respectful diligence and with consideration for others, personal branding has the potential to shape a career characterized by personal development and success.

At the organizational level, you are a representative of the organization that hired you (regardless of its type and size). Your personal brand and the organizational brand must harmonize. You must be a strong ambassador for the organisation – internally to the organization around you, and externally to clients, customers, partners, media journalists and other external stakeholders.