

By Lida Citroen

Perception Is Everything

Manage your reputation as a supply management professional by developing your personal brand.

Have you ever received feedback and thought, “But that’s not me”? We all have a personal brand, and it comes to life in how we are perceived by others. Think of your brand as your reputation, your legacy and the value others assign you based on what they believe to be true about you. As a supply management professional, you may want to be known as collaborative, assertive and communicative. Ensure your interactions with internal business units and external suppliers reflect those traits.

In today’s competitive business environment, we must take control of and manage our own reputation, rather than leaving it to fate. Why give someone else control over the opportunities you will attract? Managing your personal brand means being clear on the strengths and value that you bring to situations. It’s also crucial to know who to focus your energy on — peers, colleagues, supervisors and staff.

Developing a Personal Brand

Your personal branding process begins with understanding what makes you unique and authentic. Identify your passions, interests, successes and goals. Strip away the facade and what others may have told you that you should do, be or think. What are you truly passionate about? What are you like when no one else is watching? Are

you different in different roles (for example, at work versus outside of work)?

Next, create a vision of your desired reputation. How would you like others to perceive you? What would you like others to feel when working with you? Then, objectively evaluate how close your desired brand is to where you actually are today.

Consider the people (audiences) that need to find you and your brand compelling and relevant. If you are a manager in a large company, for example, your audience might be your direct supervisors, colleagues in cross-functional teams and your direct reports. Targeting an audience is critical because it focuses energy away from “everyone in the world” to “those who can impact your career success.”

Soliciting outside feedback is also helpful. Sometimes we are not aware how others perceive us, and this can be holding us back. Feedback allows you to understand how and where others find you valuable, if they will refer opportunities to you and where they believe your weaknesses lie.

If your desired brand is to be known as trustworthy and able to manage sensitive project information, but the feedback you receive indicates you come across as casual with a disregard for boundaries, you will learn something that can be critical to your success. Feedback provides information

and an opportunity to change or fine-tune your brand. Without the feedback, you might not know what needs changing.

Walk the Talk: Marketing Your Personal Brand

As our audience experiences our behavior, they form perceptions about us, and our reputation is created. When we act consistently with expectations, our brand is reinforced and we build “brand equity.” If our behavior is inconsistent with the values we say we represent, we lose brand equity and the damage is difficult to overcome. Look for every possible way to express consistency with your brand — in your personal style, language, behavior and even your environment.

As you build your personal brand, create measures to monitor the results: Are you attracting opportunities that support your brand? Is feedback becoming more consistent with how you want to be seen? Are you feeling more authentic in your interactions?

Developing a strong personal brand is empowering. Personal brands provide career effectiveness when they are understood, managed and enjoyed. By taking control of your brand, you enhance the opportunities to improve personally and professionally. **ISM**

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