

Personal Branding 101

Career Development



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The annual release of the iPhone usually ignites an army of Apple fans queuing religiously outside the Apple stores no matter rain or shine. Why is that so?

Simply because Apple's branding has worked so remarkably well that it has built its own fan base.

Likewise, we too should develop our personal branding and build our own fan circle. After all, we need the support and confidence of our colleagues, mentors, and sponsors in order to effect change whether within the workplace or within our network.

Today, Abigail Tan, senior corporate counsel at Elastic NV and *Docket* contributor, discusses personal branding with ACC Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

This is Part 2 of a three-part series on **Interpersonal Influence at Work.**

What does personal branding mean to you?

> As a foundational point, it is important to be your authentic self.

Tan: Well, I would think that I have developed a kind of personal branding on LinkedIn to the point where Bellerjeau and I are collaborating across different time zones on a three-part series for the ACC Docket. As a foundational point, it is important to be your authentic self.

Bellerjeau: How does authenticity help with personal branding?

Tan: We are each unique and, as cliché as it sounds, there is no one just like you. So, by bringing your authentic self to the table, you shine. You shine because you don't try to mimic someone else. It also helps to build your confidence and ease any imposter syndrome that you might have. *Authenticity is key to building your personal brand.* But it can be quite scary though.



By being authentic, you outshine others and stand out in the crowd. ProStockStudio / *Shutterstock.com*

Bellerjeau: Could you elaborate please.

Stay true to yourself

Tan: As a child, we learn to talk and walk by mimicking our caregivers. As students, we learn to excel in school by mimicking our teachers. As working adults, we learn how to handle workplace issues by mimicking our bosses and colleagues. We learn how to survive by mimicking those around us whether because of their position or their accolades. While imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we can only get so far by mimicking someone else. Perhaps we can survive but don't you want more than that for yourself?

Bellerjeau: What would you suggest we do instead?

Tan: Develop your true self. What do you represent? When people hear your name, what is the first thing they think of?

Bellerjeau: That sounds simple enough, yet it seems difficult for most people to achieve in practice.

Tan: Yes, masquerades or dress-up parties have long been appealing because we are constantly trying to be someone else. This is why Disney shows like *Beauty and the Beast*, fantasy dramas like *Game of Thrones*, and sci-fi shows like *Star Wars* have their appeal; it is why hundreds of thousands flock each year to Comic Conventions all dressed up. We are constantly playing dress up whether literally or figuratively daily. There is an innate fear of taking off our masks. After all, what if people see us for who we are and dislike us?

Bellerjeau: That sounds oddly terrifying to be rejected for oneself. So, what should people do?

Discover who you are

Tan: Figure out your core values. What do you hold dear and what do you believe in? Find out your truth and live it. It can be incredibly uncomfortable, like stepping out in nothing but your underwear in public. Yet, there is something incredibly liberating about being your authentic self and building your personal brand around who you truly are.



The path of self-discovery may be scary but is ultimately rewarding. GoodStudio / *Shutterstock.com*

Figure out your core values.

Bellerjeau: Do you find that your personal brand has changed as you grew in seniority?

Tan: I wish I had a simple answer to that. Yes and no. It wasn't so much that my personal brand changed as I grew in seniority. Rather, it changed as I matured and that so happened to coincide with my progression in seniority. I became a lot more confident in myself and I cared less about what people would say about me.

So, in a way, my personal brand has changed because I leaned in more to my authentic self, letting my masks fall away. Yet, my core values and who I truly am have not changed. I am still a lawyer who truly loves the work I do, and I am still someone who loves animals and am a champion for animal rights and diversity. These core tenets of me have not changed; they have just grown stronger

over the years.

Bellerjeau: Apart from identifying core values and displaying them authentically, how should one build their personal branding?

Utilize personal branding tools and opportunities

Tan: LinkedIn is one important part of the personal branding journey for professionals. Posting quality content (and not just spamming or reposting random articles) can be a great way in bringing your authentic self to the virtual world.

Interacting with and surrounding yourself with people who support you and encourage your growth would be another way to grow your personal brand as these are the same people who will promote you when you are not in the room. Writing articles for the *ACC Docket* would be another interesting way!

Bellerjeau: These are great ways to build personal branding externally. What about within your organization?

Tan: You can also build on your personal brand within your company by saying yes to challenges. Sometimes opportunities come when you least expect them, and they might come packaged differently. It is important that we keep an open mind and not close ourselves off to opportunities simply because they don’t look anything like how we thought they would.

You can also build your personal brand within your company by saying yes to challenges.

Never shy away from positive recognition

Tan: Also, ensure that people in the company know the work you are doing. Sometimes we can be shy or we might feel that it is rather boastful to trumpet our own horns. But if it is done tastefully and with the support of your manager, it is a good way for people in the company to know and appreciate the great work you have been doing. There is nothing wrong with being proud of the amazing work that you do. You are incredible, own it.



It is OK for others to praise you for your accomplishments and accolades. mentalmind / *Shutterstock.com*

Bellerjeau: Is there a single formula for this?

Tan: No, there isn't. There are many ways to build your personal brand both externally and internally, and you've just got to keep trying until you figure out something that works for you. And you know what, it's ok if you fall. Your failure is a part of your story; it can form part of your personal brand.

Bellerjeau: Do you think luck plays any role in growing your personal brand?

Tan: To a certain extent, yes. After all, we can do all the right things, bring our authentic selves to the

table and showcase our wonderful work in the company only to be shot down by detractors or overshadowed by someone else. But you can turn your luck around by finding out different ways to work around your current circumstances whether by finding someone to help you (and that leads us back to the value of networking as discussed in Part 1) or by carving out a different path.

Bellerjeau: That is a very interesting point and leads us to Part 3 on how to make effective use of your network and personal brand.

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James Bellerjeau is a lecturer in the LLM program of the University of Zürich and for the Europa Institut of the University of Zürich.

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Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.

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