

Brand Yourself

Create a personal brand to position yourself for success

Paris Hilton. Donald Trump. Martha Stewart.

Love 'em or hate 'em, the power and success of these individuals' personal brands is undisputable.

But personal branding is not just for the rich and famous. In today's digital kingdom, you can create your own compelling personal brand to:

- Differentiate yourself from other potential candidates
- Increase your visibility and credibility in the job market
- Occupy a unique and competitive position in a potential employer's mind
- Ultimately land the job you want.

So tell Paris Hilton to move over--it's your turn to make your mark. Position yourself for a more successful career by leveraging the power of personal branding.

Personal Branding 101

Much like corporate and product branding, a personal branding statement sums up your unique selling proposition (USP)--the unique benefit or value you offer a potential employer. Your branding statement sets you apart from your competitors and provides a compelling reason to hire you. As a general rule, this concise statement should communicate:

- your specialty (who you are)
- your service (what you do, and how you do it better or differently)
- your audience (whom you do it for)
- your leading attribute (the single most important skill you possess)

While your personal branding statement aims to influence potential employers' perceptions by emphasizing your strengths, be careful. A personal brand should be based on your REAL identity--who you are and what you can do--not just an external "image" you want to project (i.e., if your branding statement says that you speak fluent Portuguese and have superior design expertise, you'd better have the skills to back it up).

Discover Your Personal Brand

By definition, personal branding is the process by which you market yourself to others. But before you can sell yourself to someone else, you must thoroughly understand what you have to offer. So start the branding process with some introspection and audience analysis. Ask yourself:

- How do others describe you professionally?

- How do you describe yourself?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe your ideal career?
- What are your business standards and ethics?
- What can you offer an employer that others can't (i.e., what makes you different from other candidates)?
- What would you like to be known for?
- When it comes to your career, what motivates you and makes you passionate?
- Who is your audience (i.e., potential employers and/or recruiters)?
- What career opportunities are available (i.e., what positions are you targeting)?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you can begin to craft your personal branding statement.

Designing Your Personal Branding Statement

So how do you actually word your personal branding statement? It's not easy. In fact, figuring out exactly what to say is probably the most difficult--and yet most important--thing you'll do in your personal branding efforts.

But don't worry. Unlike a real brand on a cow's hide, you can change your personal brand statement as you refine your approach. Just make sure your initial branding statement is:

- short (30 words or less)
- accurate (says who you are, not who you want to be someday)
- unique (sets you apart from your competition)
- benefits-oriented (tells the employer what you could do for them)

To help get you started, here are a few sample personal brand statements:

I energize, focus and align manufacturing organizations, resulting in sustainable acceleration of processes, reduction in waste, and growth of profits.

I'm a seasoned administrative assistant whose specialty is client-phone relationship building, creating a solid bond with our clients that strengthens the sales link with my company.

I am a safety coordinator with strengths in training and program implementation that helped reduce workers' compensation claims by 37 percent over a four-year period for my current employer.

I develop employee referral programs that result in quality hires and have saved my employer \$90,000 in extra hiring costs.

I use the power of social media to help great companies recruit talented people, and to help talented people get noticed and move ahead.

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