

Would You Want to Work for YOU?

Four Tips to Help You See Your Leadership Personal Brand Through the Eyes of Others

The Starbucks brand of coffee can teach you a lot about your own brand as a leader. How? Well, consider this for a moment ... When coffee is in its natural coffee bean state, it's a commodity that sells for just 1-2¢ per cup. When you add packaging and a brand name to it and place it on a grocery store shelf, the price of that coffee goes up to 5-25¢ per cup. Throw in service and personality by offering that coffee at, say, Dunkin Donuts, and the price rises to around 75¢ to \$1.50 per cup.

But then, there's Starbucks coffee, which sells for \$2-\$5 per cup. How does Starbucks do that? And what does Starbucks have that those other cups of coffee don't?

It isn't just a better tasting cup of coffee. What Starbucks offers is something so much more than taste – it offers a rewarding coffee *experience*. When we buy a cup of Starbucks coffee, we're paying for the *experience* of taking a break during the day ... the *experience* of enjoying a jolt of java with friends ... the *experience* of relaxing with a mocha latte after a night at the theatre. It's those experiences that differentiate Starbucks from so many other coffee brands.

The same is true of you and your own leadership personal brand. If you want to earn more money, advance in your career, and keep moving up the corporate ladder, think about the *experience* you offer as a leader in the workplace. If you could step into the shoes of those you are leading, what would it feel like to be part of a team with you at the helm? In short, would you want to work for YOU?

Because you're not in your team's shoes, it can be difficult to answer that question. But if you don't, your leadership personal brand will suffer. To make sure your individual brand is bringing you success and growth in your career, you need to learn how others perceive, think, and feel about you as a leader at the office. Only then can you find out if your brand needs help. And that means getting regular, helpful feedback.

That can be easier said than done, of course. If no one is offering you feedback because of your heightened position, or if you don't feel you're getting honest feedback from subordinates, it's your responsibility to go after it. There is no better way to accelerate both your career and, ultimately, your company. Here are four tips to give you an idea of what it's like to work for you:

- 1. Use 360-degree feedback tools.** There are literally hundreds of them on the market, so choose carefully in order to find the one that will help you meet your specific objectives. For example, if you want to improve your leadership skills, use a leadership assessment tool like Leadership Agility 360. If you want to better manage your emotions on the job, try an emotional intelligence assessment like Emotional Capital Inventory (ECi 360). Ask to see an example of the report outcome you will receive, and check to see if you need a certified coach to administer the assessment.
- 2. Ask for feedback, regularly.** In a one-on-one environment, sit down and ask for feedback from your subordinates, your boss, and key colleagues. (If you try to have a group meeting for feedback, no one will be honest with you.) Let each individual know that you're sincere in your request and that you want candor. Listen intently, and write down what you hear. Don't allow yourself to become defensive no matter what is said. If you do, the exercise will backfire, and chances are you'll never receive honest feedback again. When they're finished, simply say "thank you" and nothing more.

Page 2: *Would You Want to Work for YOU? Four Tips to Help You See Your Leadership Personal Brand Through the Eyes of Others*

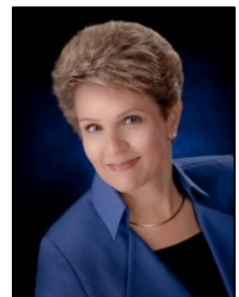
3. **Audio or videotape yourself** conducting meetings, then sit back and review them objectively. This can be a real eye-opener. As you watch or listen, put yourself in your team's position, and imagine what it felt like to be in that meeting with you. Are you communicating the leadership brand you want? If you find it difficult to assess the recordings, ask a trusted colleague for honest feedback.
4. After you've gathered all of your notes from your feedback and from watching and listening to recordings, **look for the common elements and themes**. Based on your learnings, what are the key behaviors that you want to focus on improving? Choose the top 3-4, then create an action plan to begin to change those behaviors. Find an executive coach if you feel at a loss as to how to put the feedback into action or if you feel you need extra motivation to change some non-productive habits.

Work on these changes every day, but don't expect immediate success. Long-lasting changes in behavior require time and persistence. Most of the behaviors you will want to change have been long-time habits, so you first need to become aware of when and how the behavior takes place. Then, you'll be in a position to stop yourself and do something different.

Even if the feedback stings in the beginning, you will soon discover the many rewards of strengthening your leadership personal brand. When you succeed in changing an ingrained limiting behavior, you feel a strong sense of accomplishment. And, the respect you receive from your team as a result of listening to their feedback is invaluable. They will feel empowered by the fact that you took their comments to heart, and you will become a great role model for how they can use feedback to improve themselves in the workplace, too. Only through strengthening your leadership personal brand can you continue to grow as a leader and further your career. That's how you enrich the experience of working with you and make yourself someone you'd be happy to have at the helm.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, dynamic trainer and Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including the *How YOU™ Are Like Shampoo* personal branding series and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.

With an MBA from Harvard Business School, Brenda's career has spanned more than two decades and has included developing mega brands for Procter & Gamble and Bristol-Myers Squibb across four continents and 50 countries.



Now, as President of Brand Development Associates (BDA) International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development. Brenda's client list includes companies such as Citibank, Microsoft, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, Deloitte, Hershey's, KFC, Kraft, Johnson & Johnson, Mattel, and Sheraton Hotels.

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