

Do You Need a Brand as a Leader?

Time and again, I've seen how branding can build stronger companies, catapult individual careers, and lead to increasingly greater achievements. In my years as a brander and marketer in Fortune 100 companies, I witnessed this phenomenon firsthand – both with corporate brands and personal brands.

Yes, branding works for *everyone* – companies, employees, first-time supervisors, middle managers, senior-level executives, entrepreneurs, job seekers, and even graduates fresh out of university.

This concept is *especially* powerful for executives because every leader has a specific brand that impacts his or her ability to lead effectively. It's what I call your Executive Leadership Brand—"The Trademarked YOU™®." Think of it this way: Nike and Starbucks have a "TM" after their names, so why shouldn't you? Place a ™ after *your* name, and think about what you want your Executive Leadership Brand to stand for.

If you find yourself resisting that advice or thinking, "Brenda, you've got me all wrong. I don't want or need a brand as a leader," well, here's the deal: Whether you want a brand or not, you already have one.

That's because your Executive Leadership Brand is *the way others perceive, think, and feel about you as a leader, compared with other leaders*. Since people at work already have perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about you, that means you are already branded, simply by virtue of being you at work.

The question then becomes: As a leader in your organization, do you have the brand you *want*? If not, it's your responsibility to take charge of defining and communicating the leadership brand you desire. Because when it comes to branding yourself, there's one thing about which I am absolutely positive: How well you manage that brand makes all the difference in your success or failure. You don't want to leave it to chance.

Just as companies painstakingly define their brands and communicate them in the marketplace so that they can have better control over how those brands are perceived by their target markets, so you, as a leader, can and should do the same in your workplace. Indeed, *without a brand, your chances of making it to the upper echelons of any organization are limited*.

Branding Equals Big Egos, Right?

If you're still resistant to this concept, maybe you're thinking, "But, Brenda, people already accuse executives of having big egos. Why would I want to do something like create a brand for myself that would cause others to think I'm even *more* egotistical?" That statement opens the door to one of the biggest myths about self-branding: that your brand is "all about you." Contrary to popular belief, developing an Executive Leadership Brand is *not* an ego exercise.

Remember: Your brand is how *others* perceive, think, and feel about you, so your brand's most important component isn't actually "you" at all. It's the "others" in your world who are doing the perceiving, the

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thinking, and the feeling. Without them, you can't even have a brand. It would be like the proverbial tree falling in the forest without anyone there to hear it.

By definition, leaders lead people, and that doesn't happen in a vacuum. So, while yes, you want to be authentic and not pretend to be someone you're not, you still have to get clear about how you come across to the people you lead. That requires taking into account on a regular basis the perceptions of your team members and everyone else at work.

Let me illustrate this by using the example of corporate brands. A corporate brand isn't really just about "the brand." It's about whether its target market will be interested in *buying* that brand. You can have the most revolutionary idea or product in the world, for example, but if consumers perceive it as undesirable, you might as well close up shop.

Similarly, if your Executive Leadership Brand is performing poorly, you will not reach your full potential. You'll have a difficult time leading others, maintaining a high-functioning work environment, retaining the best employees, and yes, advancing in your career.

Developing your Executive Leadership Brand requires knowing *what you want to stand for* as a leader and working constantly to communicate that brand effectively, while simultaneously taking key steps to avoid damaging it. And a fundamental aspect of branding yourself is becoming an excellent leader of people—someone others *want* to work for rather than *have* to work for.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, 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*.



In one of her recently released books, *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™? How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in Fortune 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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