

How Leaders Earn Brand-Loyalty for Life *The Top Five Behaviors That Can Damage Your Leadership Personal Brand*

All you have to do is look around you to know that brands are powerful. In fact, most people are so loyal to certain brands that they stick with them for life. If brand-name products can evoke that kind of loyalty, why can't people? Well, they can!

The truth is that we all have a personal brand whether we like it or not. Simply by being ourselves in the work place, others perceive, think, and feel about us in a certain way. The question is whether we have created the personal brand we *want*.

This is especially important for those who hold leadership positions. If you lead others, the way they perceive, think, and feel about you as a leader, in relation to other leaders, can make or break your short-term and long-term success. These "others" might consist of your subordinates, colleagues, superiors, or even entire divisions or corporations.

Your leadership personal brand impacts your image, your reputation, your relationships, and your performance. As a result, it will also impact your overall career and your finances. So, unless you create your desired leadership personal brand consciously, negative perceptions can undermine your best efforts.

There are many mistakes that leaders commonly make which can damage their personal brands. Let's take a look at five of the most potentially damaging:

1. **Not taking risks or accepting tough challenges.** When you reach a leadership position in any organization, it can be much too easy to rest on your laurels. If you have a lot of experience, you might become inclined to stick with what you know has worked in the past rather than try something new. This keeps you in a static place, however, without the opportunity for you – or the company - to grow. We all need challenges. As a leader, it's your job to find them and lead your team through them.
2. **Not speaking up when you disagree with top management.** Even leaders have a difficult time speaking up to superiors. It's natural to worry about the reactions of top management when you disagree with their decisions, but it also hurts your leadership personal brand to hold back and keep your opinions to yourself. Most of the time, if you're diplomatic about it, your input will be appreciated – even if management's decision stays the same. Most leaders are expected to offer ideas about how to solve problems or improve operations. You will be respected for making your views known.
3. **Worrying about being "liked," not respected.** A good leader is both liked *and* respected. It's a difficult balance, but it's an important one. If you worry too much about being liked, you probably aren't making enough tough decisions to lead others effectively. If, on the other hand, you worry too much about being respected and don't care about being liked,

- chances are you won't be able to garner the support you need from your team to succeed. They may even begin to feel victimized by your leadership style, making it hard to retain employees. The best leadership personal brand is one that straddles these two poles in – being liked and being respected – in as balanced a way as possible.
4. **Fearing feedback, both giving and receiving.** A lot of leaders come to a place where they stop moving up the ladder either because they aren't good at coaching others or they've stopped being coachable themselves. The best leaders are both good at coaching their teams and also at accepting regular feedback, no matter how high up in the organization they are. Keeping an open mind and recognizing there is always room to improve yourself is key, and giving your team feedback is the best way to make sure your people – and the company – are growing, too. So, strengthen your leadership personal brand by getting comfortable with both giving *and* receiving feedback, and everybody wins.
 5. **Using destructive language on the job.** Too many leaders fail to pay attention to the way they speak. Destructive language – even if it's intended as “funny” - has an impact on everyone, including yourself. It's a bit of an epidemic in modern society to speak negatively and to complain, but it presents a very poor personal brand, particular for leaders. It can lower morale in the work environment and undermine the success of your team. If you don't believe in yourself or your people, how can they believe in themselves? If they are derided for past failures, they may become so afraid of making mistakes that they stop moving forward at all. So, begin to notice how you speak, and if talking negatively is a habit you've developed, start to break it. Figure out how to turn negatives into positives – it will make a world of difference.

Leaders are in a position to inspire and motivate others, and one of the best ways you can become a truly extraordinary leader is to create a successful leadership personal brand.

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In her coaching practice, speeches, and corporate learning programs, 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 a large part 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, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through a unique, creative, and practical combination of leadership and branding. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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