

TLA Mirror

Reflecting your membership

The 21st Century Lawyer: Building a (Personal) Brand

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The Definition

The first step to building a brand is understanding what a “brand” is. As a professional coach and lawyer, I like marketing guru Seth Godin’s definition the best:

*A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another.*¹

In my view, Godin captures the shift that has occurred in the world of branding. Branding is no longer just about a logo. Brands are about the experiences that are conjured up in one’s mind when they think about a particular product or service. That’s why the phrase “personal branding” is so popular these days. It’s about people interacting and connecting with one another. It’s about relationships.

The Relevance of a Personal Brand

So much of what a lawyer does is suited to developing a personal brand. The lawyer-client relationship is fundamental to the practice of law. No doubt clients expect nothing less than “the standard of a competent lawyer.”² Clients also care about a lawyer’s bedside manner. Some lawyers build practices entirely on referrals. HOW DOES THAT HAPPEN? Chances are these lawyers display both “warmth” and “competence.”

If you’ve just glossed over the word “warmth,” think again (or think about it differently). These two perceptions not only drive our emotions and behaviours toward other people, they also influence consumer behaviour. Research by customer loyalty expert Chris Malone and social psychologist Susan Fiske³ shows that 82% of consumer behaviour can be predicted by the perception (or lack) of “warmth” and “competence.” In other words, people tend to make two kinds of quick judgments before engaging a service:

- 1) What are the intentions of this service-provider toward me? (warmth)
- 2) How capable is this service-provider of carrying out those intentions? (competence)

Clarifying Your “Warmth” as a Lawyer

If we know that (potential) clients will likely arrive at these two judgments of us, then it is wise to verify our own understanding with how we are being perceived. Let’s focus on the “warmth” category. We are not talking about WHAT YOU DO AS A LAWYER, but about WHY YOU DO

¹ http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2009/12/define-brand.html

² R. 2.01(2), *Rules of Professional Conduct*

³ *The Human Brand: How we Relate to People, Products, and Companies* (2013: Jossey-Bass™ - A Wiley Brand, San Francisco, California)

IT or WHY YOU DO IT THAT WAY. I find it helpful to think of warmth in terms of personal values. Identifying your values is another way of describing your intentions or the things that matter most to you.

To determine your unique set of values, think of a moment that stands out for you in your practice, and ask yourself: **WHY WAS THAT MOMENT SO IMPORTANT TO ME?**

When reflecting upon such a moment, one of my clients discovered that **RESPECT, CONNECTION, COMMUNICATION, APPRECIATION AND CREATIVITY⁴** are most important to him. After surveying trusted colleagues about their perceptions of him, however, my client realized that his “intentions” were not always being conveyed. This gave him insight into why certain professional relationships were not working well. At times, he placed too much emphasis on his value of “respect.” So when working with a senior partner, for example, he would mute his personality to the point that clients would express concern over his lack of “warmth.” With this clarity, he was able to build his personal brand by balancing his values going forward and managing people’s expectations of him.

HOW WILL YOU BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND?

Paulette partners with lawyers to develop their personal brand whether as employees, free agents or small law firm owners. For more information, please visit Paulette’s website at www.paulettepommells.com or contact her at paulette@paulettepommells.com.

⁴ Feel free to look up the definitions of these values/words, and see if any resonate with you.