



Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Executive Branding



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*Finding Exceptional Talent.
Building Exceptional Organizations.*

Contributors

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Anita Shuper

Anita Shuper is a writer, researcher, and business consultant. With a background in the arts, science, and business, including an MBA from the Rotman School of Management, she has written on topics ranging from language to lasers to local entrepreneurship. Anita regularly contributes her communications expertise to projects and programs in not-for-profit and startup organizations. Her current focus is developing career management resources for students and executives.

Table of Contents

Point of View	3
W5H	4
Attitude	5
Plan: Creating SMART Goals	5
Execution: 1. Define your brand	6
Execution: 2. Build your brand	6
Execution: 3. Be your brand	7
Top 10 Mistakes	8
Titles in the Career Transition Series	9

Point of View

Executive branding is not an optional exercise. As an executive in transition, you have much to prove if you want to get hired. Your brand will distinguish between winning your desired job and continuing to search. The good news is that as an executive, you have a wealth of high-level skills and experience to start defining, building, marketing, and living your brand.

“Personal branding” and “executive branding” have become buzzwords, leaving some wondering whether it’s worthwhile. If its perceived importance will fade in time, what’s the point of engaging in it? The truth is, no matter what you call it, it’s here to stay. Many executives do not work on their brands, and even those who do aren’t always effective. This gives you an advantage if you commit to building and implementing your executive brand.

A solid executive brand communicates your value to prospective employers regarding your strengths, qualifications, and interests. Your brand will differentiate you in the marketplace, allowing employers to evaluate you as a candidate even before meeting you. You want to ensure that what you’re communicating via your brand sends the right message to the right people.

Quite simply, your brand is who you are. It’s also about who people think you are. Perception is reality, so you want to ensure your reputation is good. The best brand is authentic – you can’t sustain being somebody you’re not for any time. Furthermore, people can sense insincerity, so “pretending” won’t do you any good. Take pride in who you are and what you’ve accomplished. If there’s a gap between who you are and who you want to be, take steps to make the change.

Bill Holland

W5H

Why?

Executive branding differentiates you in the marketplace. It's a way for you to stand out among other professionals with a similar background and profile, but haven't defined their brand or put it into action. It's a way for you to showcase your unique strengths and skills to the world and, specifically, to potential employers.

What?

The top three things you need to do are: (1) have the right attitude, (2) make a plan and (3) take action. A good attitude will put you in the right frame of mind, a plan will keep you on track, and executing that plan is the key to success.

Who?

You can get excellent guidance from business coaches or mentors about developing and marketing your brand. The most important person in the process, however, is you. It's your brand and your responsibility to define, build and implement it. After all, you know yourself best. It will take some honest reflection, contemplation, and analysis, but only you will know the answers to the questions you'll ask yourself during the branding process.

When?

It's never too late to start working on your brand, but the earlier you can get to it, the better. It's not something that can be accomplished overnight, and it's also not something that is ever "finished." You will continue to work on your brand throughout your career. It will evolve as you acquire new skills, succeed, and find new interests. Keeping your brand fresh is an ongoing exercise.

Where?

Your brand follows you wherever you go. You should be mindful of how you present yourself in all situations, from personal to professional interactions. Living it will be easy if you are authentic and genuine to your brand. Your brand also lives independently of you, as does your reputation worldwide and in all your marketing communications, including your resume and professional biography. It's also represented by your online presence, such as through your LinkedIn profile and activity.

How?

It's all about execution. With a plan in place, the "how" is a commitment to doing it. In this guide, we've set out the following goals for you to start working on: (1) defining your brand, (2) building your brand, and (3) being your brand. If you focus on these at a very minimum, you will be off to a good start. It's up to you to supplement the activities we suggest with others that make sense for you. There's no shortage of resources in bookstores and online to keep moving you forward.

Attitude

Attitude sets the stage for executive branding. If you don't have the right attitude, you can't fake it – but you can change it.

You have to be in the right mindset to approach the exercise of creating and developing your brand. It's essential to be optimistic about who you are and what you stand for and recognize the value of representing this as your executive brand. Negativity will only block your progress. This doesn't mean you can't be appropriately critical during the process – you must be. To develop a truly authentic brand, you must be honest with yourself. Acknowledge your strengths with humility, and recognize your weaknesses as something to accept or be open to improving.

Authenticity and a good attitude will also strengthen you against critics. There will always be those who don't relate to your brand or are convinced that your activity is self-serving. Some may even envy you or want to undermine your efforts and successes. Don't try to win everybody over. Focus on connecting with people who are open to what you have to offer. Being grounded in your values and presenting yourself and your brand optimistically will attract your desired audience.

Plan: Creating SMART Goals

With the right attitude, the next step is to make a plan. Having a roadmap to keep you focused and on track is essential. Without a plan, you'll engage in aimless activities and wonder why you're not reaching your ultimate goal of finding a job.

A complicated plan will just prevent you from getting things done, so keep it simple. Overplanning invariably leads to underdoing. However, to be efficient and effective, you must spend some time upfront identifying your goals and creating a workable action plan.

An excellent way to approach your goals is to make them SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-driven.) On the following pages, we review a number of goals and provide some advice to help you:

1. Define your brand
2. Build your brand
3. Be your brand

Execution: 1. Define your brand

Defining your brand is critical, but it's not always easy. It requires self-awareness and honesty. While many elements come into play when determining your brand, you have to be able to summarize it clearly and concisely so that people can understand it immediately.

Start with the bigger picture. What is your vision for yourself? What purpose do you want to serve? What outcome do you want? Where are you now about that? If there's a big gap between who you are now and what you want your brand to be, plan to close that gap. However, it's essential to be realistic. If you define your brand as something completely unattainable, redefine your brand.

Get feedback from others before you take your brand to market. You can't effectively define your brand in isolation. Run your ideas by people you trust who know you well – friends, family, colleagues, a coach, or a mentor. Another perspective is critical.

Execution: 2. Build your brand

You build your brand by demonstrating your expertise. This means sharing knowledge and creating opportunities to show people who you are and what you do. It also means learning from others, developing skills, and earning necessary credentials.

You must continuously develop your skills to keep up with marketplace changes and enrich your brand. A healthy attitude toward learning will keep you sharp and ensure you continually have something new to offer others. Embrace continuous learning to strengthen your brand.

In addition to hard skills, accumulating credentials is essential for your brand. They include academic degrees, certificates, and professional designations. Credentials give you credibility and indicate a commitment to stay current, improve your knowledge, and build your professional profile. While formal education is a great way to earn credentials, there are other ways. These include volunteering, participating on boards, and joining professional organizations.

Testimonials are endorsements from other people that can be used to support your brand. They can be in many forms, including written or verbal references, recommendations, or case studies. The important thing is that they speak to your capabilities and provide brand credibility.

Execution: 3. Be your brand

If you've developed an authentic brand that reflects your values and who you are, "being your brand" will be second nature. You'll have to engage in marketing and continuously improve to move your brand along. What you need is exposure to allow your brand to thrive.

There are many ways to get exposure. You can market your brand through traditional networking, making appearances, writing articles, social media, and more. While people might stumble upon you by accident, chances are they won't find you unless they're looking for you. Create compelling reasons for people to seek out or be responsive to your brand. It's also important to look and act the part. Be polished and professional at all times. Develop different versions of your branding pitch so you'll be ready to promote yourself anytime.

If you want to "be your brand," a good approach is to practice the five Cs of executive branding. These include clarity, consistency, constancy, confidence, and credibility. Align your branding activities with these five Cs to ensure you establish and maintain a robust and effective brand.

Top 10 Mistakes

- 1. You are not defining your brand.** People won't know what you're about if you don't have a clearly defined brand. You may appear to be all things to all people or nothing to nobody. Do some personal and professional reflection to determine who you are, what you do, and what you stand for.
- 2. Having vague career objectives.** As an executive in transition, you're looking for your next opportunity. Your branding efforts should be in line with your career objectives. Understand what you're looking for so that you can develop and market your brand accordingly.
- 3. You are not taking advantage of LinkedIn.** Much of your online executive branding efforts can be done via LinkedIn. It's a great vehicle to showcase your skills and experience, but it also allows you to learn from others, share your knowledge, and establish yourself as an expert in your field.
- 4. You are networking ineffectively.** The way to get your name out there is through networking. When you meet people in person or interact with them online, you should represent the brand you've worked hard to develop. Take advantage of networking opportunities to perpetuate your brand.
- 5. You are not developing your skills.** Make an effort to strengthen and evolve your brand. Acquiring and practicing new skills are critical to grow as a leader. New credentials will keep you current and indicate to others that you're serious about your actions.
- 6. Not marketing yourself.** People rarely get "discovered." There's effort in getting people to know what you're all about. Marketing yourself is an integral component of executive branding and something you should get comfortable with if you want to see results.
- 7. You are not having testimonials.** You gain credibility through testimonials. What others say about you can tremendously impact your brand, good or bad. So, getting testimonials from people who have benefited from your skills and services is a valuable tool in your executive branding kit.
- 8. Not getting feedback.** You are responsible for defining and developing your brand. However, your perspective is not enough. The insight of others regarding your brand can be eye-opening and helpful in communicating and improving your brand.
- 9. You are not having the right audience.** You may have what you think is a spectacular brand, but are you communicating it to the right audience? Please make sure the people you are reaching out to are the ones who would be interested in your brand and the knowledge, skills, and services that come along with it.
- 10. You are not practicing the 5 Cs.** Clarity, consistency, constancy, commitment, and confidence are critical to presenting a robust and effective brand. Learn what these concepts mean and remind yourself to practice them in your executive branding activity.

Titles in the Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Executive Branding

As an executive, it's essential to establish and develop your brand. Nobody else will do it for you! In this guide, we'll introduce you to the "5 Cs" of executive branding: clarity, consistency, constancy, credibility, and confidence.

A Brief Guide to Job Search Networking

Networking is an integral part of your job search strategy. It's also easier than most people think! In this guide, we'll get you started on some essential networking activities, including building your base network, preparing your pitches, getting set up on LinkedIn, and having face-to-face meetings.

A Brief Guide to Writing Your Resume

Resumes open doors. They can also close them. To be considered for the opportunities you want, it's up to you to make a great first impression with your resume. In this guide, we'll get you started on writing your chronological resume, online resume, and one-page biography.

A Brief Guide to Interviewing

While resumes open doors, interviews get offers. You must demonstrate that your skills, attitude, and personality make you the right person for the job. In this guide, we'll get you started on preparing for a winning interview.

A Brief Guide to Job Offer Negotiation

Negotiating is both an art and a science. People who are uncomfortable about negotiating need more confidence because they need experience. In this guide, we'll start you on how to best prepare and practice for a win-win job offer negotiation.

A Brief Guide to Executive Onboarding

Getting the job is excellent, but succeeding in it is what matters. Whether or not your new organization has a formal onboarding program, consider yourself in charge of the process. In this guide, we'll get you started on several critical onboarding activities to set you up for success.

Start Mandrake's FREE! Career Transition Program by [clicking here](#).