



A professional appearance that strengthens your authentic brand.

## **How To Be *THE* Employee *THEY* Just Can't Live Without**

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In today's economic climate, I am often asked, "What can I do to be sure that I am seen as a valued employee, one the company can not afford to lose?" A lot of people feel that their company has let them down when it comes to career development and are nervous about how they will fare if the company makes cuts. The answer: "It is your responsibility to manage your career."

So what can you do? Career development has been traditionally measured by the training courses attended and positions held. As such, traditional training tends to address areas where there is a perceived hard skill deficit. While this deals with specific competencies, it does not always give you the requisite tools for standing out in an organization. Most career development programs fail to address the true reason that employees are deemed as "keepers."

Personal branding is the communication of your unique strengths, skills, values, and passions. It is the entire package of experience, education, results, and verbal and non-verbal behaviors combined with your physical appearance and what you choose to surround yourself with. The projection of these traits helps you stand out from your peers or competitors and clearly communicate your unique value to all with whom you associate. Your personal brand becomes your reputation, and over time, it becomes synonymous with how people describe you.

Highly recognized and valued corporate brands tend to thrive during economic slowdowns. Personal brands are no different. Employees with a strong personal brand are perceived as those who can help take the company to the next level. In good times and in bad, they will have management bending over backwards to find the right job for them. How can you stand out? What unique ingredients do you contribute to your organization? What differentiates you to tip the scales in your favor when management is sitting behind closed doors deciding whom to promote?

Personal branding is about identifying the qualities that differentiate you and projecting your authenticity. In the May/June issue of *Psychology Today*, "After reviewing several centuries' worth of philosophical and psychological literature," Michael Kernis, a social psychologist at the University of Georgia in Athens and graduate student Brian Goldman described the "technical description of authenticity as 'the unimpeded operation of one's true or core self in one's daily enterprise.'" Conclusion? To be authentic, you really need to know yourself. Do you have a clear understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, skills, and goals? Is your behavior congruent with your values? It is important that you stand for something—even at the risk that others may not agree with or reject you.

Before you can communicate your value to your employer, you need to have clarity on how you are perceived, and what you want. Do you know how your self-perceptions differ from the opinions formed by those around you? Everyone has an idea of how they might be perceived, but do you really know what others see as your attributes, skills, strengths, and weaknesses? This is at the core of the personal branding process. It



helps you to see the complete picture and empowers you to manage how others view you. Once you've developed this clarity you can begin to communicate your unique value through all that you do.

To complete the package, you also need to work on your image. Image management is one aspect that enhances your personal brand. It is the purposeful choice of wardrobe and behavior to affect the image and impression others form during professional and social interactions—the physical and visual packaging of the “professional you.” A strong personal brand and polished professional presence makes an impact on clients, colleagues, and management and is remembered even when not physically present. Your wardrobe, grooming, and resultant presence lets people know nonverbally that you pay attention to all aspects of the work you do. Looking the part—even when you're not on the clock—strengthens your brand when people see that you are consistent both on and off the job. A successful image increases the number of opportunities presented to you, which in turn will increase your chances of becoming successful.

Below are some things to take into account that may help answer the question: “What can you do?”

- Increase your understanding of self and of how you are perceived. To be certain, you may want to have a professional assessment done.
- Assess your wardrobe, grooming, and behavior and make sure they not only positively reflect where you are but where you want to be.
- Take stock of your education, experience, and results. Make sure you are differentiating your self from others who do the same thing you do and that the differences are visible to those people who need to know about you.

Take advantage of this economic slowdown by developing your personal brand and fine-tuning your image. Sure, it takes a little time and energy, but the return on your investment will definitely be worth it!

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