

# TO BRAND OR NOT TO BRAND? IS THE QUESTION.

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One of my ex-marketing students came to visit me weeks ago, and she was complaining about her problems in the workplace. Well, there were rather common issues that surround us everyday. Underperforming, peer conflicts, biases and office politics, with everyone thinking his or hers the biggest problem ever happened. I started with lending my pair of patient ears; after half an hour of 'soul sharing', I sadly found out that she is still in a state of depression. Out of desperation, I tried to rationalize using some of the basic concepts and examples in marketing (not trying to act smart, but this is one area that I know better).

You may find the basic concept of fulfilling target markets' needs and wants in any of the marketing book, and it is also the basic knowledge that 'target market' refers to our 'existing or potential customer', in other words, people. In marketing courses, we learnt to be better off compared to our competitors, no matter in terms of our product, services, skills, knowledge or employees. In order to be different, we have to identify the points of different and fully utilized it to create competitive advantage. In many cases, branding strategies are used to achieve this objective. (Well, it doesn't take a genius to understand the above concept, yet how to apply what we have learnt in the book into reality, would distinguish a winner from losers).

How to be different and better off compared to the others? What if we are not only selling product or services, but people? People as in all walks of life, the person who just pass you by, even you, yourself.

The essence of creating point of different is to look at your self as a marketer would look at a product or service. You are the product that your bosses, colleagues or subordinates consider buying. How do you want to package or brand yourself to be likeable and admired by everyone? Self branding is a learnt skill, and like what we believe that good salesmen are not born, good self branding strategy can be applied to everyone.

I have come across an article by Dave Dolak on 'Self marketing, self branding and self promotion' and there are a few points which I think would benefit my depressed student. Point number one, let people in your organization know when you meet with success. Not to boast around but to send out signal to the others so that they are aware of your successes. Point number two, convert your success stories and expertise into one-page case studies or tip sheets that have an appeal to a broader audience. You have to document your process so others can repeat it for themselves. (This in fact is one of the best selling techniques that I teach my students in Sales Management class, to learn from the best salesman and repeat what he or she is doing until you did it).

Point number three, look for opportunity to speak to groups. Public speaking is not only boost up your courage, it is also one of the best way to let people know about what you do and how you do it and be benefited from the information. The most important point, it put you at an expert level and enhance your visibility. When people are aware of how and what you did well, they will come to you eventually.

Point number four, always put teams' accomplishment ahead of your own. Try to share your credit and soon your name will be associated with the winning team and people within and outside your organization will notice.

Point number five, maintain active network with others in your profession and industry. Keep track of what other people doing or who is going where. You should make sure that you stay visible among these people by sharing your stories and listening to others.

Point number six, keep score of your accomplishment using a written list or updating your resume frequently. Resume should not be treated only as an interview tool. It should be a continuous effort of updating our resume as people would tend to forget about ones accomplishment if not being reminded.

To some people, self branding might sound 'manipulative' and 'not being oneself'. 'I would prefer to be myself' they say, or 'It is too tired to live up to people expectation'. However, one has to realize that we are in competition with more people than we can think of. It might not be those from the same or similar profession. In marketing term, we are all in the 'generic competition' which competes with anyone that any boss would like to hire. However, talent and smarts are overrated. We all know of talented people who are not performing well professionally. Bear in mind the four basic rules of self branding: be different, be focused, be authentic and resonate in the market and you will definitely be able to stand out in a crowd.