

Five Key Takeaways from *The Brand Called You*

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1. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc.

Take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that's true for anyone who's interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work. Regardless of age, position, or business, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.

Thinking of yourself as a brand also demands that you act like a brand. Two key characteristics to build are trust and value. It's important people know they can trust and rely on you because you do what you say you're going to do. You walk the talk. In addition, demonstrate how you add value to your stakeholders and school community.

2. What makes you different?

To start thinking like your own favorite brand manager, ask yourself "What is it that makes me different? Start by identifying the qualities or characteristics that make you distinctive from your competitors — or your colleagues. What have you done to make yourself stand out? What would your colleagues or your students say is your greatest and clearest strength?

You can also use the "feature-benefit model" that compares the brand called You to others? Ask yourself: What do I do that adds remarkable, measurable, distinguished, distinctive value? Forget your job description. Ask yourself: What do I do that I am most proud of? If you're going to be a brand, you've got to become relentlessly focused on what you do that adds value, that you're proud of, and most important, that you can shamelessly take credit for.

3. What's the pitch for You?

No matter how dedicated, effective, and talented you are, you still have to market the heck out of your brand — to students, colleagues, supervisors, and your virtual network of associates. For most branding campaigns, the first step is visibility. Sign up for an extra project inside your organization, just to introduce yourself to new colleagues and showcase your skills — or work on new ones. If those ideas don't appeal, try teaching a class at a community college, in an adult education program, or in your own organization.

The second important thing to remember about your personal visibility campaign is: it all matters. When you're promoting brand You, everything you do — and everything you choose not to do — communicates the value and character of the brand. Everything from the way you handle phone conversations to the email messages you send to the way you conduct business in a meeting is part of the larger message you're sending about your brand.

The key to any personal branding campaign is “word-of-mouth marketing.” Your network of friends, colleagues, clients, and customers is the most important marketing vehicle you've got; what they say about you and your contributions is what the market will ultimately gauge as the value of your brand. So the big trick to building your brand is to find ways to nurture your network of colleagues.

4. What's the real power of You?

If you want to grow your brand, you've got to come to terms with power — your own. Use your influence power. Be known for making the most significant contribution in your particular area. It's reputational power. Remember that power is largely a matter of perception. If you want people to see you as a powerful brand, act like a credible leader. When you're thinking like brand You, you don't need org-chart authority to be a leader. The fact is you are a leader. You're leading You!

One key to growing your power is to recognize the simple fact that we now live in a project world. A project-based world is ideal for growing your brand: projects exist around deliverables, they create measurables, and they leave you with braggables. Project World makes it easier for you to assess — and advertise — the strength of brand You. Your career is built on the projects you've delivered and the braggables you can take credit for.

5. A new kind of loyalty

Today loyalty is the only thing that matters. But it isn't blind loyalty to the company. It's loyalty to your colleagues, loyalty to your team, loyalty to your project, loyalty to your customers, and loyalty to yourself. As long as you're learning, growing, building relationships, and delivering great results, it's good for you and it's great for the company.

How can you get important feedback to assess your brand's value? Put together your own “user's group.” Ask for honest, helpful feedback on your performance, your growth, your value. It's the only way to know what you would be worth on

the open market. It's not disloyalty to "them"; it's responsible brand management for brand You — which also generates credit for them. A career is now a checkerboard. It's full of moves that go sideways, forward, slide on the diagonal, even go backward when that makes sense. (It often does.) A career is a portfolio of projects that teach you new skills, gain you new expertise, develop new capabilities, grow your colleague set, and constantly reinvent you as a brand.

No matter what you're doing today, there are four things you've got to measure yourself against. First, you've got to be a great teammate and a supportive colleague. Second, you've got to be an exceptional expert at something that has real value. Third, you've got to be a broad-gauged visionary — a leader, a teacher, a farsighted "imagineer." Fourth, you've got to be a businessperson — you've got to be obsessed with pragmatic outcomes.