

The Bridge to Your Brand

Likeability
Marketability
Credibility

S. Renee

FOREWORD BY
KEITH R. WYCHE

A There Is More Inside™ Product

The Bridge to Your Brand
Likeability Marketability Credibility

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There Is More Inside
*Personal Essentials Needed for Living a
Power-Packed Life*

The Bridge is dedicated to:
My sister, *Wanda Marie Smith-Barclay*

You are one of the most likeable people I know. You have been sent to this planet to be the bridge that leads people to love through laughter. Intuitive, funny, and generous, you love deeply and give liberally.

Out side of our parents, you're one of the most credible people I know, and the only person on earth I'd go to war with knowing you'd show up on time, do what you said you would, and no questions asked, *have my back*.

Now, that's a brand to brag about!
I love you, Sis

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A gigantic “*Thank You*” to the special people who love, surround, and support me and my outlandish dream to kiss the world with the voice of love and self-empowerment.

- My parents, *William J. Smith, Sr. & Shirley M. Taylor-Smith* whose brand is as tight as they come: “We’ll be there for our daughter no matter what—praying, uplifting, and encouraging her to be her best and do what she’s been sent to this planet to do and become.”
- My *Aunt Joan Draine-Burris*. You love me as a daughter and treat me like a sister. Glad we’re on the same path.
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- My brother *Joseph*. You're committed to the cause. Like the undercurrent of a river you're always moving; quietly serving without the need for acknowledgment.
- My brother *Mark*. Your serious interest and commitment to follow my message astonishes me. You excitedly watch television interviews and training videos, listen to radio interviews, and read my manuscripts. Then, you provide a detailed, analytical critique of my work. Someone has to have the courage to do it.
- My brother-in-law *Thaddeus Barclay*. It seems that when things get backed up, just in the nick of time you call, asking "How can I help?"
- My brother *William Jr. and my nephews and nieces*. Glad you're leaving footprints in the sand.

- And to *you, the reader*. The Bridge was written for YOU! Six years have passed since the release of *There Is More Inside*, and for the last six years I heard: *S. Renee, when are you going to write your next book?* I thought about this new journey we would take together every year since we first met. Sometimes I thought about you for months at a time. In my mind, I would rehearse what we shared during workshops, private sessions, conferences, or chatting on the street.

Based on those experiences, I wanted to provide you with information that would help you to step higher, move faster, and feel better about who you are, your life's journey, and your personal and professional relationships. This is it—*The Bridge to Your Brand Likeability, Marketability, Credibility*. A bridge provides safe and swifter travel from one side to the next. Fortunately, bridges don't have to be everywhere—just in locations where conditions are impossible or too dangerous to travel. You know where you need bridges in your life. In those places, lay out the information in this book to help you cross over.

Remember, I am with you. I wish you safe travels across *The Bridge*.

~ S. Renee

Foreword by

KEITH R. WYCHE

President & CEO, Cub Foods

More than ever, to enjoy a successful career, build a lasting and meaningful relationship, or to even have a sense of inner peace requires introspection and planning. Given the competitive nature of the business world, the stress and demands of family life, and the desire for “drama-free” relationships, we all are looking for something or someone who adds value and meaning to our lives.

As I began my personal transition from “success to significance,” I began to understand the extreme importance of being “known” for something. Too often we spend our lives like a ship without a rudder unsure of who we are, what we stand for, and why we were put on this earth. Conversely, at the same time, we are attracted to those who have a keen sense of purpose, know their value, and are secure in their own skin.

A few years back, the term “Personal Branding” came into vogue. For many of us, it was an obscure term that we struggled to understand. We more clearly understood the meaning of brand when it came to products or companies. In my thirty-plus years in corporate America, I’ve been blessed to work for companies whose brands are highly respected. To this day when people

learn that I once worked for IBM and AT&T there is an assumption of competence that I enjoy. In part, it's because of who those companies are, and what their brands stand for.

However, in a personal sense, few of us really grasped the importance of having our own, individual brand. Just as a BMW is known as the "Ultimate Driving Machine," and the Volvo brand is associated with "safety," each of us, whether we know it or not, has a brand image. People make decisions about us, promote us, date us, marry us, or befriend us, based upon our personal brand. Likewise, they fire us, break up with us, "de-friend," and divorce us if our brand does not live up to our brand "promise." In a nutshell, does who we "really" are match who we claim to be?

More often than not, most of us do not fully comprehend what it takes to understand, develop, and manage our personal brand. We spend years on our jobs working hard, performing well, but not receiving the pay, recognition, or rewards we deserve. Not because we aren't good professionals, but because we have spent little time cultivating our brand. We waste our most precious commodity—time—on people and relationships that end in disappointment. Not because we (or they) are bad people, but because we don't fully understand our brand and embrace people who value and appreciate what we have to offer.

Life is a journey, filled with adventure and experiences. We travel from place to place, from one adventure to the next,

crossing bridges that take us from where we are to where we want to be. To take such a journey without secure knowledge of who you are, why you are here, and what you have to offer leads many of us to a bridge to nowhere.

Fortunately, we have S. Renee to help us navigate this journey. As a life coach, seasoned professional, and a leading authority on personal branding, S. Renee has blessed us with a roadmap to creating a brand that contains the three most critical elements in branding: likeability, marketability, and credibility. I have had the good fortune of not only sharing the stage with S. Renee, but also, more importantly, being helped by her insight, wisdom, and knowledge in this all-important area—personal branding.

Every day when you walk outside your door, your brand goes before you. It speaks for you when you are not in the room. It defends you when you are attacked by the uniformed or the “haters” that life brings your way. It comforts you when failure rears its head (and it will). Most of all, it sustains and defines you in an ever-changing world.

I encourage you to take this journey called life and enjoy it to the fullest. As you do, allow S. Renee to help you navigate its difficult terrains, lead you through the expected and unexpected topographies, and help you create YOUR personal brand! If you allow it, *The Bridge to Your Brand* will help you achieve more than you ever thought possible, be more than you ever imagined, and give the world more than you knew you had to offer.

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CHAPTER ONE

PRINCIPLES FOR PERSONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT

DO YOU HAVE A BRAND?

It is a cold winter Sunday morning. I'm running 20 minutes late. Church starts at 11 a.m. It is 11 a.m. I still have to pick up a child I'm mentoring who lives 15 minutes away. I arrive at his home. Instead of sending my usual text "I'm here," I anxiously, but gently blow the horn. He walks to the car, opens the door, and jumps in. While pulling the seatbelt, he says, "Ms. Renee, you are the only person that trusts me."

Showing no emotion, yet completely shocked by his eyebrow-raising statement, I wait to hear the click sound of the seatbelt that lets me know it's okay to begin to back out of the driveway. As I put the car in reverse I'm suspiciously wondering: Am I about to get punked by a seven-year old? Shifting to a mindset lacking emotion or judgment, I asked, "Why do you say that?" Without hesitation he said, "Because every time something

happens, my mom asks me what happened, but when I tell her she doesn't believe me." Trying to be objective, yet wiser than the mini man, I threw out another question. "So why doesn't she believe you?" I don't know, he replied.

I understood his bewilderment. Like what many of my adult clients face, this young child's quandary illustrated a classic personal branding issue based on past events and behaviors. I searched my mental database looking for an age appropriate way to explain his problem and how he could solve it.

After serious contemplation, I couldn't decide. Hesitant to guide him from pure assumption that he had created some trust challenges that needed correcting, I waited to collect more data. Driving on to our destination, I decided that reassuring him with a list of people who trusted him would suffice for the moment. I did, however, bookmark his statement intending to revisit it when I could best serve him.

Later that day we went to his favorite place, McDonald's. After eating a six-piece Chicken McNugget Happy Meal, a cherry pie, and drinking some chocolate milk, he claimed he was still hungry. Surprised, I asked, "Are you sure?" Nodding his head up and down I continued, "What would you like?" He pointed to an oversized color poster hanging on the window that advertised a 10-piece Chicken McNugget for \$1.99. "I want that," he said energetically. "It's only a dollar ninety-nine." I didn't offer to buy it for him right away because I wanted to give myself more

time to think and make a good decision.

Finally I asked, “And what else?” He added, “A small fry.” After some savvy seven-year old negotiation, I silently opened my purse and pulled out my wallet. Looking for \$3 for the \$2.99 meal, I began explaining to him how to go to the counter, place his order, and pay the cashier. Watching closely from afar, I heard the cashier say, “You don’t have enough money.” Thinking that I could have made a mistake and not wanting him to feel embarrassed, I rushed over to find out where I went wrong in totaling $\$1.99 + \$1 = \$2.99$.

Puzzled by the miscount, I looked probingly into the eyes of the cashier and asked, “He doesn’t have enough money?” She confidently replied, “He ordered a 10-piece Chicken McNuggets, a small fry—and a smoothie.”

I smiled at her, peered down at the mini man, and gave him my you’ve-been-naughty look. I requested that she remove the smoothie from the order. I then walked slowly back to the dining area to wait patiently and *wisely* for him. As I perused my mental database again for the best way to handle this defining moment, I suddenly remembered the statement he had made earlier. But before I could say one word, the 4’2” fella hopped up in the seat and cleverly declared that the smoothie was for me. “I wanted to surprise you,” he announced.

I thanked him for his attempt at generosity. Then I carefully constructed an illustration that explained why surprising

someone with a gift by spending their money on what he believed they wanted failed to exhibit genuine kindness. I also revisited his opening statement for the day, “Ms. Renee, you are the only person that trusts me.” This led to his first free coaching session on personal branding and its impact on his present and future relationships and endeavors.

If you are like him, you may not realize that you have a brand that you’ve been consciously or unconsciously building since you came to this planet. It’s the reason you were treated a particular way in school by your classmates and teachers. It’s what’s causing you to be overlooked and underestimated. It’s your brand that is still tagging along with you determining your personal and professional advancement.

The most important point to recall is that you have a brand. At any moment, you can assess it, redesign, and launch a new brand, which is probably the reason you are reading *The Bridge*.

If you’re just beginning the branding process, I would recommend that you complete this exercise. Write down three adjectives you think describe you. Then select and ask three people to provide you with three adjectives that describe you. Consider a family member, friend, and co-worker. Ask a customer, neighbor, or pastor. Supervisors, spouses, and children are also great contributors to this fact-finding process.

It is important that you give them permission to be honest and objective. Tell them that you are trying to grow and need their

help. This will ease their mind to share their honest thoughts and feelings with you. Do not punish them for their honesty by debating, defending, or forcing them to justify their submissions. More than likely, the adjectives that you see more than once or the synonyms to those words indicate the way you're received and perceived by others.

Even if you don't like, agree with, or want to accept the descriptors, you have to remember that it's the way others see you that is important during the research stage. It's like going to the doctor; a diagnosis comes through the process of elimination. You have to figure out what is and isn't working for you. What you're doing right and what you're doing wrong. What you like about what people are receiving and perceiving from you and what you don't like.

As I tell my clients, stop saying, "I don't care about what people say about me." That's not a true statement. You may not care about what everyone is saying about you, but you care about what some people are saying about you especially those you depend on for support. And, everyone needs support from others. Did the adjectives that you wrote down to describe yourself match the ones given to you by others? The data collected serves as a starting point to awaken you to the fact that people have a clear opinion of you. That opinion matters, especially in environments where you spend the majority of your time—at home, work, and in other social settings. Awareness is growth.

Are you awake and aware of what's going on around you? What about what's going on because of you?

WHAT IS PERSONAL BRANDING?

Brands are everywhere. Before you leave for work in the morning you use, see, hear, touch, and smell hundreds of them. Some you purchase out of necessity and others you purchase because they fit your style. Then there are some you choose because you think they will sharpen your image, convey the message you want others to believe about you (without telling them), or you just want to remind yourself that you've made it and you have something to feel confident about.

Regardless of the reason you purchased a specific brand of product or service, millions of dollars were spent to market the product to ensure that you recognize, like, and trust it. Millions more were spent to protect that perception and in return for that perceived faithful relationship, you spend your money. In some cases, the effective branding strategy will trigger an impulsive response in you, which will cause you to spend money you don't have or you didn't intend to spend. Directly hitting your emotional hot spots, these brand products promise to deliver what you want if you use them—sex, money, power, influence, great relationships or something that eventually leads up to those things.

Although there aren't many differences in product and personal branding, one of the conclusive differences is the size of the financial budget to research, develop, market, maintain, and

protect your brand. Fortunately, unless you want to reach celebrity status and have that level of an impact in the marketplace, you won't need a large budget for personal brand development. You do need time for reflective thinking and strategy development. But if you are serious about getting results, you need a branding coach, which can range from a few hundred dollars for a consultation to a few thousand dollars depending on who you hire to help you, what you are trying to achieve, and how much money you want to generate from that brand.

Once you discover, understand, and implement the foundational pillars of personal branding [Chapter 2], your responsibility is to be loyal to the most important brand: YOU. In many cases, unfortunately, this may be the most difficult task. That's because who we *think* we are versus our decisions that inform us of who we *really* are may disturb our existing self-concepts and behaviors. As you read, you'll learn about the consistency factor that determines if your personal brand ever gets to a level of credibility. Once your brand has evolved to that level of acknowledgment and success you'll have a believable, buyable, and bankable brand.

So, what is personal branding? Personal branding is your personal identity. I'm not speaking of personal identifications like your driver's license, credit card, or Military ID. These are external items that can be given away, stolen, and with good

fortune, replaced. And although political parties, social organizations, and special clubs are great places to network and express your points of view, they are not your personal identity either. They are, however, identifiers that can support stereotypes and pigeonhole you if you depend on them to form your identity.

Retain this: Your personal identity is your unique footprint in the universe. Among the approximately seven billion people on planet earth, it's what makes you exclusive, exceptional, and distinctive. It's the value people get from interacting with, hearing, or experiencing you through your most valuable commodity—You! Your personal identity is naturally you. Your personal brand is how you choose to package and present that identity to the world.

IMAGE VS PERSONAL BRANDING

The Internet has leveled the playing field and literally opened the market giving us access and innovative, exciting ways to find employment, build businesses, and connect with family, friends, clients, and, yes, even strangers. YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, ODesk, Twitter, and other business development and social networking sites have broken the chains of tradition, becoming gateways to accessing a vibrant buying, selling, and hiring marketplace.

In addition, the new economic, political, and social climate is inspiring us to swiftly redefine our passions and priorities and how we express them. The workplace as we have known it is rapidly transitioning; creating an open market. A corporation no longer has to hire a person on their native soil to get work done. They can literally hire someone in another country to make and receive calls, build and update their websites, and solve technical difficulties.

Subsequently, forward-thinking leaders are shifting company cultures and projecting how to best attract, recruit, and retain the most dynamic trailblazers of upcoming decades. These leaders are looking for responsible partners not employees. The partners come fully loaded with utilizable intellectual property and presence that adds value to the organization's goals and direction. The partners come knowing that they are

knowledgeable, but don't know it all. Therefore, they're open to growth through experience and learning centers—books, internal and external development workshops, and industry conferences and forums.

In the ever-changing, extremely competitive marketplace—in addition to slaying micro-managed leadership styles that squash creativity and risk-taking—a well-rehearsed, staged presentation that fits what you think leadership is looking for is not going to fly anymore. Therefore, an image that mirrors leadership is no longer a guarantee for success. If they already have one, why do they need another? You have to give them a logical reason to want to pay the big bucks for you! And unlike the last several decades where showing up for work on time, keeping your mouth shut and doing your job secured rewards, career advancement now depends on innovation, intellectual property, and value proposition.

Get this: According to Google, Googlers (the term used to describe employees of Google) “thrive in small, focused teams and high-energy environments, believe in the ability of technology to change the world, and are as passionate about their lives as they are about their work.” Notice how they describe their environment as high energy. This is what we used to call fast-paced environments. Fast-paced describes a behavior that leads to a mindset. The mind is often overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated because its environment is controlling its thought

process. High-energy describes a mindset that leads to a behavior. In this case, the mindset is already established prior to entering the workplace. It is focused, creative, and free to make decisions. Big difference, wouldn't you say?

Also, take note of the statement that they are as passionate about their lives as they are about their work. This means that their work doesn't create their life, their life creates their work. When your life mirrors your work then you are living your passion at home and at work. When your work mirrors your life you are trying to make your life fit the work. This path has led to a lot of unhappy people. In the past, our work defined us. When the shift came we were given permission to define our work by bringing our experiences, creativity, and passion to our jobs. As Rick Warren, bestselling author of *The Purpose Driven Life* was urging us nearly a decade ago to find and live a purposeful holistic lifestyle.

INNOVATION, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, AND VALUE PROPOSITION

I was having lunch with Ernest J. Dianastasis, Managing Director at Computer Aid, Inc. (CAI), a global international company in existence for 30 years with approximately 3000 employees. I wanted to know the secret to their branding success. Without hesitation, he said it was staying innovative, along with staying ahead of the curve of industry changes. “Our customers want to experience high productivity, meet deadlines, and stay within budget,” he proudly stated. “We look for the best and brightest minds straight out of college. They know the latest in technology, and that keeps us on the cutting edge.” Over the course of our 90-minute conversation, he shared the three most important elements to business and personal success—

1. Innovation: stay on top of your game
2. Intellectual Property: know what you know and make sure that your market knows that you know it
3. Value Proposition: clearly define how what you know benefits your market

Since you were hired, the company or organization chose you because of your perceived value to them. They purchased the value of your image, which is your personal brand. But personal

branding is more than putting on stylish clothes and having a polished presentation. In the twenty-first century, *you have to be who you say you are*. This includes your personality, style, skills, experiences, creativity, and intellectual property, which your partner (employer) believes synergizes with the values, vision, goals, and direction of the organization. Hopefully, you accepted their offer because you believe in their brand—the culture, products or services, public awareness, and community service they tout.

Learn this: Your task now is to use specific strategies to solidify your personal brand in their minds, create a buzz about you, and exhibit the value you bring in the ever-evolving, busy and noisy competitive marketplace. *The Bridge* is a resource for your growth in helping you to position and equip yourself to successfully cross this challenging terrain of personal brand development and maintenance.

CHAPTER TWO

FOUNDATION FOR BRAND SUCCESS

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING

During my first presentation on personal branding, I stood before an audience of approximately 300 people and held up a can of Coke, also known as Coca-Cola. I asked three questions: How many people have seen this product? Everyone raised their hands. How many people have used this product? Again, everyone raised their hands. Can I get three people to tell me why you used this product? The responses: I was thirsty. I was sick. It tastes good. Based on the responses to these three simple questions, it was evident that Coke has a brand. Why? It's recognizable, likeable, and a trusted problem-solver.

You may be thinking that's obvious. Coca-Cola Company is a global leader in the beverage industry offering over 500 brands in 200 countries with more than a billion consumers per day. Of course, it's recognizable, likeable, and a trusted problem solver.

You're correct, but it didn't start there.

According to About.com, pharmacist John Pemberton initially

concocted Coca-Cola as a patented medicine. Interestingly, it was first sold to the public as a soda fountain drink. Only nine servings were sold daily. First year sales totaled about \$50. Since Pemberton's expenses were \$70, he suffered a loss. About a year later, he sold the formula for \$2,300 to pharmacist and businessman Asa Candler. Nearly 10 years later, Candler's marketing strategy made Coca-Cola one of the most popular soft drinks in America.

Over the years, Coca-Cola and its advertising company McCann-Erickson have created various successful marketing campaigns to tell their story. Do you remember the slogan *It's the Real Thing*? It's one of the most popular ads ever created. Finding a commonality among people, Coca-Cola built the story on the premise that a Coke is more than just a soft drink—it brings people together, a way to spend time together. Birthed out of that story was the theme song *I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke*. The lyrics are:

I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love,
Grow apple trees and honeybees, and snow white turtledoves.

I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony,
I'd like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company.

It's the real thing...

After the radio campaign failed, \$250,000 was invested in a

television commercial that began running in July 1971. The response was described as immediate and dramatic. By November 1971, more than 100,000 letters about the ad were received. People began calling radio stations requesting them to play the commercial. Advertising surveys still indicate that *I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke* is one of the best commercials of all time.

That level of success was developed over an 85-year (1886-1971) time span. Despite history-making success, the competitive marketplace has marketing and branding gurus continuously working to find another sweet spot in Coke's brand. For now though, we understand that Coke's brand undeniably illustrates the power of branding. But that power does not solely belong to Coke. You can do the same.

During the setup of the same presentation before the audience arrived, I had placed a bottle of water in a brown paper bag and sat it on the speaker's table. No one would view the ordinary paper bag as anything special, but I knew that I would refer to it for my next demo. To shift mental gears, I switched images from a known brand (Coke) to an unknown product.

I held up the brown paper bag and asked the audience the following questions: "I have a product in this bag. How many people would buy the product in this bag?" No one raised their hand. "How many people would use the product in this bag?"

One person raised his hand and the audience burst into laughter. Continuing my purposeful survey, I asked, “How much would you pay for the product in this bag?” The tension from the mystery was evidently increasing because no one offered an answer. Sympathizing with the blank stares and perplexed expressions on their faces, I cleverly took the blame for the confusion. “You’re looking at me like I’m crazy,” I punned. Finally, in a supportive rescue effort, someone yelled, “I’d pay a cent or two!” Of course, more laughter followed. The demonstration, though cloaked in humor, was not yet done. I had a serious point to make.

Without validation of its value to the consumer, only one person out of nearly 300 was willing to take a *risk* by losing a cent or two for a product that wasn’t clearly recognizable, trustworthy, or known to be a problem-solver. The bottle of water hidden in the brown paper bag had zero usefulness to the audience because they couldn’t see that a bottle of water was in the bag. If someone had opened the bag to drink the water, would it have tasted the same as if it had been sitting on the counter in full view? Yes. Would it have delivered the same amount of value? Yes. But, did the value of the bottle of water change in the eyes of the audience because it was concealed in the brown paper bag? Absolutely.

My point is this: If your audience can’t clearly see your value,

they will not buy what you're selling. If people don't buy what you're selling, you don't have recognizable value. If your value is unrecognizable then you will be ignored, undercompensated, and degraded. Like the bottle of water inside the brown paper bag, people only pay for what they see and believe to be of value to them.

Now, ask yourself: What am I selling? You can't say, "I'm not selling anything" because every one is selling something. For example, you may be selling to your employer, "I am competent." You may want your potential customer to know, "I am sincere." A love interest may need to see, "I am trustworthy." If you are not strategic and aware of the messages you're sending and the messages you need to send based on your audience's needs and the results you want to create, you are planning your demise.

If your brand isn't distinctly identifiable like the can of Coke, then it's like the bottle of water in the paper bag—hidden under the image you're projecting that fails to display the substance behind the image.

Remember, like the seven-year old in Chapter 1, you definitely have a brand. It's paramount that you accept responsibility for consciously or unconsciously creating it. Regardless of whether you know what people are saying about you, you've been branded. You may be unaware, but people are consistently

studying and watching you—your family, friends, supervisors and others in upper management, your customers, and the community.

They want to understand how you operate, what model you follow to get what you want, and if you are reliable. Then, you're categorized in their minds. Based on the consistent information that you've been presenting, management is making decisions about you regarding raises, promotions, and what meetings you're invited to. Consumers and your potential partners (employers) are asking themselves these questions: Do I like this person? Do I like their message? Are they worth my time? Will they grow? Could I get the same results with less work if I invest in someone else? Can I get the same quality at a cheaper price? Should I wait to check out other options? Like most relationships, it takes awhile to gain your audience's attention and trust, but it takes seconds to lose it. Your well-built, solid brand will remove all these questions and doubts out of your audience's mind.

That's why it's important to do the self-discovery work. When you know yourself, you consciously set your responses or reactions to people and situations. This gives you control of people's assessment of you. Does this sound phony and inauthentic? It's not. Have you ever said to yourself, "What was I thinking? I never should have said that. I never should have

done that.” In an instant, you stepped out of your space and into another mode of operation that impacted your view of yourself and people’s perception of you. Wouldn’t you like to be the best you?

Although having a brand doesn’t mean that you will never have one of those regrettable moments, it will help you to become more disciplined in your behaviors. The branding process helps you to set guidelines that steer you in the right direction on a daily basis. It’s not perfect, but it can keep you from falling into most ditches.

In personal relationships, if you’re not married, even potential suitors are looking at and evaluating your brand prior to deciding to have a chat with you. How you package and present *you* either turns them away or draws them in. If you’re already married your partner is quietly thinking: this is more, less, or what I thought I was getting. A happy partner makes a happier home. A happier home makes a happier partner.

Perhaps by now you’re wondering: What are the benefits to investing the time to create a personal brand that is consistent, reliable, trustworthy, and valuable? When you deliberately create a brand for a product, business, or for personal and professional development,

1. The process provides focus to your daily activities and behaviors.
2. A personal brand guides your decisions, helping to alleviate some of the stress associated with making decisions.
3. A personal brand creates a platform where you can focus and market your skill sets and receive compensation accordingly.
4. A personal brand gives you more negotiation power when signing contracts, getting a new job, or interacting with a loved one.
5. A personal brand creates a buzz about you, expanding your opportunities by unblocking entrances into new forums.

What you may find most fascinating about going through the branding process is being awakened to the many human conditions that adversely affect our world, becoming aware of how you've been directly connected to a specific problem for a long time, and discovering how your experiences prepared you

to address that problem. Knowing how to solve a particular problem is called your niche or specialty. Identifying an audience who would appreciate your product or services is your target market.

Let me be clear, this doesn't mean that you are trapped with just this audience. Most often it's a starting place to gain loyal followers and then you can expand into other markets while remaining loyal to your targeted audience. If you're an employee it may not be easy to see how you fit in this situation so let me connect the dots.

Here's an example. I had a client who works in retention at a university. Retention, like most problems, is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted challenge that has many factors that influence its outcome. His desire was to reach vice president status. As described by him, his direct report (immediate supervisor), co-workers, and staff viewed him as very knowledgeable, hardworking, and results-oriented. His own perception was that he had strong, respected relationships with leadership. But they were elusive when it came to having conversations about his future.

What was the problem? Why wasn't he being promoted? Were there hidden concerns about his performance, personality, or persona that leadership wasn't talking to him about? Did they see him as vice president material? Had politics gotten in the way?

What was upper management's perception of employees who were knowledgeable, hardworking, and results-oriented? Were those the qualities that they looked for in a vice president? Or were they grassroots, frontline-worker qualities? Did they describe vice presidents as visionaries, leaders, and experts in their field? Was there a personality type that resonated more with them than what he was projecting? What were they looking for? Where should he begin his research?

Seeking to pinpoint his current brand, we started by collecting data. That's where we got the adjectives knowledgeable, hardworking, and results-oriented. From this exercise, we discovered from his direct report that despite his leadership role he was perceived as a hands-on worker not a delegating leader. Remember, leadership success now means developing people and encouraging creative conversations to find solutions. All are responsible for the execution of the solution, but within their roles. Crossover of responsibilities comes when necessary. Obviously, when the brand or success of the organization is on the line, it should never be said, "That's not my job."

In this case my client needed to shift the perception of his capacity to change according to his role. After a few coaching sessions and research assignments, I encouraged him to start the rebranding process. They needed to see the full scope of his expertise and professionalism.

We worked on redefining lines between his relationships with his staff and people in other departments. I encouraged him to delegate more assignments and spend time on building his brand as the expert in his area. He needed to set himself apart from and above the rest. He needed to create a buzz about his intellectual property.

In addition to bringing out other aspects of his personality that would better serve others in this situation, I encouraged him to launch a one-page monthly newsletter about retention. His assignment was to decide on a specific market. Would it be written for the student, faculty, staff, or administration? What kind of information would he provide? It wouldn't end there. He would then use the information to create a blog. The blog would generate interest from other universities and online communities struggling with the same problem. He would continue to expand by alerting and engaging the media on timely and relevant issues. He would submit his articles to trade magazines for publishing consideration and to national conferences to offer his knowledge to attendees.

The goal was simple: he was going to reposition himself and his knowledge as the go-to person on and off campus for a specific issue relevant to retention. This would increase his local and national value and presence giving him the power to negotiate a promotion either with the university that he already served or

with another university smart enough to see how his success supported the university's brand. Be advised that this was a deliberate strategy because of the situation he was in. Each situation requires a customized solution.

Be aware: Your job right now is to discover what problem you have been repeatedly connected to and how you are going to solve it. Keep in mind that an authentic personal brand isn't birthed out of a selfish need to get ahead, make a lot of money, or to control others. An authentic personal brand comes from an internal place of understanding your life's mission, how to communicate that mission, and the value that mission brings to others.

THE VALUE OF THE BRANDING PROCESS

In the movie *Kung Fu Panda 2*, Master Shifu tells Kung Fu Master Po that he needs to reach another frontier: inner peace. This opens up questions for Master Po. While pondering his existence, Master Po is called to fight a pack of wolves. In the midst of fighting the wolves he has flashbacks of his mother. With his energies diverted thinking about the past, he loses his personal power and the wolves escape. For greater self-awareness, Po begins a search for answers. Po asks the goose who found him when he was an infant in a crate of radishes and adopted him, “Where did I come from?” The goose was unable to provide satisfactory answers, so Po digs deeper and begins to ask himself: Who am I?

Intensely bothered by the lack of a resolution to his existential questions, Po is unable to concentrate. He loses battle after battle and consequently the faith of the other Kung Fu warriors whom he leads. The truth is known by Lord Shen, a peacock and evil ruler, who deceptively told Po that his parents had abandoned him. Unaccepting of Lord Shen’s story, Po continued his quest.

Guided by a soothsayer back to his past, Po learns the truth: that his parents did not abandon him, but rather sacrificed their lives to save his. This news strengthened Po’s heart. Returning to himself and a place of inner peace, Po attempts to convince Lord Shen to let go of his own unpleasant past. Shen refused to

embrace self-empowerment and enlightenment. The driving forces of unforgiveness, bitterness, and jealousy compelled Shen to continue his ambitious pursuit to destroy Po.

During an attack of Shen's furious rage, Po uses a kung fu technique that redirects Shen's negative energy back to himself. Shen inadvertently cuts the rope releasing the last cannon ball—killing himself. Po, however, resumed authentically living his brand as the Dragon Master.

Since the beginning of time humanity has struggled with the questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What are my values? What makes me happy? What happens to me after I leave here? As we examine cultures and their political climates, societies struggle with these same questions. Most often the answers change as we grow, develop, and evolve. What I find interesting is that we frequently end up where we start, leading me to believe that we know the answers, but choose to explore our options, which is, perhaps, required for our growth.

During a personal branding workshop for a group of polished, ambitious, and smart new hires at a national corporation, I asked the question: Who are you? No one moved. Their firm grasp on investment portfolios, command of Wall Street lingo, and expertise in accounting principles didn't help them with this basic question. They looked amazed, caught off guard, like I had

just announced a pop quiz that they hadn't studied for. Unable or perhaps too stunned to answer the first question, I continued, "Why are you here?" The tension eased and hands began to pop up.

Not knowing whose hand raised first, I randomly called on one of the blue-coat-white-shirt-fancy-ties to my left. Sounding like a well-rehearsed 30-second elevator speech, he pronounced, "I'm here to represent the (industry) in integrity while helping my clients build the wealth that they desire and come to expect from a (name of the company) employee."

I wanted to applaud him for his performance. He had learned the bank's language. He definitely had their image. Unfortunately, he was a long way from home. His response didn't represent his brand. It was the company's brand. He did what most people do when they get hired—find a way to fit in. Falling into the image trap of believing that if I show up the way the company executives want me to, I'll be rewarded. In order to successfully navigate across the new normal of workplace dynamics, you have to BYOB: Bring Your Own Brand. Which means, you have to bring the real you, not just the image you think the company expects of you.

I've worked with new hires and seasoned employees at state and government agencies, colleges and universities, corporate and not-for-profit organizations, and I have found this: Many people

don't bring their brand to the company. They accept the values, culture, image and brand of the company—even when they don't believe in them.

How many times have you heard your co-workers complain about the unfair practices of the company? They label the culture as cutthroat, negative, or unfair yet they quietly yearn to become more entrenched in the organization. They are willing to abandon more of themselves for the schemes that they despise.

In return for handing their life over to the employer, a complete and sometimes unfair assessment by the employer establishes the brand of the employee—how talented the person is, how those talents will be used, who they will be exposed to within the organization, and which growth and advancement opportunities the employee will be considered for. Often marginalized because an employer only has a limited perspective of the employee's abilities, the employee feels trapped by the system's skewed perception. But the employee is unaware that the company's perception stems from them. The real culprit is the employee's failure to create and manage their own brand.

For most, I think it's an unconscious decision. With the day-to-day financial challenges and pressures to get ahead, many people haven't taken the time to find their inner peace by answering the question: Who am I? I believe that the best thing about today's economic and housing crisis is that it's bringing us full circle—

back to our true selves. Loss, devastation, and excessive stress is prompting us to ask the right questions for the right reasons: What brought us to this space? Why are we here? What are we to learn? Where is truth? What is the truth? How can we live it together, even if our truths are different?

There has been a universal shift. When the shift came, the system as we once knew it vanquished—for some, unwillingly. The power that was once given by organizations to freely project its perceived value of its employee onto the individual is gone. Those who will continue to try to operate using old mythologies like micromanagement, top down theories, and limiting access to information that hinder employees' purposeful service will be unable to recruit and keep quality employees, slowing the organization's growth. Hence, the reason you see many "Going Out of Business" signs. It isn't all due to financial limitations. It's also the failure to embrace, change, and flow with the shift. The shift requires all of us to function from a higher thought, working for the good of the universe. Personal branding is one of the openings to self-knowledge and decisive living. It increases your value and the value of the company. A quality, forward-thinking, self-knowledgeable employee who understands themselves and the industry adds to the dimensional thinking and direction of the company.

To ensure that you are moving with the shift, answer the following questions.

1. Why am I on this planet?
2. What problem am I here to solve?
3. What value does it bring to the universe?
4. How do my results impact the company's or customer's bottom line?
5. What is my niche within the organization or marketplace?

As you go through the process, you will develop your own list of reasons why consciously developing and living your brand is useful to you. Here are five additional reasons experience has taught me that having a personal brand will add value to your life.

1. Your brand will protect you from being misunderstood because you control your message. Negative people who want to misunderstand you aren't included.

2. Your brand shapes your behaviors. Like an unexpected whisper, it cautions you when you are out of alignment with whom you are and how you want to be perceived.
3. Your brand increases your likability factor. It's difficult to get and keep respect and followers when there is a lack of consistency. Like a well-run franchise, people know what to expect. This is exceptionally important for those in management who want to keep partners (employees) engaged and productivity high.
4. It serves as a compass for where to put your time and attention so that other people's agendas don't consume your energy.
5. It advances your ability to meet and exceed goals faster because you target a specific audience with a definite solution.

BUILDING YOUR BRAND'S FOUNDATION

My father was a builder. A lot of his work continues to stand today because the footers were accurately poured, the foundation's block walls were laid straight, and the concrete for the flooring was properly poured and finished. At a young age I learned, anything that doesn't have a proper foundation will collapse. There is a specific process that each of us must go through to build a solid, lasting brand.

Our brand is our legacy. Inasmuch as this is true, it is vital that each step is followed. Skipping a step or failing to complete a step will create flaws in your brand. The flaws of an improperly built or phony brand will create gaps and expose you through inconsistencies in your behavior.

These gaps cause alarm in people, as they don't know what to expect of you. An example of this can be examined in the life of Actor Mel Gibson. Without going through all the dreadful details as reported by the media, his unruly behavior toward women, drugs, people of other races, and himself has caused disturbances in his personal and professional life. Although he is a brilliant actor and director of *The Passion of the Christ*, there's a disconnect between his religious beliefs and his behavior. Instead of being known for the fallen mortal who makes a comeback, he is known more for the fallen Christian who just can't get it right.

Remember, your flaws will expose your secrets. Author of *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential* Michael Bernard Beckwith who was also featured in the movie, *The Secret*, says “You can’t hide your secret thoughts because they show up as your life.” Mistakes are one thing, but too many false starts and outlandish, contradictory behaviors can lead to mistrust and the perception of faulty character. Reflect on the following five foundational steps to build a strong brand.

Step 1: Learn the work that you believe you are called to do.

Study under great teachers. Research the subject thoroughly. Look at the subject from an objective point of view and then decide what you believe to be true. Decide how the subject, product, or service is applicable to your life experience. So that you remain connected and motivated to do the work, write your own story that connects you to the work. As you grow, change and evolve, add, change and expand your story. Refer to it often as a resource and reminder that you’ve been called.

Step 2: Test your ability, stamina, and seriousness to do the work by practicing the ideas or concepts that you believe to be true about your message, prior to announcing your message to the world. In the inconsistent, fast-moving society in which we live, it is easy to be the same—to get excited about

many things, but find it difficult to remain committed to any one thing. During this time, you are granting permission for situations to come into your life so that you can identify which aspects of your mission, message, and values are sustainable. A well-built brand the public sees, loves, and embraces, but the people closest to you despise is a sham.

Step 3: Find someone who knows what you know about you.

It's important to have someone older, richer, smarter, or in a higher position than you to mentor and/or endorse you. Networks are crucial for success. The more successful your personal network and your access network, the more successful you can become. An access network is the network that you don't have a direct connection to, but you can access through your direct network. For example, I knew a banking executive who was also a branding expert. She didn't make decisions on corporate sponsorship for charitable events, but when I needed a corporate sponsor for an event I was planning, I reached out to her. She supportively scheduled a meeting with the decision-maker, herself, and me. The outcome? The bank became a sponsor. She unselfishly gave me access to her network because she believes in my brand. Likewise, she has access to mine because I believe in hers.

Step 4: Build a team of imperfect, but trusted followers.

Think people. Think big. Think expand. And think about those things in that order. The only way to fulfill your calling is through others. Relationships are the gateway to getting your needs met, therefore, treat every one you meet wisely. Your brand will only grow to be as large as your number of followers. Supporters dictate the value of your brand. That's how celebrities, products, or businesses become successful—they have a large, dedicated audience.

Step 5: Give your audience a reason to preserve, protect, and expand your message.

Make sure you have a core group of at least 10-12 strong, trustworthy people who won't overstep you or try to compete with you. They study and believe in your mission and message. They understand and trust your value. They are your messengers when you are not in the room. They endorse you. And, their endorsement counts.

Having a mix of races, religions, and social classes can help with expansion. Even people living in different states, working in different departments, divisions, and industries are also a plus. The most important factor is that they trust you and you trust them. Before you need them to produce, test them. I was shocked and let down by the lack of support and limited influence of my inner circle when I really needed them to yield

results. There's a distinct difference between people who know you and want to chat with you and people who will and can make things happen with and for you.

You may travel, eat, and play together. You may even share some of your secrets with them. But that may be the extent of your relationship. You need to know if and how they can help you in advance to move your agenda forward. And vice versa. This is important, because like a quarterback, you need protection—people who will block, tackle, and help you move the ball.

It's tough to win a game when you have the ball only to realize that there's no one blocking. Or, you need to pass the ball and no one is in position to receive it. Fortunately, I have a large professional network and access network, which saved me and helped to preserve my brand. My brand is inspirational, transformational, and results-driven. The feedback from the attendees praised the scholarship fundraiser as a five-star, inspirational evening.

The evening wasn't a success because of me alone. It was a success because there was a phenomenal group of people who believed in the brand and the cause. But, don't miss this: As the leader and face of the event, it was my brand at risk.

If this project failed, it could have been disastrous to my brand. Instead, I taught the team how to work within the brand. I

emphasized protecting the brand. I put people in position based on their ability to represent the brand well. This challenged others to step up their game. By building and leading the team around brand development and management, they understood, worked, and made decisions according to that brand. Thankfully, we superseded our goals. Don't set yourself up to crash. Know who is surrounding you, their realm of influence, and if they can and do have your back.

THE PROCESS

The process is simple. So don't be fooled by false teachings and erroneous beliefs that may complicate it. Be willing to let go of what you think you know and, in faith, believe that life really does have deeper meaning. That meaning is beyond fancy cars, big houses, and big bank accounts. Yes, like you, I appreciate those things, but they will not make you happy. They can only add to the happiness that already exists.

The process is going to require you to have executive sessions with yourself. During those sessions, you have to ask yourself a lot of thought-provoking questions. The questions aren't easy and the answers don't come quick. But, they will lead you home—to the real you.

The information you learn about yourself will give you the leverage you need to reinvent yourself and develop an authentic brand. Like every industry, "experts" have their own belief and method of how one should identify and create their brand. This industry isn't any different. It's important to find a process that best fits your needs.

I am a branding coach. I'm also a spiritual coach and motivational speaker who helps audiences transform their lives. The original self-development process in my book, *There Is More Inside* helps people find their voice and the courage and confidence within themselves to be accountable for their lives.

Phase 2 of this process, *The Bridge*, helps you cross to new stages of insights and behaviors in your personal, professional, and spiritual life by building a brand that mirrors your values. Society, corporate cultures, and even religious teachings, can sometimes be confusing, even contradictory. But when you decide for yourself how you want to show up you can best serve yourself and others.

Keep in mind, *The Bridge* is written to help you avoid detours, roadblocks, and dead ends. My good friend Herbert C. Smith, an executive search consultant for major corporations, often reminds me that “world-class leaders aren’t born, they are grown and developed.” You can grow and develop at an incredibly productive rate if you are willing to do the work.

THE PILLARS TO BRAND DEVELOPMENT

There are three pillars and three tiers to building a personal brand. I've created a formula (CCR=MMV), which I explain in Chapter 3, to simplify what drives the development of the pillars. The formula helps to clarify why the pillars exist, the importance of finding and living your passion, and how to connect the dots from where you are to where you are meant to be. Regardless of where you are or what you are doing, understanding the pillars can be significant to your growth and your understanding of why you are where you are in this moment.

During a press conference for her school in South Africa, Oprah Winfrey said, "I've been coming to this moment my entire life." This means that there are countless moments prior to "the moment" that were necessary gateways to the lessons and experiences needed for the vision to form. The wisdom and knowledge gained from these seemingly meaningless moments lead us to and help us create "the moment" that we eventually realize we have been sent to this planet for.

Hence, if this process uncovers for you that you're far from where you believe you are supposed to be, I encourage you to examine and ask yourself these questions:

1. Why am I at this specific place of employment or stage in my business?

2. What am I to get from and give to the people I interact with while I am here?
3. What lessons and experiences am I receiving that will serve me moving forward?
4. Who am I becoming as a result of being here?
5. As a result of what I'm learning, what is trying to emerge within me?

Don't get discouraged if you don't know all the answers. Or, if you find yourself spending more time than you thought during your executive sessions. You actually gain time versus losing it. How do I know? That's the purpose of *The Bridge*—to close the gap between the external you and the internal you while making the transition safe, quicker, and enlightening. The questions are written to guide you through a reflective thought process that increases your self-awareness. Executive sessions are the necessary action steps you take to get across *The Bridge*.

