

Creating Your Career Identity

Market Branding You

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The days of the mammoth corporations are coming to an end. People are going to have to create their own lives, their own careers, and their own successes. Some people may go kicking and screaming into this new world, but there is only one message there. You're now in business for yourself.

— Robert Schaen, Former Comptroller, Ameritech

You can find out more about these tips, résumé writing, and networking at the NAEYC 2006 Annual Conference in Atlanta, where Marshall Brown will present in the Student Networking Room in the Georgia World Congress Center (A303).

WHETHER YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT making a career change or are satisfied in your current position but still don't know what your skills are, it's time to discover your abilities and strengths and know what makes you marketable.

The world of work has changed. In the past, as long as you did your job and met expectations, you were paid. William Bridges, author of *Creating You & Co.* and *Jobshift*, speaks about jobs as “slots, boxes, and pigeonholes.” He describes jobs as a demanded performance in a script already written. Those days are over. Today, whether you are working in a for-profit or not-for-profit group, employers pay for results and what you can produce for them. And those who are succeeding are the ones who know what they have to offer and what they are capable of doing better than some of their competitors. It's also about taking charge of your own career and knowing your marketable and transferable skills.

You might be asking, So, what does this have to do with “Market Branding You”? A lot. Any marketing professional will tell you that one of the first things you have to know about a product before you put a marketing plan together is its benefits. What makes this product different? Why should I buy it? How will it benefit me (and maybe my team)? Translating this to your job and/or career means knowing what *you* have to offer, what makes *you* different, and why Mr. or Ms. HR (Human Resources) person should hire *you*.

It is imperative in today's competitive job market for you to know *you*. Knowing what you have to offer and then marketing and branding yourself as the person with that information and those skills will help separate you from the competition. Your marketability will depend on your ability to demonstrate your skills verbally and in writing (whether the job change is within the same organization or outside).

If you don't know what skills you offer (and therefore are not sure how to market your brand), find out! There are various types of personal assessments, some available online, such as checklists, card sorts, and experience stories. If you need some help in preparing your list, consult a career coach

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or counselor. When putting a list together, don't forget to include soft skills, like being intuitive, a hard worker, and conscientious, as well as hard skills, such as building staff development, marketing, strategic planning. The two categories can be equally important when marketing you.

If you think you know what you have to offer and how to brand yourself, great! However, I encourage you to look beyond your current skill set at developing additional benefits of *brand you*. By asking yourself the following questions (and discussing them with your peers, friends, family and/or a personal "board of advisors"), you should be able to list some of your assets and come up with specific ways to work on improving your product—you—in the next six months. For example,

1. I am known among my peers or coworkers for these projects or skills.
2. My current assignment or role is challenging and provocative to me in these ways.
3. In the past three months, I have learned the following new things that will help me to move forward.
4. I have added three important people to my contacts list (Rolodex or Palm Pilot) in the last three months.
5. By next year at this time, I would like to be known for these skills or projects.

In addition to knowing your skills, abilities, and experience when developing your marketing plan, I encourage you to do the following:

1. Determine the needs of your target market.
2. Develop your personal brand statement that says why you are the best candidate.
3. Tailor your brand statement to the specific job.
4. Let people know about your brand.

Network, network. Get the visibility that your brand needs and deserves. Knowing your product takes time and energy. And it's well worth it.

Resources

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Bridges, W. 1998. *Creating You & Co.: Learn to think like the CEO of your own career*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.
Bridges, W. 1995. *Jobshift: How to prosper in a workplace without jobs*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.