THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING A PERSONAL BRAND

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Abstract

If we speak about the personal brand, we first speak about the own image of a person, an image created from our own beliefs about ourselves. The majority of these beliefs stems from past experiences, successes and loses, as well as from the way people around us react towards us. Therefore, each of us, either conscious or not, has a personal brand which influences us in everything we do, a brand that we continuously develop. This paper analyses the challenges faced while building the personal brand and their approach, as well as the levers that we may use in creating the personal brand.

Keywords: *brand, image, society, reputation, feedback.*

According to most experts in this field, the personal brand mainly represents a promise to those we interact with (IOAN et al.,2013); it tells people who we are and what we have to offer – is the opinion of the coaching specialist Mihai Popa Radu. Therefore, it targets the personal image which is reflected in the society. David McNally and Karl Speak consider that "the brand is the one that tells consumers what to expect" (McNALLY & SPEAK, 2002), and Peter Montoya, in his book entitled „The brand called you", besides the fact that he tells us that each of us represents our own business, considers that the best definition of the personal brand is that it represents a clear public, strong and convincing public image of a certain individual. David McNally and Karl Speak consider that everybody has a brand and also that anyone can become a strong brand (DOBROVOLSCHI, n.d.).

We therefore notice that the most interesting part in building a personal brand can be found in its two components: individual on the one side, and marketing, on the other side, the effort that we all have to put in order to present who we are or to be different.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL IMAGE

Most of our beliefs about ourselves are formed in the subconscious from our previous experiences, successes and failures, as well as from the way in which we react towards the people around us. Once we build it, the personal image accompanies and defines us, no matter what we do, directing our actions and we cannot overcome it; what we do, the feelings, capacities and behaviour will align with the our created personal image. Therefore, we shall always act in accordance with the person that we conceive, despite our will or conscious effort of acting differently. This image represents the basis on which we build even a part of the incidents in our lives, so that our experiences confirm and thus strengthen our personal image. Finally, the impact of the personal image can even be decisive on a person's destiny, being able to determine both the success and the failure, as most of us act according to what others believe and to what we believe we can do.

2. DEFINING ELEMENTS OF PERSONAL IMAGE

Usually our image of ourselves is very close to the one perceived by the people around us, as we transmit what we think we are and also we identify ourselves with the ones other people tell us we are. This perception of the people around us is based on the following elements:
- Exterior aspect (face, physical condition, clothing, accessories). People have always judged and they will continue to judge

according to appearance and this is highly important in building the first impression. It is well-known that appearance is formed within the first 5 seconds and it represents the strongest impression that people have about us;
- behaviour (actions, attitudes, manners);
- speech (language, tone, voice volume and inflexion, gestures);
- reputation (what is being said about us).

All these defining elements of the image support us or, on the contrary, contradict our intentions. Many of the results that we obtain, both on a personal and on a professional level, depend on the way in which we know how to use these elements in the service of our intentions, and implicitly to value our personal image (ILUT, 2001).

The personal image perceived by the people around us therefore represents an etiquette that the others offer us and that we can influence. Therefore, if usually what we are on the inside determines our exterior image, we can also act from the outside towards the inside with the purpose of improving our own image in other people's eyes, meaning that we adopt gestures, attitudes and a tone of voice which transmit a certain message or state, to induce ourselves that state, which we then design (for example, if we want to impose our authority, by adopting a position of power – right back, arms opened – this will instantaneously help us feel more authoritarian and to transmit self-confidence to the others). Also, moving forward, through imagination exercises and will, we can discover and improve the capacity of our mind with the purpose of building an image of the success that we can later project in our everyday life. In this case, in the year 1960 Maxwell Maltz introduced the concept of psycho-cybernetics with the purpose of explaining the significance of self-image in personal development. Otherwise, the discovery and improvement of the self-image represents an important preoccupation in the field of psychology (MALTZ, 1999).

For the purpose of knowing personal image in relationship with the people around us, a very well-known tool is the one proposed by the American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in the '50s, the Johari model. This model known as "the Johari window," offers a framework to compare what we communicate about our own person and what people around us perceive. This information is divided into four dials (Fig. 1). In the first dial we discover something that nor the person in cause, nor the ones around don't know; the second dial contains what a person knows about herself and what the other around don't; the third dial indicates something that is unknown to the person about herself but it is known by the others; the last dial indicates what a person knows about herself and what it is known by the people around her (ZLATE, 2004).

	unknown to myself	known to myself
unknown to others	1	2
known to others	3	4

Fig. 1. Johari window

When we work individually or together with a consultant on our personal image, we first move the important information from the first dial into the second dial. As we become more aware of the feedback that we receive from the others, we access dial 3 and move information towards dial 4. Then, by revealing information to others, we open dial 4. A well-built brand requires the intelligence use of dial 4, through which we know what image we transmit and it is perceive as such by the others (NECULAU, 2003).

3. CHALLENGES IN BUILDING THE PERSONAL BRAND

Why is it necessary to be interested in the personal brand, no matter if we are public people or not? Because, no matter if we interfere or not with our image, it will have definitely had an impact on us, regardless of the environment in which we operate, but not only in our professional life, but also in our personal one (MICU, 2012).

We consider that the main challenges encountered while building the personal brand are:

➢ awareness and acceptance of the present personal image, as a starting point in building the image desired;

➢ good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses;

➢ considering the fact that every brand has a strategy, the following challenge is to create a coherent strategy with the purpose of improving the personal image, and therefore we can use the Johari window:

o Dial 1- this space invites to personal introspection: discovery, the awareness of the talents, passions, values and qualities that differentiate us from the others and that can take us where we want. Also, here we can include those things that are revealed to us in limited situations and that present us some features that we have not known before or that we haven't been aware of;

o Dial 2 – proposes on the one side an exposure of those positive aspects that the others don't know about us and the capacity to improve or change some negative aspects. When we consciously develop new, better, habits our personal image has the tendency of overcoming old habits, building new patterns (SOMMER, 2002);

o Dial 3 – the challenge in this case consists of accepting feedback from the people around us, in order to see the way in which they perceive us and according to it to work more on what we want to transmit about ourselves;

o Dial 4 – here we include those aspects that define us the best and the ones that we project most often. A well-built brand proposes an intelligent use of dial 4, which tells us what image to transmit and this is perceived as such by the others (MARINAS, n.d.);

➢ Finding a model to follow, a mentor to inspire us in discovering the potential of our own image, or even a coach to assist us, step by step, in the development of our personal brand;

➢ A clear and coherent defining of our personal brand, so that the audience perceives it correctly;

➢ Preserving authenticity; when we aim to build a successful personal brand, we risk losing authenticity, either because of our tendency to copy other successful brands, or due to the capacity to offer a well-built marketing image whose content does not correspond to the expectations created by the label;

➢ Using the right channels to make ourselves known; in order to become famous and also remaining authentic, we have to avoid the error of communication on all online and offline channels, everything to everybody without establishing a strategy first and without aligning the brand with a personal mission, also without establishing a certain profile of the one to whom we transmit who we are and what we do;

➢ Since today almost everyone possesses a virtual identity (on Google, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or on other social networks), we have to be aware of the fact that this may help us or not. The main challenge in this direction is to broadcast offline what we broadcast online;

➢ And, since at one point we manage to influence the community created around our personal brand, we are responsible for the correctness and the legitimacy of the messages created and transmitted, as each mistake may lead to a decrease in our credibility (IONASCU, 2010).

Last but not least, with the purpose of making the personal brand more efficient, we have to take into the advice that Tom Paters offers us in his article entitled "The brand called you" (1997): "*It's this simple: You are a brand. You are in charge of your brand. There is no single path to success. And there is no one right way to create the brand called You. Except this: Start today. Or else*" (PETERS, 1997). In this article, which completely changed the concept of the brand, he speaks about "the era of the individual," claiming that the success of a contemporary business is based on the

strengths of the personal brand, the relationship between the partners being based mainly on interpersonal interaction rather than on competence (MALTZ, 2002).

Building the personal brand can be achieved with or without willingly interfering in this regard and it surely poses a lot of challenges, but once achieved, a good personal image, either personal or professional, in the relationships with the people around us, results in taking control over the message that our own image sends, power of influence and trust in our own person (PREOTEASA, n.d.).

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