



Protecting Your Professional Brand

“Life Is a Presentation”

Whatever industry one serves, all executives are in the business of marketing themselves - or they should be. Reputation building is a lifetime endeavor, and one that can be derailed or destroyed in an instant. Deliberate, strategic, and well-considered choices in all communication and behavior are the best insurance for a successful and satisfying career.

The following are primary categories to keep in mind and devote attention to as you build your reputation, and your future.

Personal Presentation

Leaders look like leaders, sound like leaders, and act like leaders: Do you?

Consider this: 55% of audience impression is based on visual image. Therefore, we are basically being judged - or pre-judged - on a snapshot of ourselves. Half of every potential client, customer, employee or management assessment is formed by your appearance and perceived attitude, based on visible non-verbal cues. Superficial, you may argue, but proven and true, and a reality too critical to ignore.

Thus, your sartorial style, combined with grooming choices, expression, posture and body language tells a story about you before you've even uttered one word. In the words of Charlene Barshefsky, former U.S. Trade Representative, “The body speaks long before the mouth ever opens”.

Communication

Most of us learn to talk at a fairly early age, but the education often ends there. Now consider this: 35% of the impressions we make are based on the quality - tone, volume, pitch, cadence - of our voices, rather than the meaning of the words themselves. Does your voice convey the level of energy, engagement, and enthusiasm to make those impressions powerful?

And, when we move on to look at language, does yours pass the ‘Executive Inspection’ test? Is your verbal style consistently clear, concise, and compelling? Are your words and sentence structures positive? Leaders know this, do this, and do it well.

What about content? Do you think strategically about your communication, and structure your presentations persuasively? Are your messages powerful, and memorable? Can you tell stories that get your point across in a unique and creative way? If you have bad news to deliver, are you able to tell it fast and say you're genuinely sorry, while moving the situation or relationship forward? Master communicators can, and do.

Reputation Management

First impressions matter, but behavior and performance over the long haul is the true test of character. Most of us mean well, but intentions are not enough: It is action that matters.

What's your track record like in regard to the simple - yet essential - things, such as meeting deadlines, returning calls, responding to email, and...telling the truth? For instance, most people would say they are "polite", but let's analyze that term a bit. Real courtesy is more than just holding a door from time to time: It involves attentive listening, with complete eye contact and without interruption, and the ability to utter the most conventional phrases, "thank you" and "how are you?" with real meaning and intent. And, most importantly, true courtesy sends a profound message of respect, and inspires comfort, confidence and trust. Combine that depth of attention with productive, constructive action, and you will always pass the integrity test.

And remember: If you're going to have a career-defining moment, make it a positive one.

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