

HIGHPOINT ASSOCIATES: INSIGHTS

DEFINE YOUR BRAND

Self-branding Insights from a Senior Advisor

ANNA MINTO & KRISTINA TOBER

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Associates

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At the heart of anything we read or often do is the same fundamental question: "What's in it for me?" It seems a selfish question, but if you believe that your best you comes from the realization of your dreams and strengths, it's an empowering question. This doesn't just apply to your personal life, but also to your job and career—equally important since it's where you spend half of your waking hours.

Let's start with your job. You can be really good at it. You get great performance reviews and are regularly promoted. You might be appreciated and well compensated for your day-to-day contributions to operations. But are you really satisfied and engaged with your work?

Sadly, just 13% of the U.S. workforce is passionate about what they do.ⁱ In another study tracking U.S. employees since 2000, less than a third feel engaged in their jobs/workplaces.ⁱⁱ That means only one in three employees is enthusiastic about and committed to their work, or demonstrates the productivity and customer engagement necessary to drive innovation, growth, and revenue.

Companies want and need engaged employees. Employees who exercise their strengths and passions in their jobs are more satisfied, more engaged, and better performers. It's a win-win proposition, so what are you waiting for?

It's worth taking a hard look at yourself. Even if you're doing a "great job," if you aren't excited about the answer to the question "Do I love what I do?" chances are you aren't realizing your full potential.

Anna Minto, HighPoint Senior Advisor, understands the impact individuals have in their organizations, having spent 25 years collaborating with clients to build and embed profit-enhancing strategies, many of which start with executive coaching. She has seen firsthand how individuals can define and ultimately shift the trajectories of large, complex organizations by challenging, creating, and embedding transformational changes. "The idea of transformation in the workplace doesn't just apply to operations and strategies, but to individuals as well," she asserts.

In this first of a series of articles, Minto will explore concepts of "Transformation in the Workplace." "Transformations can be applied anywhere, to services and brands, to thoughts and ideas, even entire organizations. But it always starts with the individual—you."

DEFINE YOUR BRAND

"Think of yourself as a brand," explains Minto. There are literally hundreds of definitions of "Brand" with a broad range of uses. At its most simplistic, a "brand" is a type of product manufactured or service delivered by a company under a specific name. From a marketing perspective, it is a unique design, words and/or symbol that identifies the brand and differentiates it from its competitors. This image, over time, becomes associated with a level of quality, credibility, and consistency. Key terms we discuss about the brand include the Brand Promise, Brand Perceptions, Brand Value, Brand Identity, Brand Expectations, Brand Elements, Brand Persona, etc. Strong brands are highly, highly valued. A brand is defined both as what it is and, by association, by what it is not.

Now translate the brand concept to the individual. What is YOUR brand? Are you smart? Analytical? Personable? Reliable? Detail oriented? Driven to results? The list of possibilities is long. Take a minute and jot down the top ten words that represent your brand, i.e., what you are and what you want to be known for. Your image, the essence of YOU.

Are you growing your brand each day or just coasting? Do you have the opportunity to evolve and transform yourself? Growing your personal brand requires having a reason to be (a valued job or role) and the right environment, where you are motivated to deliver and exceed expectations. Is what you are being asked to "do" in your corporate role aligned with what you need and want to do to grow your personal brand? Your performance goals may not be aligned with your personal brand goals.

Let's look at an example. Say you are in sales and are expected to double customer volume next year. You can certainly plug away at that sales target, get creative and implement quick hits. Your performance review (and bonus) might be stellar next year if you deliver. But what if what you thrive on (and what you want your "brand" to stand for) are strong personal relationships and client trust? What if you are motivated to perform at your peak when you are building relationships and focused on long-term business development and growth, not just hitting sales targets? You may be undermining your brand and underperforming against your own goals. If YOUR brand goals and your corporate performance goals are not aligned, you should either reconsider what personal brand you are building or consider new roles that allow you more opportunities to build "Brand You" and that reflect your personal strengths and passions.

"It's easy to stay the course, particularly if you are doing well," says Minto. "Eventually though, something will give. Either you will reach a point of disparity between your own strengths and the expectations of the job, or your lack of engagement will prevent you from delivering what's expected. Turns out, as identified by the Gallup poll, 'doing what you do best' isn't about general competencies, but applying individual strengths."

When we plug along, achieving a steady level of performance, we fall into a state of relative comfort (as identified in a renowned behavior study conducted by psychologists Robert M. Yerkes and John D. Dodson in 1908). To change the status quo, you have to push outside your comfort zone and add just enough stress to reach a state of "optimal anxiety." When stress levels are slightly above normal, we can achieve peak levels of mental productivity and performance. We can be more productive, adapt better to change, and more easily push boundaries.ⁱⁱⁱ

"Think beyond what's safe and easy," urges Minto. "Recognize that your own best work is aligned with your strengths and passions. Push your dream, even if it means you need to change the direction of your career."

While the 2016 Shift Index Report indicated that only 13% of employees are passionate about what they do, it also showed that 52% of workers have some strong attributes in their current roles. Chances are that if you are already a strong performer in your company, they will want to keep you. If that means shifting the focus of your job or role to better align with your strengths and passions, both you and your company have a strong argument in favor of transformation.

WHERE TO START: A PERSONAL INVENTORY

The first step in any transformation is taking a thorough assessment of where you are now. We began this article by asking you to consider who is "Brand You"? If you jotted down your key adjectives, pull them out. If you haven't yet, take five minutes to list at least 10 words you think best describe you.

Now let's dig deeper. Think about your unique strengths. In what areas do you excel? How and where do you add value? What are your weaknesses? What do you love about your work? What do you hate?

There are plenty of available tools to help you take this analysis further. Many tools used for personal training and development are worth revisiting. Minto turns to her two favorites, Myers Briggs and the Enneagram of Personality.

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an introspective self-report questionnaire that sheds light on psychological preferences in how people perceive the world around them and make decisions that underlie our interests, needs, values and motivations. From it, a 4x4 matrix classifies and describes 16 different preference types. The Enneagram is another introspective tool that classifies nine key personality types, emphasizing psychological motivations.

After you take a hard look at yourself, it's time to look more broadly. "You may know your own strengths and weaknesses," explains Minto. "You may know how you perform against standards. However, perception is reality. Make your assessment more thorough and realistic by looking at how others perceive you. You likely have several tools at hand, including 360-degree performance feedback and peer reviews. You can also ask colleagues, friends, and family for their thoughts."

PURPOSE WITH GOALS

Once you have a clearer picture of "Brand You," the next step is figuring out how to build it. Start by defining your goals. Better yet, have a purpose.

"We all have goals, striving towards desired results," says Minto. "Attaining a goal doesn't necessarily ignite your passion or deliver happiness, it just delivers an end result. On the other hand, your purpose is the real reason why you do or create something. It's your reason for being."

Ron Reynolds, author of *The Magic of Goals*, makes the analogy to a jigsaw puzzle. "Where you want to be" (i.e. your purpose) is the picture on the cover, the end result. All the pieces inside the box are your individual goals, both short and long-range. By putting the pieces together, you are working toward creating or achieving your purpose. Your goals could be what you want to change in yourself, a wish. It could be things that you don't want in your life anymore and acquiring something better. In the case of your career, it could be the relationships you need to build or the skills you need to acquire.

"Change can be daunting," recognizes Minto. "Perhaps your current job requires skills A, B, and C, but the job that you think best reflects your talents and passions demands skills D, E, and F. Breaking down the path into incremental steps, using your unique personal brand as a map, makes it manageable and steers you in the right direction. It allows you to focus on 'Where I want to be' by identifying 'How do I get there.'"

"Consider it like networking for a job, but this time you are looking for something that doesn't just pay the bills, but inspires you," explains Minto. "It can be as simple as joining

a United Way team, grabbing lunch, or a quick cup of coffee. You can ask peers you respect who do what you want to do how they got there. Take a class, ask for a job transfer. For example, if you are a brand manager at P&G but aspire to be a general manager, you need to build a better understanding of how ideas get implemented in the field and work on building relationships. A specific next step could be to ask for a transfer to the sales team where you can build skills to enrich your brand."

A REALITY CHECK

As identified in the Shift Index Report, as the costs of core technologies go down, the opportunities for individuals to learn new skills have gone up. Knowledge is flowing faster and farther than ever before, both in and out of organizations.

"Making a change, learning something new, isn't just about staying relevant in your current position," stresses Minto. "It's an opportunity for you to do something different that both ignites you and builds your personal brand."

"Meaningful work that engages and excites you shouldn't be a pipe dream," concludes Minto. "We spend so much time and energy working that it needs to be more than just about a paycheck or promotion. But that doesn't mean that some days, you won't still hate your job."

As Mark Manson reminds us in his pop culture blog, every job sucks sometimes.^{iv} It's okay if you can't make money following your passion. As he suggests, maybe you need to stick with a job that pays the bills but allows you to follow your passions in your free time? Or maybe you need to stop being afraid of making changes and go after what you really want to do. Know "Brand You" and build it. Discover the insight to set your personal goals and find the courage to transform your personal brand. It's worth the investment.

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 - iii Alina Tugend, "Tiptoeing Out of One's Comfort zone (and of Course, Back In)," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/your-money/12shortcuts.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>
 - iv Mark Manson, "Screw Finding Your Passion," October 22, 2015. <https://markmanson.net/passion>

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTORS

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KRISTINA TOBER is a communications consultant with over 21 years of experience. After working at The Wyatt Company, Kristina supervised and executed all areas of corporate communications for Helene Curtis, Inc., with an emphasis on investor relations, employee communications, and executive speechwriting. She also served key agency accounts at Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, providing communications strategy development and implementation, labor relations, and investor relations. More recently, Kristina has served a variety of clients on a freelance basis with an emphasis on copywriting and website content development. Kristina holds a BA from St. Olaf College.

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