

## Executive 2.0

# How to strategically build an executive brand that makes you a contender for your ideal job?

As soon as you understand what an executive brand is and why you need one [link to blog 01](#), you can consider how to build a brand that matches with your ideal job.

But of course, many people are not sure what that ideal job is. We are better at this when we are children. It is usually so much easier for a child to say, “I want to be a fireman,” or “I want to be a tennis player,” than for a senior leader in a company to know what they want from their next role. And the older we become, the further our careers advance, the more difficult it gets to make sense of what’s ahead.

To reach where we will find the most fulfilment and make the most impact, we need to understand ourselves. Once we have understood ourselves we can define our own personal branding. Then, after we have built our brand and learned to communicate it, the stakeholders surrounding our ideal job will be much more inclined to give it to us.



## Clarify your essential ingredients

I know too many high-ranking leaders who experience difficulty in formulating the opportunities on offer or what they can deliver. They don't have clarity on their strengths and assets - or which business they should be in - and so they make impulsive moves or they make no moves at all.

We may slowly climb a career ladder without truly considering whether it is the right ladder against the right career wall. After all our career ambition, effort and promotions, we need to make sure our brand matches with the position we achieved. For example, when you are a top performer in procurement during your whole career and stay in procurement all your career, you should not be surprised to end as CPO and not as CEO, even if you have many assets that match such a role.

You can complete an entire career before you realise that you need a high intellectual challenge to feel excited by your work. Or you may stick with a company through good and bad, only to later recognise that you only felt fulfilled when you were bringing the business back from the brink.

Consider what these essential ingredients are for you. Think upon your current job and ask yourself which elements of it engage you. Then ask the same of your previous jobs. What gave you energy? What did you hate? What did you have passion for?

You will likely not be able to answer these questions in full at first. It can take weeks to remember in detail. But once you have a long list, you can ask yourself which elements, or essential ingredients, are most important to you. See where these intersect with your skills, capabilities and experience. It will start to clarify what your ideal job might be, and the personal branding that will take you there.



## Establish your brand positioning

Brand positioning is in essence, 'the place you want to occupy in the back of a consumer's mind when they think of you.'

Your brand positioning must be authentic. So while you should create a brand that suits the industry you wish to achieve in, there is little point in pretending to be someone that you are not. When you build a brand upon your actual passions, interests and skills, your branding will be much more convincing.

For instance, before beginning my career in consumer goods, I spent six months in the UN army in Lebanon. I had some ideas of becoming a military officer - and it didn't seem like an impossible task either. But there was a problem: I did not like blindly following orders.

So although I liked aspects of the military, I realised I could not have authentically built my personal brand in that context. I could have tried but I am sure that my disgruntlement would have gradually begun to show. It was not the best fit for me or the kind of brand I wished to build for myself.

When deciding on your next role, your authentic branding should narrow the kinds of roles you consider and the industries you contemplate. You are choosing how you wish to evolve, which isn't the kind of decision you can take lightly, casually or unprepared. You need to take time to reflect and you need to be honest with yourself.

## Design your brand strategy

Building a brand is not something you can start too early. There came a moment, as a student studying medicine, when I knew I wanted to change course. I did not want to be a medical doctor. I had to define a new career path. But the options seemed far too many.



To get an idea of what different career paths would hold for the mid and long term, I spoke with ten people who were five years into their career and five who were at the final stages of their career. Gradually I began to see how each one would interfere with my own personal brand.

I was lucky to be able to speak with a Unilever board member who gave me career-impacting counsel. The part of their advice I will always remember is: start in a low level job because it will help your career later. They said, “Even when you’re at the board level in a consumer goods company, you should be able to discuss the diameter of the opening of the dishwasher soap bottle for half a day.”

Later, when I was part of the Frito Lay (Pepsico) European marketing leadership team, I realised how true these words were. We would make huge operational decisions and yet we also spent a long time talking about the image on the front of our crisp packets, getting down to the detail of which knife should be pictured and how thick the potato slice should be.

Then, further on in my career, I was offered the chance to lead a 27-person sales team that worked all over Italy. I had come a long way from the time I began my career as a personal sales rep at P&G. But I realised that without that sales experience, I would never have been able to lead that team in Italy.

You see, once you get to a high level, everything you have done until that point matters. It will affect your skills and knowledge base, which will in turn affect your personal branding. And once you get to an executive level, that detail can give your executive branding the colour it needs to differentiate you from everyone else.

## Sell your brand story

So how does this help you secure your ideal job? Well, it is possible that by building your brand authentically, you may be headhunted for a role that appears perfect. But you won’t know for sure unless you’ve rigorously examined yourself and built a brand intentionally.



The last thing you want is to jump at a role that turns out to be detrimental to your ideal career path.

But you don't have to wait for the ideal role to land in your lap. Once you've defined and built your own branding, you'll find it much easier to sell yourself to organisations, even at an executive level.

This is about much more than creating a good resume. It will need to read differently to what other candidates are putting forward. But if you are willing to put in the time and honest reflection, if you are strategic in your career choices and the details of what you do, then you can create a brand story that compels organisations to choose you over your competitors.

It's not an easy road but it is a path you can create for yourself. Get in touch with me to start refining your executive or personal branding - and bring your way forward into focus

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