

Executive 2.0



What is an executive brand and why do I need one?

Before I clarify why you need an executive brand, I should make one point plain: You already are a brand. The real question is: are you paying your brand enough attention?

In my experience, I've met only a few people who are aware of their own brand. They might believe that they only need to work for brands. But they often ignore the great effect that their own brand has on their present position and their future prospects, even their own sense of fulfilment.

You see, your executive brand is all about authenticity. When your brand matches who you are as a manager, it'll help you as an executive too, in the long run. So no matter whether you're at the beginning of your career or you're considering your next CxO role, you're better off thinking about your executive brand sooner so that it can profit you later.

It's the personality you project

Your executive brand is essentially your leadership personality as it is perceived by other people. Whenever you have to sell yourself to other people - whether to be hired, win a deal, lead a team or form a partnership - your executive brand comes into play.



It's a little like what customers do with consumer goods, in which they subconsciously translate a brand into a personality. For example, I remember when we did brand personality studies at P&G, our study for the Ariel brand showed that people would describe Ariel as a beautiful admirable woman with long blond hair walking through a field. And that they would even imagine she has two young children that she takes good care of.

This image sold the brand well to its target market, who were mostly young and middle aged women. However [Ariel did also sell well in urban areas.](#) Perhaps the notion of the woman walking through a field speaks to a busy city person's desire for a simpler way of life. The imaginary personality acted as a source of inspiration for people. It was an image they wanted to be associated with.

In the same way, the brand that you build for yourself will affect how others think of you. So it can help to think of yourself as a brand that you're selling. To ask yourself, how do I want to be perceived? Why would a client grant me a deal? Why would people work with or for me? How can I inspire others?

It's affected by everything you do

Whether you mean to or not, everything you do, say and wear can contribute or compromise your executive brand. You cannot control whether people make assumptions about you or not. But you can influence the kind of assumptions they make.

You partly do this by the way you dress, by your hair style and even by the car you drive. These are all soft signals that communicate to others what kind of person you are. This doesn't mean you should necessarily change your usual appearance to suit others.

But you should nevertheless be aware of the message you are sending out. Then you can consider whether these soft signals match the kind of person you intend to be.



Your executive brand is also gradually built through more overt forms of communication. The way you speak in presentations matters but your everyday conversations also play a part. Even your tone of voice in messages and emails contributes to the kind of brand you are building. You might be perceived as direct or conciliatory, formal or casual, humorous or candid.

And it's not only what we put into words but our behaviour too. How you act is important but what you demonstrate consistently over time is even more so. What you prove yourself reliable at can become your specialism in the eyes of others. And they may turn to you later for answers on what they perceive to be your subject.

It's how people buy into you

So won't all of this come naturally to you? Some of it will, certainly. Your executive brand should, after all, be authentic. It is the outward projection of who you are, not who you are not. However, we can all act out of character and it is good to become aware of when we are not doing our own brand a favour. The further our actions are from our authentic selves, the more problems we create for ourselves. If your executive brand is not a reflection of you, it will in time collapse.

When you are a leader, you need others to buy into your authority. Some of your influence will come purely from your title and function. But people are only truly inspired to work for those who have a consistent executive brand image. Otherwise, they're not quite certain who they're following.

One of the primary drivers of humans is to belong to a group (or tribe). So your executive brand will determine whether others can see themselves as part of what you are leading them towards (whether you should be accepted as leader of their tribe).

It's what can gain and lose you opportunities

Your executive brand should also affect what you see yourself doing, even on a detail level. If you're not comfortable wearing a tie every day, don't look for a company where that is required.



As a consultant, always consider that your car doesn't outclass your client's car. But as a CEO, drive the car that people expect you to drive.

I know of a marketing manager who wanted to be a marketing director in a company board. He had the capability, certainly. But he was struggling to step up. And part of the reason was that his branding was off. In the company he worked, the board was well dressed in well branded modern suits and dresses. But with his flowery tie and rusty glasses, he looked like a biology teacher from the 70s. So even though he had the necessary skills, he wasn't using his own marketing expertise to market himself to match the audience he wanted to become a part of.

Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Your appearance plays a part but it is the work you do to refine your brand inside and out that unlocks opportunities and gives you clarity on the next step you should take.

More and more people are coming to me, after a long and good career, saying, "My job is about to end" or "I want change." Few of them have any idea of what should be next. And many of them have not given thought to their executive or personal branding.

Ready for the next step but unsure where to begin? Get in touch with me to start refining your executive or personal branding - and bring your way forward into focus.

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