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*“In your life you only get to do so many things, and right now
we’ve chosen to do this, so let’s make it great!”*

– Steve Jobs

"The art of communication is the language of leadership."

– James Humes

*"Communication is a skill that you can learn... If you're willing
to work at it, you can rapidly improve."*

– Brian Tracy

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Branding Your Career Like Steve Jobs

Recently Leander Kahney of Cultofmac.com interviewed former Apple CEO John Sculley on his ten years' experience working with Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. Link to the article: www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_44/b4201096309840.htm.

We can summarize this interview and distill seven learning points to help us develop a more successful and innovative professional brand:

1. Be Different - Begin With the End in Mind

“Why join the navy if you can be a pirate?”

— Steve Jobs

Part of what Sculley describes as the “Steve Jobs methodology” is to “start with the user’s experience”. While competitors focus on product development, Jobs focuses *first* on customer experience. The result, of course, is a line of products that are user friendly, popular, and worth paying more for.

We can relate this to career branding by thinking about how you want your primary professional audience (those who have the power to pay and /or promote you) to experience your brand. Consider the following:

- A. Putting yourself in your supervisor or customers’ shoes; what must they experience from you in order to entrust you with greater, promotable responsibilities? To become loyal to your brand and make referrals?
- B. What would they be willing to pay you more for? Offer you greater opportunities for? How can you satisfy their needs?

- C. How can you improve their user experience of your professional service so that, because of you, their time is easier, better, and more enjoyable? What can you offer so that they're glad they have you around, and prefer not to do without you?

2. Be a Minimalist – Follow What You Truly Want to Be

“Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

— Steve Jobs

Scully made a point of emphasizing the importance of being selective in what you do. It's important to say “no” many times to avoid going in the wrong direction, or taking too much on your plate.

There's a big difference between being busy and being productive. Some busy people lack selectivity, can't say “no”, and attract many thankless tasks that go unappreciated. Productive people who are brand-savvy know what their strengths and niches are, and focus primarily on tasks that will help them earn higher recognition and pay.

“Quality is more important than quantity. One home run is much better than two doubles.”

— Steve Jobs

Granted, we can't always choose what we do, and with every job there's a certain amount of obligatory busywork. The key, therefore, is to reduce your discretionary busy work. Consider the following:

- A. How much of your current work is busy work, and how much is meaningful work? If more than 50% of your professional time (some managers and executives would draw the line at 20%) is devoted to busy work, it's time to reprioritize.
- B. Make a list of all the busy work that you do as part of your job - tasks that are time consuming, thankless, and add nothing to your career success.
- C. What can you do to reduce, simplify, or delegate as much of your busy work as possible, so that you can concentrate on brand-building endeavors?

3. Be Selective – What You Don't Do Brands You as Much as What You Do

"I'm as proud of what we don't do as I am of what we do."

— Steve Jobs

Some professionals never volunteer to be note-takers at meetings. Some refuse to answer non-essential work e-mails. Some do not attend unproductive meetings. Certain top of the line products and services rarely offer discounts. While you may agree or disagree with these strategies, branding-savvy professionals are often highly conscious of projecting what their brand is *not* about. Consider the following, arguable points:

- A. It's more important to be respected than to be liked. There's truth to the saying "nice guys finish last". You want people to take you seriously, and not see you as a softy.
- B. It's more important to set limits and standards than to cheapen your brand. Ways of cheapening one's brand can range from allowing others to waste your time, to

making a major concession without strategic payoff. Once your professional brand is cheapened, it's hard to win back the respect.

- C. It's more important to be a producer than a compliant team player. Being an amenable team player is suitable in some situations. However, being a strong producer (with excellent people skills) will ultimately earn you your highest recognitions and promotions. Even when you're part of a team, be sure what you do as a member will bring you due recognition, instead of allowing someone else to shine at your expense. Those who are consistently overshadowed in groups are only contributing to their colleagues' success.

4. Be Irreplaceable - Brand Yourself With a Hard-To-Substitute Niche

"A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

— Steve Jobs

Many years ago in business school, one of my professors told me the following two keys to success in any organization:

- A. Get your foot in the door.
- B. Do something to make yourself irreplaceable.

Of course, what makes you irreplaceable becomes part of your brand. In the context of Job's philosophy, we can also include:

- C. Identify an unmet need, and be the only one who's qualified to fill it.
- D. Better yet, *invent* a need, and be the only one who's qualified to fill it.

You can exclusively fill a need based on one or more of the following:

There's more to this excerpt!

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