SHE LEADS
With an
AUTHENTIC BRAND

22 trail-blazing women
share their stories of fuelling their career success
with the power of an authentic brand.

BlueRose ONE .com
Stories Matter
NewDelhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS
India | U.K.

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ISBN: 978-81-6744-962-7

Cover design: Aafiya Saifi
Typesetting: Namrata Saini

First Edition: October 2026

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Introduction

What is a personal brand, really?

Bhavna Toor

CEO & Founder, Shenomics



At Shenomics, we view personal branding not simply as superficial packaging that you might create to project a certain image to the world, but as a much deeper exercise.

At the root of it, personal branding is about uncovering your core essence; it's about owning and expressing an authentic identity. It's about building awareness around the things that make you uniquely you, such as your values, your passions, your strengths and your vision for yourself and the world.

The process of personal branding, therefore, is a journey to using your self-awareness to actualise the best version of yourself. And then, it is about using that self-awareness to fuel compassion in the world – in other words, using the best of you to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. That is how a legendary brand is built. **At Shenomics, we call this building your brand from the inside-out.**

In this book, you will meet 22 exceptional women, who in their own way, through the ups and downs of their lives and careers, courageously went about discovering their best self, and through the awe-inspiring brands that they have built, are now making a significant dent in the world – as entrepreneurs, as leaders, as change-makers, as creators and so much more.

I'd like to thank these women for taking the time to share their stories to serve as a beacon of light and guidance for others. And, I'd especially like to thank the editor and curator of this book, Tapshi Dhanda, who has with great skill and care brought these stories to life.

I hope in this book you find both the inspiration and the practical advice to progress in your own journey of uncovering who you are, and then stepping up to own your unique greatness to serve others.

Warmly,

Bhavna

CHAPTER 01

Sushma Chakkirala



Executive Director, JPMorgan Chase & Co

Like most engineers, Sushma Chakkirala's career followed a natural progression from being a developer to a team lead, then a manager and a leader. Moving past initial skepticism, she now promotes meaningful branding, which is really about what she stands for and how she wants others to remember her.

After a Bachelors in Architecture, I got married, moved to the US and completed my Masters in Computer science. I landed my first job in my dream company, Sun Microsystems.

The initial decade as a working mother is a complete blur as I went through the motions of life, raising two kids and managing a full-time career. I attribute my early career growth to strong work ethics, great managers and some luck (being at the right place at the right time).

As I stepped into management, I realised that people and project management are my true calling. This is how I discovered my passion for working with people, rallying them together and getting things done by aligning them to a common goal. The adrenaline rush of delivering products, transforming experiences and simplifying complex delivery processes was immense, and I was ready to give it my 110%. My job became meaningful and turned into a career.

After spending 10+ years of my career in one organization, my next stint at Intuit felt like a management roller coaster with tons of learnings.

Until then, I was of the opinion that an engineering manager needs no branding; my deliverables will speak for themselves and my character is visible for anyone to see. I learnt the hard way, through failures, that external perception matters. I realised what I thought of myself was sometimes different from how I came across in discussions. Your reputation or perception is made up of opinions people form about you based on your actions and behaviours. The first hard step for me was to reflect deeply, accept myself and solicit feedback with an open mind.

This set me up for an exciting journey of reflection and self-awareness to transform into a leader. I started following people who are successful and who I resonate with to observe how they present themselves, how they communicate, their behaviours and their overall ability to influence and impact.

Branding meant self-promotion, something I was not comfortable with. But I started small by working on my inner chatter and being intentional about my interactions -preparing well for the situation and empathising with the recipient. This is how I attracted sponsors in the organisation, expanded my network and discovered new doorways.

> **As a senior leader, personal branding is all about perception building.**

This realisation has been revelatory. A definite turning point in my personal branding journey.

Besides my core work, I made it a point to join communities such as the Grace Hopper Conference India (GHCI), and lead horizontal initiatives at my workplace, so I could practice leadership skills such as networking and influencing.

Brand building is about consciously deciding where you spend your time and what/how you put yourself out there. Finally, personal branding is personal. While I can emulate another leader, I still needed to customize the style in order to be authentic and convincing. Most people are smart and can see right through any duplicity, and being true to oneself becomes even more important for a 10x leader.

Being soft-spoken, I did not fit into the traditional definition of a leader. Coaching helped me uncover a few limiting beliefs that were holding me back. I realised I could be compassionate, empathic and assertive all at the same time. Fortunately, leadership styles have evolved to become more inclusive and allow you to bring your true self to work.

Note that being a 10x leader is an inner journey of being fully aligned with your true north, and leading with confidence and conviction. I sincerely believe that such leaders are intentional about personal branding on both digital and physical platforms until it becomes second nature to them. It's a journey worth undertaking.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Make every interaction count

We are knowingly or unknowingly creating impressions with each interaction. Through interactions, you are sharing your expertise, point of view, building connections, and attracting sponsors and mentors. Being more thoughtful about your interactions and making them valuable is important.

2. Keep the intention pure

My style is not being over the top but rather keeping it subtle which aligns with my values. While presenting an update or sharing a message, keep the objective about the larger good and not just about yourself. Visibility becomes a side-effect of this action but not the primary objective. So focus on the 'real why' and branding automatically happens.

3. Inspire others and stay inspired

Take time out to join a new community or a training course to stay inspired and build new brain pathways. You are a work-in-progress and constantly growing. Meeting new people helps you expand your network and learn and evolve your 'brand' based on fresh insights about yourself and what the world needs.

CHAPTER 02

Lata Daswani

Partner, KPMG India



Lata Daswani's enviable and extraordinary journey is a testament to her clear professional vision right from the start. Her personal brand has organically developed through her consistent alignment of actions with words, connecting with like-minded individuals, and shining a light on others.

Inspired by the likes of Barkha Dutt, my journey began with aspirations of becoming a journalist, but the path to my dreams took a different turn when I chose to study commerce. It was a choice guided by practicality and the assurance of financial independence, as my parents were concerned that arts & literature may not be the right path for me in those times.

Commerce led me to take up chartered accountancy because it seemed the most challenging of all, and I enjoy being challenged. Once I qualified as a CA, I explored various options – auditing, accounting, tax, business management, and consultancy.

I decided to specialize in tax as the ever-evolving nature of tax laws and regulations fascinated me, and I knew it was a field where monotony would never set in.

In my initial years I held significant tax compliance roles at Capgemini and Morgan Stanley – before the pivotal advisory role at Barclays. My only goal when I started my journey as a CA was to become the Tax

Head of a multinational, which I assumed would happen in my 40s; it's a role where you need extensive experience and depth of knowledge.

But three years into my role at Barclays my manager decided to move on and, to my surprise, the leadership team considered me to be his successor! This marked a significant turning point in my career. I became the tax head of Barclays India in my early 30s, and stepped up to my first ever leadership role.

> **Leadership changes you**, **and that changes your brand.**

As a tax head, I transitioned from an introvert to a leader who could build relationships, manage risks and effectively lead a team. This transformation was an essential part of my journey, one that expanded my horizons and opened the doors to new opportunities. It changed me a lot, in terms of personality.

Barclays was where I first delved into diversity and inclusion, a cause I'm passionate about. My CEO became a mentor who guided me towards opportunities beyond tax. It was here that I recognized the impact I could have on an organization's culture and values.

My journey continued through Citi, Bank of America, and an unexpected opportunity as the CEO of Everest Fleet. Being a CEO was something I had never envisioned, but I took the leap of faith. From being a Tax Head, which is a back office role to being a CEO – as front end a role as any can be – was exhilarating! The eight months I spent in that role were transformative, instilling in me newfound confidence.

The last year, as a Partner at KPMG, I've undertaken everything that I had not attempted in my two decades as a professional. It's been highly fulfilling. As a leader you realise you're not responsible for yourself alone but also your team, your stakeholders and the brand of your organization. Visibility of your and your team's work becomes imperative.

You can either just let your work speak for itself and wait for others to notice it – in which case you may be doing a disservice to those you represent – or you can not only let your work speak for itself but also talk about your and your team's work. For ex: As a Tax Head, while my

team’s role was a back end one, we started sending monthly reports to the leadership team which brought visibility to each member of my crew.

I did not make a conscious effort to brand myself. My brand got built as a byproduct of me sharing what my team had achieved, expressing gratitude to those who had given me opportunities, admiring the work of those who inspire me, and publicly announcing the career goals I was looking forward to.

The connections I’ve built and the people who have reached out to offer support and opportunities, as a result, have been magical. In my experience, crafting a personal brand has not only opened doors in my career but also profoundly enriched my life.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be who you are

Your personal brand should be a reflection of who you truly are. Authenticity is the foundation of a strong personal brand. Be yourself, embrace your unique qualities, and share your journey authentically. Don't try to be someone you're not; people recognize and appreciate genuine individuals.

2. Align your actions with your words

Ensure that your actions align with the image you project through your personal brand. If you promise something, follow through. When you don’t, it negatively impacts your brand. Building trust and credibility is essential in personal branding.

3. Take people along

Personal branding is not just about promoting yourself; it's about building a community. It's about connecting with like-minded individuals and uplifting those around you. Share your knowledge, engage with others, and offer your support. By creating a community, you enhance not only your personal brand but also the brands of those you interact with.

CHAPTER 03

Deepti Dayal

Chief of Staff, Indihood | Promoter & Co-Founder, DeepKey Co.



Deepti Dayal's personal brand radiates amidst a vast sea of talent. A marketing and corporate communication virtuoso, her prowess has graced Dell, ING, EY, Cognizant, and Google. She meticulously selects the right projects, people and leaders to propel her career forward, and works with strategic precision on building her brand.

I started my career over two decades ago and worked with startups for the initial couple of years. I had to cross the Dell office as part of my daily commute to Electronic City in Bangalore. Interestingly, it was then that my fascination with the concept of a "brand" began. The Dell logo got etched in my mind, and I often wondered what it would be like to work with such a big name. In March 2004, I joined Dell and dedicated the next ten years to working my way up the ranks.

After completing my executive MBA from IIM, Bangalore, I realized that a brand is a foot in the door to bigger and better opportunities. People pick up your resume! I had a similar experience of understanding the power of a brand while working at Dell, but my journey began long before that.

As a young mother, I had my son at 18 and completed my education in a hybrid set-up. I missed out on the typical day college experience, but I

was determined to study at a premier educational institution in India. Thanks to Dell, this dream came true.

My experiences with branding externally helped me realize the importance of building my personal brand. I wanted to understand what makes me stand out and how to bring something extra to the table. While I could pursue a career in marketing or PR, I knew that defining my own brand was the key to my success.

> **Even now, I relentlessly challenge myself with burning questions: "What unique value do I offer? What sets me apart? What legacy do I leave behind?"**

Wearing many hats – from marketing & communications and PR to change & crisis management and strategy & operations – I have intentionally chosen the projects, leaders, and organisations I work with. This has given me a broader view of many parts of the business, helping me hone my skills, grow professionally, and contribute value to businesses in more holistic ways.

Unveiling my true potential to my network is also paramount to me. My unequivocal lesson is that a thriving network requires constant nurturing, and fostering a memorable indelible "brand recall" in every interaction. I want to point out that sometimes, my strategic choices can (seemingly) take me ten steps back. But I always consider whether a project will add value to my brand and resumé in the long run before making a decision. Even if a project fails, I always learn something valuable from it, which I can apply to other projects and turn them around!

After years of building a network and a brand, I've cofounded DeepKey Co. – a strategy consultancy helmed by an exceptional team of senior women consultants with over 100+ years of collective global experience across various industries.

I also mentor women in tech forums and fiercely support the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore Alumni Association (IIMBAA) and India Startup Festival (ISF) in strategy, corporate communications, and public relations. This is another critical aspect of my brand.

Throughout my professional journey, I've made conscious choices to build my brand. Building a brand is not something you can do overnight. It requires consistent effort -from what you say and do to who you interact with. It's an investment in how you want people to perceive you, both personally and professionally. As a daughter, sister, friend and single mother I think about how I want to present myself in personal spaces and interactions, just as much as I think about the brand I'm projecting professionally.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be authentic

Don't pretend to be someone you are not because people will pick up on it easily. By 'authentic,' I mean that you should have a clear understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, thought process, and behaviour. Spend time to reflect on who you are, what you want to be known for, and what you specialise in. Then leverage this self-knowledge to create a unique personal brand.

2. Be consistent

If you're someone who posts once a month, and you suddenly start posting more often, your audience is going to know it's not you; it's probably someone you've hired. Instead, gradually progress to build consistency that is sustainable for you. The same goes for the platform(s) you choose. Don't try to be everywhere and master it all. Pick a few that you feel are most relevant to you, and stick to them.

3. Overcome the guilt of self-promotion

Be absolutely unapologetic about your achievements and showcasing them. Celebrate your wins without feeling like you're bragging. As a woman, you may be aware of the discomfort others feel when you take up space, but trust yourself to find a balance in how you talk about your accomplishments. And by all means, celebrate your wins and share them with others.

CHAPTER 04

Hema G

Senior Director Software Engineering, GE Healthcare



A strategic leader with 25 years of IT experience, Hema G's self-effacing demeanour belies her confidence and unyielding integrity. She embraces personal branding not as a selfish pursuit but as a means to empower those who look up to her. In her view, it is a practice towards a larger cause than the self.

Given my line of work, it's obvious that I come from a science background. However, I took up science not because of a deep passion for it – in fact, I found physics, chemistry and maths painful – but simply to distinguish myself from others (at home, to begin with). My father was a banker and my sisters had taken up commerce. So, I wanted to be different.

My fourth elective, computer science, became my saving grace, propelling me into the world of software engineering.

Around the time I graduated, there was an advertisement in the Indian Express about the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, recruiting project trainees. My father, handing me the newspaper, encouraged me to sit for its entrance exam and I thought, "why not?" 10 individuals were selected pan India and I was fortunate to be one of them. As a project trainee, I got the opportunity to work with PARAM, a series of Indian supercomputers, developed in late 1980s.

From there the stage was set for a 25-year journey through testing, development, project management, and ultimately, a senior director role at GE Healthcare. You would think I'd have embraced personal branding early on, given how women have to fight for their rights in male-dominated industries but I only consciously embraced it about five or six years ago.

Back in 2003, my peer was chosen to be sent onsite to the US for a project that I was running. When I asked the senior why he hadn't chosen me, he told me he'd assumed I would not be ready to go since I had a young baby to take care of. This incident where I had to stand up for an opportunity, despite societal expectations of a new mother, laid the foundation for what I now recognise as an early form of personal branding.

Fast forward to today, and I find myself advocating for the power of personal branding. Not for self-promotion but as a means to inspire and guide those who look up to me.

The realization dawned on me that if I shy away from acknowledging my achievements, or think of branding as ego/pride, or let my traditional upbringing get in the way, those who seek inspiration from me might be left in the dark. It took 20+ years of work experience for me to understand that...

> **the essence of personal branding is to move away from the self to something larger.**

Talking about my work is still hard. I am a very "we" person, attributing success to the team rather than myself. Overcoming this required a shift in perspective. I started embracing the concept that stating the truth is not boasting. This mantra became a guiding principle for me and my team, most of whom also come from backgrounds where humility is respected. They find it challenging to talk proudly about their work, and some even consider it egotistical.

"Tell the facts," I urge them, "in a humble way." Truth is never pompous.

The lessons I've learned in personal branding have not only transformed my approach to personal branding but have also influenced the way I guide my team. The power of storytelling, another aspect I've incorporated into my personal branding efforts, has proven to be a game changer. By shifting the narrative to highlight key milestones and achievements, I've inspired others to take pride in their own unique stories.

Let me give you an example. Earlier, I'd introduce myself something like this:

"After having completed my internship, I took a job as a quality engineer in a small company, then I had a couple of shifts, then I joined GE, and I have been with GE for 22 years. "Rather uninspiring, isn't it?

Once I understood storytelling, I made tweaks to the introduction. For instance, I'd say, "I am an alumna of one of India's most premium institutes, the Indian Institute of Science…" Or, "I was one among the 10 project trainees selected pan-India by the IISc in 1997..." These small changes would make people sit up and take notice.

Now, in both cases I'm stating facts. I'm not manipulating anything. But there is a huge difference in how the two introductions land for my audience. The latter ignites a fire in them. As a result, they start telling their stories with pride!

Personal branding, to me, is not about elevating myself but about igniting a spark in others. If I can inspire even one person to be bolder, more authentic, and unapologetically proud of their journey, my efforts in personal branding have served a larger cause.

Lessons in personal branding

1. State the facts with humility

I emphasize that telling the truth is not boasting – it's merely acknowledging the reality of your accomplishments. Do not shy away from telling the truth about your origins, your personal and professional journey, your challenges and your wins. All of it adds up to make you who you are. Tell it as it is.

2. Engage in passive brand-building

Make a conscious effort to build a habit of passive brand-building. Whether through blogs, articles, or even a simple WhatsApp status, these small efforts contribute to shape your personal brand over time. Now there is social media too. Use it to put your thoughts out. This will build your persona.

3. Be comfortable being uncomfortable

Acknowledge imperfections, embrace vulnerability, and recognize that discomfort is a natural part of growth. Putting yourself out there is likely to make you feel queasy. But learn to accept the discomfort and do it anyway. When branding is for a larger cause, for inspiring those who look up to you, the discomfort of being in the public eye is a small price to pay.

CHAPTER 05

Aditi Garg



Director / Principal Program Manager, Microsoft

Aditi Garg was born and educated in a small town in India. Setting examples of many firsts for the women in her family, she truly believes that where one starts from influences one's journey but does not define it. Her approach to personal branding is philosophical, and in being that, it is quite unique.

I was born in a small town in Haryana called Rohtak, and graduated in engineering from a local, private college in the same town. I was the first girl in my family to pursue engineering, and the only woman in the generation to later pursue a corporate job and work across three continents.

I started my career with Tata Consultancy Services back in 2001, three years after which I joined Sapient Consulting (now Publicis Sapient), which is a Massachusetts based consulting firm. With them I got the chance to travel several times to the US, and lead and manage diverse projects.

In 2006 I moved to Accenture and established myself as an SME in niche technology areas across Accenture globally, which led me to move to their Denmark office, along with my family. And today, I work as a Director at the Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

In the initial 5-6 years of my career, it was established that I could move projects from "red to green". I consistently took on and successfully

unblocked complex projects that were in deep trouble by leveraging my technical acumen and project stewardship skills. This led to me being recognized for the same, and sought after by my employers.

Over time I managed so many blocked engagements, and brought them back to order, that it became my brand! My work brand – to be precise – which is not very visible outside and doesn't feature on my LinkedIn. It's more private, more day-to-day at work. Even today my current role in Microsoft entails unblocking highly strategic and business critical customer engagements.

I've built my personal brand a lot more intentionally. Having grown up in a humble town in India where doing more with less was a necessity, and having lived in a Nordic country where I experienced the height of social welfare systems as well as in the US where I witnessed the height of consumerism – 'give more than what you take' became my life's guiding principle. For me, this resonated with the concept of sustainability in today's world and hence it became a purpose.

The concept of sustainability for me is holistic, encompassing not just the environment but also social-economic dynamics. Growing up in a small town, I have gone through the struggle and understand the lack of resources and opportunities that come by virtue of one's location, community and religion. I'm thus passionate about creating equal economic opportunities especially for people from small towns.

These passions are more personal, and you can clearly see them reflecting in my day to day and personal life, where I look for opportunities to optimise consumption or maximise resource opportunity for all.

Working on my personal and professional brands keeps me focused. I'd say that's the biggest plus for me. It give me direction.

I'm a big believer of '*karm karo aur phal ki chinta mat karo*', from the Bhagavad Gita, which translates to 'do your work and don't worry about the results.'

> **I'm not going after branding. I'm going after my purpose and passion.**

In return, I'm being approached as a subject matter expert, I'm mentoring and supporting startups and I've established a not-for-profit digital platform focused on spreading equal opportunities and resources, globally, for teachers. Everything that is coming my way is a byproduct of diligently doing my work, while staying focused on my purpose and value system. Brand, I firmly believe, is a byproduct of the same.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Identify a clear passion area, and don't keep switching

Figure out what you're passionate about. For me it's sustainability. For some of my peers too it used to be the same when sustainability was cooler but now it's AI, tomorrow it'll be something else. Your passion cannot be seasonal. If it is seasonal and not deep rooted, your content will lack depth of knowledge. Constantly changing passions can confuse your audience and definitely hinders personal branding efforts.

2. Know your strengths and growth areas

Identifying your passions, values, strengths, and areas of growth helps you create a strong personal brand. This self-knowledge then gives you the confidence to believe in yourself, which is a must because if you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. Others cannot value what you do unless you value it first.

3. There is no substitute for hardwork

If you want something extra, something more, you've got to first put in the extra work. This is a universal law and it applies to personal branding as well. Intentionally work on your brand, give it extra focus, and then watch as extraordinary opportunities begin to open up for you.

CHAPTER 06

Tina Mansukhani Garg



Founder & Chief Creative Storyteller, Pink Lemonade

From being a computer engineer with a penchant for literature to founding Pink Lemonade, a respected branding and marketing agency, Tina Mansukhani Garg chose the path without any experience or mentor in the industry. Certain that a company gains from projecting its leader, personal branding makes solid business sense for Tina.

I chose the path of computer engineering not out of a burning desire but because it seemed like the logical choice. It was the expected trajectory, the conventional wisdom. Yet my heart craved a different calling, one that resonated with my creative spirit. The desire to immerse myself in literature and writing never waned, and I made a promise to myself during my engineering years to explore this passion further.

As life unfolded, marriage and entrepreneurship entered the picture. My husband and I started a software company, within which I managed the vertical that looked at marketing language and content creation. This paved the way for my realization that my true love lay in marketing and communications.

I embarked on a marketing course followed by an MBA in marketing, while being newly married at the age of 22. When my first child was born I took a three-year hiatus during which I wrote 400 articles for publications like Deccan Herald, The Hindu, and the Economic Times,

as well as for Microsoft, affirming my commitment to my first love – writing.

The roles that began to come my way assured me that I'm good at this but the imposter syndrome, the nagging feeling of inadequacy – of not being formally trained as a marketer or communications expert – lingered despite tangible success.

After my stint at Ernst & Young, managing their internal communications, I decided it was time to do this on my own. The transition to consulting was a pivotal moment, leading to the birth of Pink Lemonade in 2008-2009. I formalised the entity, desirous of taking it to a level where it becomes a brand to be reckoned with.

What started out as a three people team transformed, over time, it into a 200-member organisation that thrived on a visionary approach to ideas and creativity.

Personal branding soon became a crucial element in navigating the professional landscape. During interactions as a consultant, I became acutely aware of selling not just services but myself.

> **At every point in our life we are selling and marketing.**

This prompted a deliberate effort to shape my personal brand, both as an individual and as the leader of Pink Lemonade.

Building Pink Lemonade from the ground up demanded not just technical expertise but a distinctive personal brand. In a field where formal training in advertising or marketing was missing, I needed to forge a unique identity. The absence of a mentor in this field fuelled my determination to project authenticity and competence.

The journey of personal branding began organically, driven by the need to establish Pink Lemonade as a recognizable name in the industry. The process involved not just external communication but also internal culture building. The idea was to convey not just what Pink Lemonade does but also who leads it and the values it embodies.

The integration of personal branding wasn't a mere marketing strategy; it became an intrinsic part of leadership. From the early days of sharing insights on social media to participating in industry discussions, my

personal brand evolved as a dynamic force, combining expertise, authenticity, and a unique perspective.

My personal brand is a blend of high energy; profound knowledge in marketing and communications; creative thinking; and a strong, confident demeanour. I know my strengths, and I couple them with an unapologetic approach to leadership.

To those who observe me, I am someone who not only leads with authority but also fosters an environment of equality. The commitment to thought leadership, a balance of firmness and empathy, and a continuous pursuit of learning contribute to the persona that defines me.

Not engaging in building your brand is akin to having baked the perfect pie but not sharing it with anyone. Personal branding is the conduit through which your skills, expertise, and unique perspective are communicated to the world. In a landscape saturated with information, personal branding is the key to ensuring your voice is heard, your work is recognised, and opportunities come knocking.

For me, personal branding has opened doors to speaking engagements, opportunities for moderation, requests for mentorship, and business growth. The decision to consciously shape and share my personal brand has elevated my professional standing and become a catalyst for Pink Lemonade's success.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Personal branding begins internally

Personal branding isn't just about external projection; it begins internally. Every interaction, whether with team members or clients, subordinates or seniors, serves as a touchpoint for personal branding. How you handle tough situations, navigate conflicts, and guide others contributes to the narrative of your personal brand. It is also influenced by your turn out, your demeanour and your body language. So, pay attention to each.

2. Self-assessment is crucial

Understanding what you are known for, your strengths and weaknesses, and what you want to be known for provides the foundation for strategic personal branding. Crafting a unique identity involves a thoughtful elimination process, focusing on what sets you apart rather than conforming to common traits.

3. Create a core team

Building a core team that supports your personal brand is invaluable. Whether it's delegating tasks related to content creation or leveraging your team's expertise, a collaborative effort enhances the consistency and effectiveness of your personal brand.

CHAPTER 07



Sonali Gupta

Founding Director - Centre for Entrepreneurship, Ramaiah University

With over 25 years of multi-faceted experience as a technologist, research scholar, entrepreneurship educator, and ecosystem builder, Sonali Gupta has excelled at several different professions and nurtured passions just as varied. Her brand building is an exercise in shining in diverse fields and changing tracks – on her own terms.

I'm a typical small-town girl, and I grew up wanting to be independent. I hail from Jammu. The career options were limited, and more so for women. I saw engineering as my ticket to a world of opportunities.

I graduated from BITS Pilani, a prestigious institution that allowed me to spread my wings. After completing my engineering degree, I spent over 12 years working as a techie, immersing myself in projects that set me apart from many of my peers. I was exposed to various domains, clients, and countries which gave me a broad outlook of the tech industry.

I completed my Executive Management Program from IIM Bangalore. However, as life often unfolds, my priorities shifted with the birth of my child. Balancing the demands of motherhood with a demanding career proved challenging. I had to take my foot off the gas pedal, professionally. I had to chart a course that would align with my evolving values.

By then, I felt I had the financial security I desired. I wasn't pursuing unicorn-like riches, but I felt secure. It was a moment for me to contemplate what's next. I wanted to build something more, without compromising my family life.

So, I took a break. It wasn't easy as it meant leaving behind a career and life I had diligently built for over a decade. During this time, I delved into volunteering for NGOs and offered my expertise to friends, who were in search of professional guidance. Though unpaid, it kept my professional spirit alive and helped me stay connected to the ever-changing world.

My break allowed me to explore the idea of starting my own venture, but I lacked a clear concept. So I did the next best thing to starting up – I joined NSRCEL, the business incubator at IIM Bangalore. It gave me an up, close and personal look into the entrepreneurial journey and the ecosystem. Rather unexpectedly, it got me interested in the academic side of entrepreneurship – how an entrepreneurial mindset could be taught and what more could we do beyond incubation.

Driven by my passion to learn and teach about entrepreneurship, I pursued a Ph.D from IIM Indore, focusing on the intersection of entrepreneurship and public policy. The Ph.D as well as the extensive practitioner experience behind it, empowered me to start my own venture. I realised I wanted more than a typical role in academia. I decided to carve out a different path that included the work I was passionate about – my venture, research and writing, teaching entrepreneurship and consulting in the enabler ecosystem.

All of this eventually led me to my current role as the Founding Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, where I am building a centre that focuses on latest pedagogy and practices in entrepreneurship for a multi-disciplinary audience.

My journey has been a tapestry of diverse experiences, each thread weaving together to form a unique personal brand. My journey from a small-town girl to a techie, academic, consultant, and entrepreneur demonstrates the importance of embracing change and following one's

passions. Amidst all this, personal branding came to me gradually, only a couple of years ago.

As I transitioned from a break to reentering the workforce, I had to redefine my career goals. I recognized that personal branding wasn't about boasting or seeking external validation. Instead, it was about effectively communicating my experiences, skills, and aspirations to align with my career objectives.

In the early days, I was hesitant to speak about my varied experiences. The career transitions I did, even though in sync with my priorities, are hard to explain to anyone. But soon I realized that if I didn't articulate my story, no one else would do it for me.

So two years ago, I deliberately defined my brand narrative based on the career I wanted. I picked education, ecosystem building and entrepreneurship. It's a unique bouquet but it's one that brings me joy and satisfaction. Having a personal brand helps me do the work I want, and keeps me growing, grateful and excited about the possibilities ahead.

> **My brand is not just to indicate who I am to the world; it's my North Star guiding me to live the life I want.**

Lessons in personal branding

1. It's a tool for anyone with professional aspirations

Personal branding is not just for celebrities. Each person, regardless of their unique career path, should be able to articulate their story coherently. If someone like me, who has worked five different careers can communicate my brand, I believe every one should put effort into theirs.

2. It takes time

It takes time not only to talk about your brand, but also to first arrive at it yourself. It takes time to craft your narrative and constantly refine it as your priorities change. Today I can have a conversation about brand building, but it's been a gruelling journey of many years trying to understand, for myself, what my brand is. It's entirely worth it.

3. No one else can do it for you

Your mind can be your biggest obstacle, and you must build the confidence to speak about your achievements and aspirations. Even people who are well-intentioned, and who know you and your work well, may get it wrong. You have to give others the vocabulary to talk about you. You have to believe in yourself and talk about your skills, your interests, your wins, your career goals.

CHAPTER 08



Shyamala Jhaveri

VP - Global HR Operations & Shared Service Program Management, Alstom

In her early career in the US, Shyamala Jhaveri discovered the power of speaking up, a lesson that has since shaped her personal brand throughout her 20+ years of working life. Consciously building her brand and showcasing it professionally, while keeping its ethos sacrosanct in her personal life, she believes, are two sides of the same coin.

My journey commenced in a realm far removed from corporate boardrooms. Armed with a bachelor's in physics, and a master's in computers, I ventured into the world of technology as a Java developer.

My first job as a Java developer led me from India to the bustling streets of New York, setting the stage for a career that would require a delicate dance between professionalism and creating a niche for myself.

The cultural shift from being a quiet observer to being expected to use my voice in the fast-paced environment of corporate America, left an indelible mark on my early career. It taught me the importance of speaking up, a lesson that would later shape my personal brand.

From there, moving to Deloitte was another big exposure because it opened up my world to the breadth and depth of consulting, and taught me both hard and soft skills that are needed to become a consummate consultant.

In the world of consulting, where visibility is key, I learned that it wasn't just about doing the work but also about making sure others knew about it. The infamous 30-second elevator pitch became a tool to succinctly convey my value, a practice that, in hindsight, sowed the seeds for a conscious approach to personal branding.

Working the room, networking, and making myself visible in various professional settings became second nature to me.

What added to this was also the program management course at Harvard, with professionals from around the world, which lent collective experience to understanding the importance of expressing myself with deliberation and intent.

After Deloitte, I consulted in the space of both investment banks and alternative investments including private equity. But largely, it was to be thrown into the mix of projects involving business, technology, strategy and operations, and somehow finding my way because every consulting assignment is different from the other.

In 2011, trailing my spouse, I moved to India. As my career meandered through different roles and continents, the concept of personal branding evolved. Moving from the corporate world to social projects and then back to corporate life in Unilever, I faced challenges that tested not only my skills but also my resilience.

The transition to a new role in Unilever, where I found myself in unfamiliar territory within the supply chain space, unveiled my resilience to me. Putting myself out there knowing nothing about the field and accepting with vulnerability the help that was offered was deeply humbling.

Having worked in the social sector and learnt the value of leading by influence, I exercised it extensively in the corporate workplace, which became a trademark.

Over time, my personal brand shifted from being vocally expressed to embodying what I stood for – a silent yet powerful testament to my values. At Alstom, I get to live my values and passionately champion

DE&I. From IT to HR and now global shared services program management, my journey here is defined by change and resilience.

Describing my personal brand and work ethics in a few words – connection, the desire to contribute, resilience, and leadership by influence – reveals the consistent thread that has woven through my professional identity over the years.

Beyond the professional realm, my personal brand is intertwined with my spiritual journey and self-care practices.

A 9/11 survivor, the transient nature of life became a poignant reminder to nourish myself amidst the chaos. The questions arising from that fateful day led me to introspection and deep meditation practices, shaping not only my personal resilience but also influencing my leadership style.

> **I firmly believe that our inner world reflects our outer world.**

My personal mantra is centred on balancing inner calm with outward dynamism. This equilibrium – which avoids lethargy from excessive calm or feverishness from constant activity – holds me in great stead.

When it comes to branding, I wonder what stops us women from talking about our work, from asking for a specific opportunity, from throwing our hat in the ring? Personal branding is about being unapologetically yourself.

The way I view it, it's the synergy between the impact of your work and the embodiment of your values, ensuring alignment in words, actions, and identity.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be by being and do by doing

When we are constantly doing, we lose focus on being. We forget to take a step back and ask ourselves, "who am I?" I'd say, ask yourself that. Identify your unique gifts and play to your strengths. In the professional world, where conformity often seems like the norm, understanding what

makes you uniquely valuable is key. And always benchmark against yourself rather than comparing yourself to others.

2. Presence matters

There are two kinds of presence - outer and inner. Outer presence involves how you present yourself; your appearance, demeanour, and etiquette. However, inner presence, which reflects who you are internally, speaks volumes even before your outer presence has had the chance to make an impression. Be mindful of the energy you bring to a room. Do not underrate a calm and centred demeanour in professional settings.

3. Take personal responsibility

Take personal responsibility in crafting your narrative and be proactive in shaping your professional identity. Don’t wait for opportunities to come your way but actively seek them. Personal branding is not immodesty but a factual representation of your skills and achievements.

CHAPTER 09

Indira Jois



Director - Cross Market (USA), Kyndryl India

Over the 25 years in the IT/ITES Industry, Indira Jois has consciously built a brand that represents a problem-solving approach, curiosity and inclusivity. Having been in multiple global roles, Indira credits one core choice that has helped her build and amplify her personal brand – seizing opportunities for meaningful stretch assignments.

I completed engineering in 1998 and moved to Bangalore for a job with a startup. I come from a privileged enough background that in the initial years of my career I could make the choice between money and learning, and I chose the latter. I got to learn a lot working with startups, and the culture of taking on new things holds me in good stead even today.

After about six years with startups, I got an opportunity with a UK-based firm which handed me JP Morgan Chase as a client within my first two weeks there. I had to work offshore, which meant that I had to leave my 11-month-old baby in the care of my then wonderful support system for nearly two and a half years. In the beginning I would feel guilty, but soon it passed as I was focused on creating an impact at work. When I look back, I believe I unknowingly started building a personal brand from then itself.

The word began to spread in the JP Morgan headquarters that there is a young lady from India who is resilient in building large and high

performing teams. New stakeholders welcomed me with open arms because they already knew what I bring to the table.

It was only after I joined IBM in 2010 though that I started working on my brand more consciously. Maybe I needed that large a platform to understand the Art of Possibility, which is the remarkable effect of being prepared to seize opportunities.

I spent close to 12 years at IBM, where I moved roles horizontally and vertically, in strategic and global capacities, but no matter what my core role was, I always took up 2-3 interesting side roles. This helped me understand the business, the stakeholders, and how things look from completely different vantage points. Many a times my primary role did not give me those perspectives.

> **I recommend taking up 1-2 meaningful stretch assignments to boost your brand.**

They give you a chance to work with senior executives, come under their radar, and of course to learn unlike any other opportunity can offer.

Now, where I work at Kyndryl India, each one of us is encouraged to be a brand ambassador for the organisation. With Kyndryl being the world's largest startup it comes easily to us because we all feel like we are a part of something exciting.

With Kyndryl's push, I decided to become methodical with what, when and how I use social media. Earlier I used to think that it has to be an earth-shattering idea for me to put it out but now I know that as someone who has grown in the industry for 25 years, my point of view on even the small things happening in my industry matters. I block time on my calendar to write a post, I comment on other people's posts with which I relate, and internally at Kyndryl we use a set of employee communication tools like Yammer where I am quite active.

Apart from social media, I participate in relevant forums and I try to go beyond my primary as well as stretch roles.

For ex, CII hosts the Digital Eminence Awards annually, which I came to know of only last year. I decided to nominate my team and we ended up winning both in 2022 and this year, in 2023!

It is important to find avenues where your stories, your work and your wins are valued.

I believe that building a personal brand does a myriad of things for professionals. One, it ensures that when an opportunity opens up in your organisation, you are in the first cut off. I can guarantee that you're not going to be in that list if you are not well known, internally, and if people don't know what value you add.

Two, establishing a brand makes certain things easier. For ex, some time back when I had questions about ESG, which is a new thing, I reached out to a leader who is 2-3 levels senior and he gave me his time. He accommodated me and shared insights that he would not have if he wasn't already familiar with my brand.

Three, having a brand undoubtedly helps you land specific roles and jobs especially if you have a clear idea of what you want to do and where you want to be in the next 3-5 years.

Making conscious efforts to build your brand opens you up to a number of different things happening in the world, and gives you the opportunity to contribute to them and make a real impact.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Operate with integrity

Especially as you become senior, it becomes a mark of a respectable leader. I'd say my approachability and integrity are key factors in providing meaningful advice to others. Being consistent in both public and private interactions as a leader is crucial. If you aren't, people will see through it and that could negatively affect your brand.

2. Prepare for interactions

Ginni Rometty, ex-CEO of IBM would prepare for every investor meet a couple of dozen times. If she at her level chose to do it, I believe it says a lot about the importance of preparation. I follow the same mantra. I go thoroughly prepared for every one-on-one, critical review, and client meeting, which has only strengthened my personal brand.

3. Prioritise taking up stretch assignments

This is a great way to understand the organisation and work closely with peers and seniors from other verticals. The proximity helps make them aware of your capabilities, what you bring to the table and the energy with which you drive things. For ex: I was taking care of a unique client as a primary role at IBM and had taken up a global role as a stretch for one of the senior leaders, with whom I would have regular cadence because of the assignment. Later, when an opportunity opened up in his organization, he first offered it to me. This was only possible because he knew me, my work and my brand. So, go the extra mile and take up stretch projects.

CHAPTER 10

Ann Ann Low

Senior Director - Talent Development (APAC), LinkedIn



Ann Ann Low's journey has taken her from the role of a consultant, providing valuable support, to a dynamic position in HR where she specialises in fostering the growth and success of others. Her perspective on building a personal brand keeps authenticity paramount and recommends speaking up when a decision clashes with one's values.

My professional journey started in consulting, a world of high-profile problem statements, and a quest to alleviate pain and introduce gain. As I dove into the consulting realm, I realized the importance of viability, cost impact, scalability, and client needs. But while proposing brilliant solutions was exhilarating, implementing them was a challenge.

Many clients loved our ideas, but infrastructure limitations, a lack of readiness, and slow time to market often thwarted implementation. The proposals remained just that – proposals. Dissatisfied by this, I knew I needed to shift gears and explore the in-house side of things.

Marking a significant evolution in my journey, I transitioned into the role of an HR professional. My objective was to improve experiences, simplify complex processes, and demystify the inner workings of the corporate world.

My consulting background had taught me to dive deep into problems, ask "why" multiple times to identify root causes, and develop

comprehensive solutions. These skills served me well as I took on the challenge of making HR more effective and human-centric. I aimed to bridge the gap between processes, policies, and the people they affected.

From consulting, which is an advisory role, to HR, which is an enabler role – the move was deeply fulfilling.

As my career evolved within HR, I moved into organizational development, talent management, and talent development. I found immense satisfaction in helping individuals unlock their potential, envision their futures, and unleash their dreams. My personal journey had now become intricately tied to enabling the growth and development of others.

The concept of personal branding entered my professional life quite early. In the world of consulting, where you're expected to develop expertise rapidly, the importance of building a strong personal brand was conveyed to us by senior partners in the firm. We had to come across as attentive, professional and someone our clients see as a true thought partner.

However, my transition to an in-house role brought personal branding into sharp focus. I no longer wanted to be viewed as just a "consultant." I needed to establish myself as a genuine partner, a collaborator, and a business leader.

As I navigated this shift, I developed four questions that I posed to my peers, seniors and team members, which proved to be instrumental in shaping my personal brand and in helping me understanding how others perceived me. (a) What advice do you have for me to succeed in this organisation? (b) What is your understanding of what I do here? (c) How do you think others perceive me? (d) What is the one thing, according to you, that would make the biggest positive difference for my success here?

These questions helped me align my values with my actions and communicate my authenticity to those around me. I was no longer "the consultant" but someone with a unique perspective, a voice that mattered, and a brand that reflected my true self.

> **There are several reasons I work on my personal brand. Most important being: I want to be true to my values, and use them to energize others.**

There are clear practical sides to building a personal brand. First, it helps you establish yourself as an influencer in your area of expertise. It allows you to be seen as someone with constructive views and valuable insights, making a significant impact in your domain. Second, it leads to enhanced professional opportunities. Your brand becomes a magnet for those seeking your unique talents and perspectives.

Third, when you develop your professional brand, you also build a supportive network of individuals, mentors, and collaborators. These connections can provide guidance, feedback, and opportunities that help you grow personally and professionally. And fourth, it gives you the chance to inspire people. When people look up to you as a role model and seek your knowledge and guidance, it allows you to pay it forward.

So, why bother with personal branding? Because it's a journey that not only shapes your career but also empowers those around you.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Authenticity is key

To build a strong personal brand, it's crucial to be true to your values and to yourself. Your values should become an integral part of your personality, reflecting in your interactions, conversations, and decisions. People trust and respect those who consistently uphold their values, so being authentic is a fundamental aspect of personal branding.

2. Define your values

Complementary to the point above, identify and be clear about your core values. Your top values might evolve over time, but the foundation of your top 3-5 values should remain consistent. By regularly assessing your values and ensuring alignment with your actions, you can build a personal brand that reflects your true self. Knowing your values also enables you to speak up when faced with situations that conflict with your principles.

3. Speak up and ask questions

When something being discussed or decided clashes with your values, it's important to speak up. Instead of simply expressing disagreement, ask questions in a constructive manner to encourage others to think and consider different perspectives. By speaking up in a thoughtful and coaching way, you can earn the respect of your peers and leaders, ultimately becoming a trusted, consistent voice who people turn to for advice.

CHAPTER 11

Surekha Mandadi



Engineer Leader, Roche Information Solutions India

Starting out as a software engineer in a domain where few women participated, Surekha Mandadi had to build not only her technical skills but also – and more importantly – her influencing skills. Today, in the role of an engineering leader, she has crafted a brand statement that guides her, while keeping her core values central.

Growing up, my father was my role model. He worked in a public sector industry and was the manager of an aeronautics company, which had scarcely any women. I aspired to follow in his footsteps.

I was raised without bias or discrimination around what women can or cannot do. But the day I told him I wanted to be where he was, his expression changed. Always encouraging, he warned me that it'd be a challenging path. There were absolutely no female leaders in his workplace, and he was concerned about my future in the industry. His words steeled my resolve. I recognised that being a trailblazer wouldn't be easy, which made it more crucial to be one.

Nevertheless, I went on to study electronics and communication. In college the men to women ratio was more or less equal but as soon as I joined the professional world, I saw a drastic drop. Women employees were in single digits!

I began to grow through the ranks, and over the years, took on multiple roles. From being a front-end developer, progressing towards a full stack engineer and an architect, over the course of time. On the managerial side, I have been an individual contributor as well as a people leader. Currently I am an engineering leader building and nurturing global teams.

It was in the managerial roles that I repeatedly received the same feedback – "You can be more assertive."

Thinking I'm doing something wrong, I decided to look up to my mentors and model other leaders, only to realise that most of them were male, and had their own ways of being assertive. Still, I tried to emulate their style. But it just wasn't me.

I decided I don't have to change my authentic way of working as long as I can deliver same or better business outcome. I chose, instead, to influence.

In any role you play, you have to influence, and I realised I'm good at it. This became a core part of my brand.

Practically speaking, I decided to combine my core skills of decision making, striving for excellence and being result oriented with my core values – empowering, encouraging, being empathic – to create my brand.

I channel my skill into defining clear problem statements, figuring what needs fixing, which themes work and which don't. Whatever I learn, I make notes of it, and eventually they become content for my brand. I channel my value of bringing people together and aligning them to a common goal with the use of storytelling. A story always garners more commitment from the team than a command. And the latter is not my style of leading, anyway.

I show up as the brand I've created. In fact, when someone asks me what I do, I do not tell them my role or designation, I tell them my brand statement – *I explore. I engage. I influence.*

> **Your brand has to reflect your core values.**

This automatically ensures that whenever you show up as a brand, and in any content you create, you're authentic.

With every role, I try to rebrand myself while remaining consistent with my core values. For ex, as an engineering leader, how do I come across as someone who owns the room? As a technical architect, how do I project myself as a subject matter expert? This can be challenging sometimes but I believe our brand must make room for evolution and adaptation.

I make conscious efforts to build and grow my brand. I gain more knowledge in my field of work and keep abreast with industry news to stay relevant. I create visibility for myself by building networks and leveraging them. I subtly incorporate my brand into conversations without actively blowing my own trumpet. And I have accountability partners (a core support team of sorts) who nudge and help me to maintain an active presence on social media.

Personal branding is often misunderstood as as a tool for self-promotion. I personally see it as a North Star, my guiding principle that keeps me grounded and aligned with my aspirations.

So, to those who wonder, "Why bother with personal branding?", I say – it's your path to self-discovery, empowerment, and unlocking your fullest potential.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Don't fall into the perfection trap

You have to start somewhere; that's how you'll learn and grow in your personal branding journey. You will observe patterns, you will receive feedback, you will align more and more with what comes authentically to you. And gradually you'll have more structure. Stick with the process, and forget about perfection.

2. Be consistent

Working relentlessly to build your brand has huge payoffs. I'm already seeing its benefits even though I've only recently started. And that in turn motivates me to keep at it.

3. Make room for your brand to evolve

Don't say, "this is my brand, and I will not go beyond this." Sometimes, based on the opportunity, be open to adapt and evolve your brand. As long as it's still expanding around your core values, evolution of your brand is a positive change.

CHAPTER 12

Ranjani Mani

Director, Gen AI, Microsoft



Ranjani Mani's trifecta, in a career spanning two decades, is product, AI and data. She has built and scaled global teams, mentors Deep-Tech and Gen AI startups, is a TEDx speaker, podcast host, and a LinkedIn Top Voice in Tech for whom personal branding began simply as a way to strengthen her understanding of self.

I was born and raised in Bangalore by parents who were both English literature graduates and government officials. While they envisioned a future in medicine or engineering for me, they never impeded my fascination with technology.

I grew up watching my parents treat each other, and my brother and I, as equals. From them, I imbibed the ethos of never holding back, a principle that continues to shape my professional approach.

Embarking on the well-trodden path of engineering, I found myself at Oracle India, as a technical consultant. Yet, even amidst lines of code, I found myself questioning not the 'how,' but the 'why.' This internal inquiry led me to pivot towards a role that would provide answers – the realm of product management. Pursuing an MBA at MICA in Ahmedabad became both a strategic move and a way to evade marriage for a few years.

The journey into product management proved fulfilling, but the allure of data and AI beckoned. An opportune move to Dell Global Analytics, as they set up their Centre for Excellence in Bangalore, shaped my early corporate experience. This phase crystallized my understanding of leadership, shaped by mentors who, much like my father, believed in unwavering support.

VMware came next, where I witnessed the team burgeon from its nascent stages to a 1600-member global powerhouse over eight transformative years. Leadership roles, scaling capabilities and geographies, and managing global teams defined this phase.

The journey intertwined with a significant personal milestone – embracing motherhood, a testament to the supportive culture at VMWare that encouraged both professional and personal growth. My trajectory took me next to Atlassian, where I led a global team, collaborating with engineering and product heads to solve customer experience challenges through data sciences. And just a month ago, I joined Microsoft as Director, Gen AI.

Alongside my corporate endeavours, a parallel passion has emerged – one that seeks to bridge the gender gap in technology. Mentorship, podcasting, and involvement in startup initiatives have become integral facets of my mission.

The concept of personal branding didn't dawn on me overnight. It was a gradual evolution rooted in my love for learning by teaching. Feasible in school and college, I stopped engaging in learning this way as I grew up, for a lack of audience.

As a professional, I wanted to create a force function, which would allow me to learn and communicate at the same time. Writing, my chosen medium, became a vehicle for self-expression and discovery.

Embracing platforms like LinkedIn, I started sharing my thoughts on tech and AI. The process unfolded into a powerful tool that not only facilitated learning but also connected me with a diverse array of professionals. I discovered that personal branding isn't a mere outward projection but a reciprocal meaningful interaction.

Yet, personal branding is not without its challenges. Wrestling with imposter syndrome, juggling time constraints, and overcoming societal expectations are struggles I face. My remedy? Anchoring myself in authenticity, planning my time meticulously, carving out dedicated slots for deep work, self-advocacy and embracing the long game.

Amidst these challenges, personal branding becomes a transformative journey – one that extends beyond self-promotion.

> **Building networks, allies, and mentors becomes pivotal, because...decisions about your career are often made in rooms you're not there.**

Building a personal brand has been a game-changer, both externally and internally. Externally, it has expanded my network, opened doors to diverse opportunities, and heightened my professional trajectory. Internally, it has transformed how I perceive myself, fostering confidence and self-assurance. The fulfilment of knowing that my journey resonates with others, impacting their lives positively, is a deeply gratifying reward.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Authenticity is the cornerstone of branding

A strong sense of values – and aligning to it everything you do and everything you put out – is important when you're defining your brand. It creates a resonance that is both powerful and enduring. Understanding oneself becomes the cornerstone, with a focus on what truly matters – values, mission, and purpose.

2. The process of branding is individualistic

Some people like to talk about themselves, some people don't. The key is to be more intentional about branding whether it's through writing, speaking, or even within the confines of a job. It helps to keep a running note of all your accomplishments and contributions, professionally, so you can easily communicate them whenever you need to talk about yourself.

3. The onus lies on you

Women often lack self-advocacy, and hand over the responsibility of self-representation to others. The onus of letting others know about your journey, accomplishments, talents lies squarely with you. When you take the reins, you get to propel your narrative forward in the way that you desire.

CHAPTER 13

Sahar Mansoor



Founder & CEO, Bare Necessities

Sahar Mansoor, ex-Cambridge, ex-WHO, Acumen Fellow, Green Citizen at UNESCO, and a Penguin author, founded her social entrepreneurial venture from the blend of passion, purpose, and a commitment to positive change. Personal branding, in her view, is a unique opportunity for women to celebrate themselves.

My professional journey kicked off in the realm of academia, where I was on a path to becoming an environmental professor. My academic pursuits took me from a small, hippie liberal arts school in LA to the prestigious University of Cambridge.

I found myself drawn to the intersection of environmental science, policy, and planning, ultimately creating my own major. This became an unparalleled opportunity to learn intricately about the environment at a time (13-14 years ago) when environment was sweet and cute and very much a side dish; it wasn't mainstream.

After I graduated from Cambridge, I spent the summer working with the World Health Organisation in Geneva, where I learnt the intricacies of impactful work but felt a disconnection from the hands-on impact that I craved to create.

So, I moved back home to Bangalore, India, and joined the solar energy and access space. The idea was to be closer to the ground where the real implementation happens.

This decision allowed me to witness the transformative power of social enterprises firsthand, and to learn that good does not always need to be charity or philanthropy; it can make business sense! This laid the groundwork for Bare Necessities, the genesis of which was a response to the environmental challenges I observed within waste management systems.

Inspired by the need for sustainable packaging, we embarked on a mission to make mindful consumption accessible to all. Co-creating with customers, pop-ups, and face-to-face interactions became our compass, guiding us through early stages.

In the early days of Bare Necessities, personal branding wasn't a conscious strategy; it was a necessity. As a young, fresh graduate leading a lean operation, putting myself out there became a tool to raise awareness about our mission and the broader cause of sustainability. This unintentional foray into personal branding began to shape the trajectory of my entrepreneurial venture.

Maintaining alignment between personal values and the brand's ethos has been crucial. The congruence between the two has not only enhanced credibility but also fostered meaningful connections with customers who resonate with our values.

However, the journey hasn't been without challenges. Early on, my outspoken nature on various issues, especially environmental injustice and social inequality, posed a dilemma. The rise of online cancel culture forced me to reassess the balance between self-expression and potential consequences for the brand. Navigating this delicate dance between online and offline expression became a valuable lesson in personal branding.

Amid the digital noise, finding offline spaces for authentic self-expression became crucial. As an Acumen fellow, I discovered a haven where authenticity is celebrated. It’s a space that invites the complete human, not just the entrepreneur, fostering conversations around power, privilege, and personal purpose. After all, my identity is so much more than just my startup.

Creating a personal brand opens doors to new opportunities and enhances credibility. It serves as a digital footprint, allowing for self-expression beyond the constraints of a traditional CV. And it fosters meaningful connections by making it easier to identify value alignment, so you can recognise who your partners and allies are.

> **As women, wired to look at ourselves and our accomplishments critically, personal brand gives us an avenue to celebrate our career, life, and thought-process milestones...**

...in a way that is different from what the world has done to us for so long, which is to reduce us to a couple of images. In this way, personal branding is powerful, and worth spending time and energy on.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be authentic

Being authentically yourself builds trust and credibility, and is the strongest cornerstone of your personal brand. Remember that your brand is more than the work you do, so find avenues – a mix of online and offline spaces – to be your whole true self.

2. Embrace continuous learning

Staying in a constant process of learning not only demonstrates expertise but also ensures relevance and evolution of your personal brand. During the pandemic I took an online course in Circular Economy with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and, in general, I'm always doing something to nurture my personal journey, which strongly bolsters my brand.

3. Be consistent

Consistency doesn't have to mean daily posts. Find a frequency that aligns with your life and career trajectory, and stick to it. I do not have the bandwidth to post frequently but I like to take a thematic approach by posting on landmark events/days that are relevant to my brand (for example, the World Environment Day). This is feasible for me. Define an approach that is feasible for you, and apply it consistently.

CHAPTER 14



Kavita Mehra

Senior Director India COE, Dell Technologies

Kavita Mehra, with a distinguished career spanning 23 years, has navigated diverse roles ranging from frontline sales to customer operations and strategic leadership. Her personal brand, cultivated from the outset, actively challenges stereotypes and weaves a narrative that enriches her professional journey.

After being raised and educated in Delhi, my career kickstarted with the Indian Hotels Company Limited in Chennai, a city that became the cradle for my learning. The job provided me with invaluable insights into diversity, cultural dynamics and nuances of multinational workplaces. This exposure formed the bedrock of my understanding of personal branding.

Early on, I grappled with the challenge of shedding the label of a ‘North Indian girl in Chennai’. That experience taught me the power of defying stereotypes and refusing to let preconceived notions define me.

Following my marriage, I moved to Bangalore and embarked on roles with Info Edge India Ltd, before joining Dell Technologies, where I have dedicated two enriching decades. Each role, spanning from global call centre and now operations, elucidated the pivotal role of personal branding in a corporate landscape rife with stereotypes.

A defining moment emerged when I was categorised as a "call centre person”, sparking my initiation into the realm of personal branding.

Authenticity and consistency became my guiding principles. Through genuine conversations, I began showcasing my journey, gradually shaping this practice into a deliberate approach to personal branding.

Adopting a detective-like mindset, I delved into why this perception was formed, sharing my journey authentically. Undiscovered to me then, this tactic, initially aimed at challenging stereotypes, evolved into a strategic branding approach.

My colleagues at Dell recognise me for my vibrant energy, positivity, and humour – a deliberate strategy I employ to forge connections. Leveraging these traits, I establish rapport, allowing me to share my work in-depth.

In our professional trajectories, stereotyping is inevitable. I emphasise recognising and leveraging stereotypes to fortify connections and consciously redefine one's narrative. To me, personal branding extends beyond self-presentation; it's about crafting a narrative that resonates, fostering professional transformation.

> **How people perceive me is not my brand; it's my reputation. My brand is what I create.**

The development of one's identity has significantly impacted my professional life, furnishing me with a distinct identity and a mechanism to distinguish myself from others. It has facilitated connections with others, forming a network that attests to my capabilities and has served as a gateway to several opportunities.

Early in my career, I relied on my resume to secure opportunities. However, as my professional journey progressed, I found that most of my roles materialised through my extensive network.

Building and nurturing professional connections has played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of my career, allowing me to leverage valuable relationships for new opportunities and advancements. In a competitive professional landscape, it is crucial not only to be aware of your unique contributions and differentiators but also to effectively communicate with the right people.

Defining, communicating, and connecting based on one's identity plays a crucial role. This journey of creating a personal reputation is not a static destination but an ongoing process. It involves continuously and consistently adapting over time and effectively communicating your brand to the world.

Your work may not inherently communicate its value because not everyone will allocate dedicated time to understand it. Even if your work does eventually speak for itself, the impact may not be immediate. It is essential for people to see, hear, identify, and resonate with your trademark. Clearly articulating who you are and ensuring that definition is known to the market is critical.

Crafting a reputation for oneself transcends mere image creation. It involves weaving a narrative that resonates with others, propelling continuous growth and success in a cutthroat professional world.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Authenticity is paramount

Authenticity, in my perspective, equates to unwavering commitment to my true self without compromising my core traits to amend to external perceptions. Genuine connections, founded on understanding and trust in my brand, pave the way for opportunities for enhancing my life.

2. Consistency is a conscious effort

Consistency necessitates a deliberate commitment, a conscious effort made every day, even in challenging circumstances, to present oneself in the most authentic manner. I start my day by journaling and writing down a list of tasks that are aligned with my professional aspirations. At the end of the day, I review the list to see if I stayed true to my commitments. This practice not only reinforces consistency but also holds me accountable.

3. Stay relevant

Relevance underscores the significance of remaining mindful of the context and adapting without compromising authenticity. For instance, drawing on my experience as a national-level rifle shooter holds value

only if contextualised in a sales conversation by highlighting its contribution to my competitive edge. The art lies in crafting a narrative that renders your brand relevant in any given context.

CHAPTER 15

Swayta Murarka



Managing Director, Head of Global Banking GSC, HSBC

Swayta Murarka, a visionary business leader with 20 years in investment banking, embodies strategic thinking and champions self-belief, balance, exploration, fostering connections, inspiring others, and diversity and inclusion. She firmly believes, backed by evidence, in the transformative impact of personal brand on collective progress.

I never had a vision of where I could reach when I started my career. At 16, wanting to support my father in educating his three children, I began tutoring junior students, which gave me the means to sponsor my higher education in Chartered Accountancy. However, while still in the course, I landed a well paying job and everyone advised me to abandon the gruelling course. But I had my long term goals clear in my mind. Undeterred, I woke up at 5AM for tuitions, worked 10-hour shifts, and returned to books in the evening. The tenacity paid off, culminating in an All India Rank.

Life's lessons unfolded swiftly – my first income at the age of 16, first job at 21 and cracking my first big merger for a US client at 26. These experiences sculpted me into someone who embraced challenges, embodying the belief (as quoted by Zig Ziglar) that “you don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.”

My encounter with the concept of 'brand' traces back to childhood. At the age of 7-8, accompanying my father to banks, HSBC left an indelible

mark. The professionalism, employee conduct, and client respect embedded in me a profound idea of branding. I set my sights on working there one day. This early exposure shaped my understanding of brand values, leaving an enduring influence on how I perceive and appreciate branding today.

I realised that who I am and what I stand for matter significantly. Transitioning through varied careers – auditor, investment banker, strategist – the essence of my identity remains, shaping every professional endeavour.

It dawned on me that it's not just about what I do; it's about how I do it. By embracing my distinctive approach and letting my personality shine, I turned my personal brand into a testament to my values, work ethic, and the impact I strive to create.

Initially, I succumbed to emulating stereotypical male leadership attributes, due to a lack of enough female role models. Recognising the importance of playing to my strengths and perspectives, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery and self-awareness. Understanding my emotional, physical, and behavioural self became pivotal. Techniques like meditation, journaling, and seeking unbiased feedback became allies in fostering self-reflection.

Today, my brand embodies strategic thinking, networking, self-belief, fostering connections, inspiring others, balance, exploration and genuine advocacy for diversity and inclusion.

I engage with my community, share insights, and listen to the stories of others. Authentic connections are woven through the fabric of my personal brand. Social media, too, plays a crucial role, allowing me to share not just my achievements but the journey behind them.

> **All this builds cohesiveness in branding, which informs industry professionals whom to approach for specific expertise, fostering collaboration towards shared goals.**

The impact of this collective effort surpasses independent endeavours, and tangibly transcends to a wider audience, which is very powerful.

Over the last 4-5 years, industry recognition has beckoned, with nominations for various awards becoming a testament to the brand I've built. The brand, in turn, attracts similar energies that amplify your efforts, creating a positive ripple effect. By investing in personal branding, I contribute not only to my growth but also to my team, organisation, and industry, opening doors to a multitude of opportunities.

Building a brand requires diverse modes of outreach – social media posts, leadership talks, panel discussions, and other avenues. The key is to choose methods aligned with your personality and comfort. Whether through a powerful post or a quiet behind-the-scenes presence, each approach contributes to reinforcing your brand. By crafting your brand, you not only elevate yourself but also become a conduit for collective progress, linking opportunities and influencing a bigger change.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be genuine and consistent

Reflect on who you are, take the time to introspect and be consistent in portraying that to the world over and over via different channels. One odd LinkedIn post is not going to make people recognise or remember what you stand for; your brand has to be reiterated and reinforced.

2. Rely on strategy

If you want to be known for something, you cannot post randomly and expect people to be clear on who you are. Have a strategy – narrate your brand through a story, be clear on where you want to be present, what message you intend to convey, when and to whom.

3. Give your brand attention

Focus on building your brand; it does not magically build itself. If you truly care about your brand, give it time, resources and attention. Think about it often, try different approaches for building it, and review frequently if and how you’re creating value through it.

CHAPTER 16

Sheenam Ohrie

Managing Director, Broadridge India



Sheenam Ohrie's career spans three decades with roles at Oracle, SAP, Infosys, and Dell, culminating in her current position as the Managing Director of Broadridge India. As a woman leader charting her path in tech, she understands the value of perceptions. And strongly believes that one's brand must evolve with every transition.

I am an Electronics engineer by profession and I started my career with a fintech startup called CITIL (Citicorp Information Technology Industries Ltd) back in 1992, which became i-Flex Solutions in 2000. I honed myself as a Technology and Business leader with this "Made in India" company for 15 years. Then, with a deep desire to be a part of a smaller set-up and build an organization again from the ground up, I moved on to a global technology product organization called Business Objects. The size of Business Objects in India was the size of my team at i-Flex (by then it was called OFSS - Oracle Financial Services Software).

Fate, though, had other plans. SAP acquired Business Objects the same year I joined, and we became a small line of business within a very large organization. I decided to move to mainstream SAP, and took on a wide variety of roles, including becoming the first Chief Product Owner at SAP Labs in Bangalore.

Today, after an impactful stint at SAP, followed by Infosys and Dell, I'm the Managing Director of Broadridge India.

As I look back at my journey, I realize that every role brought new opportunities, and along with it, the need to consciously shape and evolve my personal brand.

My tryst with personal branding began early on. While I was still at i-Flex (it was CITIL back then), an insightful offsite exercise became the catalyst for my awareness of personal branding. A leader's candid feedback, highlighting how the perception of my cheerful demeanour might be misconstrued as a lack of seriousness, triggered a pivotal question within me – what did I want to be seen as in the professional sphere?

This marked the beginning of my journey with personal branding: an exploration of how I wanted to be perceived in the workplace.

In those formative years, I recognised the importance of separating my personal and professional brands. I understood that the friendships forged in the workplace were vital, but so was the need to project a professional image when the situation demanded. I could be in a room with my colleagues, debating and discussing work deliverables, navigating our way through differences in opinions, and then heading off for lunch with the same folks. We could be absolutely professional with each other and not allow our professional opinions hamper our personal relationships.

It became clear to me quite early that...

> **I need to build a different perception of me with every role and transition.**

What worked for me when I was just three years-old in the industry versus now, when I have 30 years behind me, is very different. In the early years of my career, being known as a firebrand was important. Today, being strategic, patient, and mature is critical.

It's not just the brand that must change with time, the way you behave, the way you want to be perceived, and the way you want people to witness and experience you must also evolve over time.

One enduring lesson from my journey is that people perceive you differently based on their experiences and perspectives as well. I embraced the idea that their perception is their reality of me. To navigate this complexity, I learned to tailor my approach to different personas within the professional realm. What my skip level sees in me differs from what my direct reports observe, and this intentional differentiation is fundamental to managing diverse professional relationships.

That said, I believe certain core values should remain consistent across all facets of one's brand. Integrity, empathy, and a commitment to ethical practices are non-negotiable aspects that resonate through my journey, across roles and relationships. It's the foundation upon which my varied personas are built, ensuring a cohesive and authentic representation.

The impact of personal branding on my life has been profound. It has heightened my self- awareness, prompting a continuous process of self-reflection and growth. Through intentional brand building, I have also become more attuned to the impressions I leave on others. As a result, every interaction and meeting has become an opportunity to shape people's perception. The result? A heightened sense of control over my professional narrative.

I tell this to people all the time that every interaction is a brand building exercise. Whether you're meeting the CEO of an organization, a customer, or your peer, you have to know in advance about the outcome you want from the meeting. And this outcome is not just a deliverable; it's an experience. This is something we learn over time, and slowly grow accustomed to. It's crucial, however, that we learn this.

Personal branding isn't a static concept but a dynamic force that requires adaptability and foresight.

For those questioning the significance of personal branding, let me offer a perspective. Personal branding is not just about creating an image; it's about understanding oneself, evolving with intentionality, and steering the narrative of one's professional life.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Your personal brand will evolve

What's your brand today cannot be your brand tomorrow. Figure out what your brand should be tomorrow, and what you need to do for it today. What do you need to learn? How do you need to change? Who are the people that you need to meet? Do you need an external intervention? Personal branding is a continuous process, mirroring the evolution of one's career and life. This necessitates a proactive approach to identifying the skills, knowledge, and relationships needed for future growth.

2. Your brand has to resonate with your role

Take examples from your personal life where you change your personal brand based on your role, effortlessly and effectively. Your role as a mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law are all very different. Similarly in your professional life, you have to be conscious of the people that you're dealing with and the kind of perception you want them to have of you. While core values remain constant, tailor your approach to suit the expectations of each professional dynamic.

3. Intentionally adapt

Embrace the fact that mistakes happen, perceptions change, and that personal branding requires ongoing adaptation. Listen to what your environment is telling you and adapt accordingly. Just like your brand evolves, the perception of you can also evolve. And it can be changed to influence what you want others to see in you. But for that, you need to be self- aware, you have to introspect, and you have to be willing to make intentional changes that align with your evolving goals.

CHAPTER 17

Gunjan Pai

Founder & CEO, Copylove



Gunjan lost her biggest cheerleader – her husband – and co-founder of Copylove, to a critical illness five years ago. Overnight, it became crucial for her to expand her identity for both her little son and her business to flourish. Personal branding was not only a choice but, in some ways, also a necessity for Gunjan.

After completing my education, I moved to Mumbai in search of a job in the creative field. Having grown up in small towns, far removed from the razzle-dazzle of Mumbai, for me the city was this "big place" I had to head to; it was a dream.

I began my career with Ogilvy & Mather and Lowe Lintas. For six years I immersed myself in pure play copywriting, learning how branding comes alive.

I loved the job but the commute from where I was staying to the other side of town was becoming a major strain on my time. I felt there must be a more effective way to work and, most importantly, I wanted to plan for a baby in the future. So, I transitioned to becoming an independent consultant.

In 2015, I started a copy studio from home, which today has evolved into a successful business with a team of 10 remote workers.

It's very exciting because we get to work with unicorns, Indian conglomerates, MNCs, MSMEs, and – most passionately – with small

entrepreneurs who gain immensely from our guidance and understanding of what it takes to build a brand.

Over time, alongside my business, I also began to build my personal brand, which ultimately contributed to the business's growth and recognition.

That said, my personal branding journey only really started when life intervened and I lost my husband in 2018. He was my business partner and would handle the business and finance side of work while I would take care of the creative side.

With him passing away, I came to the realization that who I was until then was not going to work if I were to continue the business.

> **For me, personal branding was a clear before-and-after scenario; a watershed moment.**

It became critical for me to shift my identity from who I was to who I had to become – a bold entrepreneur. I had to broaden my perspective, be humble in receiving information and education, and bring more dimensions to my personality.

My creative ego underwent a breakdown. Numbers, legalities, contracts – they intimidated me – and I initially hesitated to delve into them. However, I also realized that I couldn't avoid them for long. So, I started looking for business management courses at reputable institutions.

I made it to the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women, an initiative conducted at IIM Bangalore, which provides women entrepreneurs around the world business and management education. Last year, I even won a scholarship, where only four of India's top women entrepreneurs are selected. These upskilling programs had networking and spotlight opportunities, engaging with which is how my personal brand began to emerge.

Without these catalysts I was only exploring a part of me which I believed was my sole possibility. But soon after the courses, I was capable of talking legalities, and a whole lot more, with my clients!

Opening up various layers of who we are involves constantly breaking self-opinions and beliefs about what we can do and who we can be. For

example, I never thought I would drive. When my husband was around, he would drive or I'd take a taxi. But after his death, I took driving lessons and now I confidently drive.

These are significant shifts that you've to keep working at if you want to expand your identity. I am driven to do the best for my business and to be a role model to my son.

Building my personal brand has completely transformed my life and career, making me more confident and self-assured. My personal growth and self-knowledge through my brand has led to a deeper connection with others and a sense of fulfilment.

I also see the importance of putting out my brand as it helps open up opportunities for my business's growth and success.

I view personal branding as sharing a gift with others. Either you can just be with yourself and do your thing, or you can share it with others, and it's that much more joyous. Your impact ascends, and you definitely feel more affirmed.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Follow your heart

It is a strength to follow as your heart directs. There is a certain joy and empowerment in listening to your heart even when others, and your own mind, is saying otherwise. I started a copy agency when no one was thinking of one. I continued running my business after a challenging personal phase, when everyone said I should just pick up a job. I believe your heart knows the true you, and that's your brand.

2. Intention matters

The one failsafe that I can always fall back on is the honesty and integrity of my intent. When I have done something with a clear intent, I know my brand is safe in the long run. This is what helps me sleep peacefully at night. No matter the feedback on my work, or a deal falling through, if I've put my best intentions in it, I rest assured it will bear fruits in the future.

3. Hard work beats talent

There are smarter, more talented people in my industry but I've always believed in the power of hard work, and know that it will get me far. When people are out partying, I stay back in office and read, read, read about my craft and my industry. You may not have natural flair for what you're passionate about, but you can build it. Just like in business, I work hard on my personal brand too.

CHAPTER 18

Priti Sanghavi

Leadership Coach



After a successful career of nearly two decades in the banking sector, working with top international banks, Priti Sanghavi has now turned a new leaf and is embracing her passion for yoga and coaching. Fairly new to building her personal brand, she views the process akin to sowing a seed, nurturing it daily and patiently waiting for it to bloom.

Let me take you back to where it all began. My career kicked off in Mumbai, where I joined India's first private sector bank. Then, life took a turn when I got married and moved to the UAE, and I dived into opportunities with a local bank. Initially, I thought banking was all about handling accounts and transactions, but soon my role expanded and I found myself managing funds and investments, shifting from banking operations to financial services. This was a revelation, showing me the multifaceted nature of the banking world.

I spent a significant part of my career with an international bank, working across their Chennai and Malaysia offices. In 2015, I decided to take a pause in my professional life, spend more time with family, and explore new learning paths. That is when yoga came into my life.

So, I picked up yoga and started to go deep into it. At some point I even began to teach. But my true passion came through when I started connecting with people.

Yoga wasn't just a hobby; it became my window to connecting with others. This led me to ICF coaching, a perfect match for my love of helping people transform their lives. For the past three years, I have been dedicatedly coaching clients, particularly in the corporate sector. What sets me apart is my ability to identify the deep-rooted issues my clients face, often hidden beneath surface-level problems.

Now, I'm focusing on establishing my brand as a mindset coach – my niche – and teaching people the art of 'taking a pause'. Given my background in high-pressure roles and juggling life responsibilities, I understand how crucial it is to find that pause.

Developing my brand has been a journey of intention and daily commitment. Every day, I make small strides toward my goal, whether it's learning, networking, sharing my expertise, or mentoring.

> **I treat my brand-building process akin to nurturing a plant, knowing well that growth takes time and patience.**

Reflecting on personal branding, I've learned the importance of authenticity and finding joy in the process. If what you are doing does not resonate with your true self, brand building can become a strenuous task. Being authentic naturally leads to enjoying what you do, and that is vital for longevity and success in this endeavour.

I also believe in the power of support networks. Don't shy away from reaching out to mentors or industry colleagues. Their guidance can be invaluable in shaping and enhancing your brand.

Lastly, patience is key. Building a brand is a marathon, not a sprint. It's crucial to respect your own pace and the natural progression of your brand's journey.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be authentic and enjoy the process

If you are doing something that is not close to your heart, that does not feel like it's you, personal branding is going to feel tedious. When you're authentic, enjoying the process comes naturally, which is very important because if you're not enjoying it, you're likely to give up sooner or later.

2. Seek support

Don’t hesitate to reach out to your mentors, or people in the industry who you know can help you build your practice and, in turn, build your personal brand. Be vulnerable to share your difficulty; you’ll be surprised by how many people come forward to help. Building a brand is definitely not a one-person job.

3. Be patient

Building and establishing a brand takes time. Honour your own pace, and the pace of the process. It takes a while before you can reap the benefits of your brand building but with patience the journey becomes easier.

CHAPTER 19

Aarti Saran

Strategic Global Black Belt Lead, Microsoft



Aarti Saran's professional journey spans two decades in the world of tech sales. From her childhood in Srinagar, a place marred by unrest and adversity, to her current role as a global leader at Microsoft, her self-belief shines through. Aarti did not build her brand intentionally and, even today, treats it as a gateway for her to create an impact.

I grew up in Srinagar during a tumultuous period, from 1989 to 1997, when unrest and uncertainty were a daily part of life. I would go to school six for months in a year and spend the other six at home, studying under a lantern. My family, comprising cousins and relatives, faced a perpetual scarcity of resources and critical financial constraints.

Despite the hardships, my father having recognised my potential, encouraged me to pursue further education once I turned 18. I decided to study both biology and math to secure a safer future.

After completing electronics engineering from a small town called Ichalkaranji, near Kolhapur, I moved in with my grandmother in Delhi and started working as a beginner in sales and project management jobs. I did not want to burden my parents with money issues. During my time there, I met the person I would later marry.

Due to personal discomfort with Delhi, I decided to move to Mumbai and it marked the beginning of my two-decade-long journey in the city.

From HCL Noida I moved to HCL in Mumbai in a customer support role, which was a dog-eat-dog world. I worked on large government and public sector projects, and made a name for myself which led to recognition and headhunting opportunities.

Cisco was one such opportunity, and I started working there on a contract basis, but secured a permanent position in under one year. I still remember I got my confirmation letter in January 2006, and the same month I got married.

I completed my MBA in marketing while carrying my first child, and my son's birth in 2007, in fact, marked a turning point in my career. I was ambitious and eager to take on more significant roles. My mother-in-law's support allowed me to travel extensively for work while caring for my child. Her support enabled me to maintain my career and personal growth.

As the years passed, my two children and family became my backbone to thrive in my career. That, and my drive to succeed in the tech industry, kept me focused on my career. I continued to acquire certifications and expand my expertise.

My journey took a unique turn when I joined Microsoft and began working in the sales vertical for Skype. Over the years, I transitioned from selling products (first 15 years of my career) to selling services (last 5-6 years) and took on a global role, managing complex and strategic multimillion dollar deals.

My current position as a "global black belt" at Microsoft reflects the culmination of my hard work and dedication. In some way, I attribute my success also to my outgoing and social personality. I've found it easy to talk to people about my work, right from the start. This automatically led to visibility, which, in my opinion, was personal branding back in the day.

> **Your brand is how people perceive you.**

I believe in authenticity, in polite but direct communication, and in creating an impact. These traits shaped my personal brand naturally, as I gained recognition and visibility in the industry.

Over time, my personal brand has evolved, especially in the digital age. I've started creating content to help others understand the nuances of sales strategies and processes. My journey now includes a conscious effort to build my personal brand as I prepare for an entrepreneurial venture.

I am now decidedly reaching out to entrepreneurs, and to people who can guide and coach me. I have also started a YouTube channel where I establish myself as an experienced tech-sales professional.

Embarking on my personal brand journey has been profoundly enriching, seamlessly intertwined with my spiritual odyssey. Guidance from luminaries like Sadhguru, and affiliations with transformative organizations like Isha Foundation and ISKCON, inspire my engagement in volunteer activities. Rooted in purpose, my brand reflects not just professional achievements but also the spiritual growth that defines my journey.

Building my brand has given me visibility, personal growth, and the opportunity to take on more significant roles at work. It has allowed me to make a positive impact on people and help them navigate the world of sales. And, of course, it has empowered me to make a difference in the tech industry while preparing me for the next chapter of my career.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Be authentic but cautious

While putting yourself out there authentically be conscious and cautious about what you share. Avoid controversial topics unless you are well-informed and have a clear message to convey.

2. Find clarity and motivation

It took me many years to reach a stage where I was clear on what I intend to do and why. I want to create an impact and especially help women in sales. Having a clear purpose and motivation are essential for building a personal brand. They bring focus to all the branding efforts.

3. Believe in yourself

Be unstoppable in your pursuit of your goals. Find your focus. If you haven't heard of the Japanese concept of Ikigai, I suggest you look it up – as a start point – and see where the three circles of your Ikigai intersect. Where they meet, is most likely where you'll best serve yourself and the world.

CHAPTER 20

Natasha Shirazi



Regional Consultant - Culture, Diversity & Inclusion, Dell

Natasha Shirazi's emphasis on creating a personal brand that reflects one's beliefs, values, and interests aligns with the contemporary understanding of personal branding. In today's competitive professional landscape, she believes it's important to not only showcase skills and expertise but also present a coherent and authentic personal brand.

I embarked on my professional journey about 28 years ago, beginning in the hospitality industry for a brief nine months. It taught me the value of service, the importance of relationships, and the significance of being professionally turned out, which, though it may have lost some of its charm, still holds weight in the business world.

After my stint in hospitality, I took a hiatus for about 3 months, and then a friend called me, insisting I attend an interview. When I reached it was for a position at JTM, the first mobile company in Karnataka. In spite of my lack of knowledge of the company, I trusted my instincts and got the job as a senior executive in Quality Assurance.

This experience taught me not to question opportunities, especially when someone believes in you. I stayed with JTM, which later became Airtel, for about a decade. What I recall from working in Airtel is that I made some of my best friends in that organization. We witnessed important

life moments in each others' lives that bound us together – love/marriage/kids.

During my time at Airtel, I formed valuable friendships that reinforced the idea that relationships and the ecosystem you build are crucial in your career.

I left Airtel to start in a new environment that would allow me to focus on my family. Being a mother in an organisation that was not used to it was a challenge. My priorities had changed but work still demanded 12-hours a day.

I was extremely lucky, having built the relationships that I had, because one of my friends (again) reached out to me seven months after my son was born about a job at Dell – which I got! – and started a new chapter in 2006.

In the 17 years that I've now been with Dell my roles have constantly evolved, and it was re-enforced never to turn down an opportunity, even if I don't initially grasp its scope. Through various roles at Dell, I've developed into my current position, leading culture, diversity, and inclusion for Dell APJ and Greater China. I say this with joy but I'm finally getting paid to do what makes my soul sing!

The term "personal branding" wasn't widely used during my early career, but it was always present in the background. People started recognising me as extroverted, fearless, and outspoken, and those attributes shaped my path. This distinct personality opened doors and provided me with unique opportunities.

As I stepped outside the identity of my professional roles, branding became intentional for me. It was born of my personal experiences, beliefs, and the causes I was passionate about – gender, women empowerment, LGBTQIA+, diversity and inclusion. I ensured my brand wasn't about being different for the sake of it; but about being true to myself and sharing my story.

One of the biggest challenges I face in personal branding is constantly questioning my relevance, the right sources to follow, and the appropriate things to say. Overcoming these challenges requires staying

true to my authentic self, not seeking validation from others, and learning to ignore those who don't align with my values.

I believe one's brand should focus on sharing one's authentic story and beliefs, and making it relatable to others. This connection, based on shared values, can help you stand out in a crowded digital world. So try and find commonalities of belief and not rely on the fact that you have to be different.

> **Personal branding, for me, was a choice. But for the current generation, it's a necessity.**

I encourage everyone to embrace the advantages of social media. It's a powerful platform for building your personal brand. Follow those who inspire you, engage with diverse perspectives, and use the platform as a space for meaningful conversations. Focus on building your ecosystem and supporting others who share your beliefs.

Personal branding has transformed my life, career, and relationships. It has opened doors, connecting me with like-minded individuals and enabling me to make a difference in areas I'm passionate about.

Your personal brand should not just be a marketing strategy; it's an expression of your true self. Embrace it, build it, and let it guide you on your journey to success and fulfilment.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Make a start

This might sound obvious but take the leap and create your online presence. Register on Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook or whichever other social media you prefer. I initially created my online profiles despite apprehensions about what I will say, how people will react to what I say, and how I will navigate trolls. The rule is, "Would I say this to a stranger?" Understand that the mistakes online are not as significant as they may seem. So, make a start without overthinking it.

2. Define your personal beliefs

Your personal brand should reflect your genuine beliefs and passions. Whether it's fashion, flowers, sustainability, or any other area of interest,

be authentic. Create a clear and personal narrative that resonates with who you are. I emphasize having a strong personal story and rallying around it. This helps others understand your perspective and purpose.

3. Build a support system specifically for branding

Building and maintaining an online presence can be challenging. I advise that it's beneficial to have a support system in place. This support system can include friends, like mine, who help with spelling and grammar, providing a more human touch to my online interactions. If you're aiming for fame; hire a PR agency. If not, focus on being yourself and connecting with like-minded individuals who genuinely appreciate your content.

CHAPTER 21

Bhuvana Subramanyan



Director & CMO, Spinning Wheels

Bhuvana Subramanyan has had a dynamic and rewarding career of over 27 years in the field of marketing. Ex-TNT, ex-IBM and ex-Randstad, she is a storyteller adept at engaging and influencing diverse audiences. Bhuvana believes building a personal brand is a delicate task and, therefore, requires thoughtful curation.

When I started my career there was no difference between sales and marketing. Philip Kotler was the only theoretical reference we had. We learned everything on the job and marketing, as a profession, was slowly evolving.

I was driven and result-oriented, and did not enjoy sales much, so over time I naturally transitioned to marketing.

I honed my skills in brand development, strategy, and customer engagement. I developed a keen understanding of marketing trends and leveraged data-driven insights to formulate innovative campaigns so that there is a distinction, not only for me as an individual but also for the organisation's brand.

I nurtured a passion for delivering great customer experiences and today, I consult through my own company, Spinning Wheels, where I have the privilege of collaborating with cross-functional agencies and driving strategic initiatives for select companies.

As a result of my passion for marketing, a year and a half ago I started a podcast ‘Marketing the Untold Story’, to showcase Indian case studies and to educate the audience about the art and science of marketing.

Reflecting on my early years in the workforce, I have to admit, I did not think about my personal brand. My focus was solely on establishing myself in my career, making money, building friendships, and finding my footing.

Only after the initial 10 years, when I was in a leadership position where I needed to be known in certain circles, because I was bringing business to the table, did I realise the importance of building my own brand.

I faced the challenge of deciding which part of my personality to showcase in order to effectively build my brand that is authentic, relatable and personable.

I realised this is a delicate task since all of us are multidimensional and, therefore, it requires curation. I began by deciding what messages I want to put out across different platforms i.e which part of my personality I want to showcase in a speaker forum vs LinkedIn vs Instagram.

What it really means is adapting the messaging to different contexts and audiences, and offering them something authentic that they can apply in their life.

> **I view personal branding as an investment in my future.**

Building my brand has given me so much. There has never been a job that I’ve applied for; they’ve all come to me through my network. It has opened doors and created opportunities as I’ve advanced in my career. It has led to speaking engagements, contributions to industry publications and an unparalleled exposure to different perspectives.

I have a strong sense of identity and purpose along with functional expertise, and working on my brand has made me a thought leader in the space of marketing and women empowerment, which has further helped build trust and credibility.

But most of all, it has given me friendships. It has enabled me to meet the most incredible people I’ve encountered in my life! It has opened my

eyes to whole other worlds, which makes me want to keep learning, keep contributing, and keep creating impact.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Humanise your brand

To market is to humanise a brand. And that applies to personal brand as well. Relatability and transparency are ways to get there. Openly acknowledge your strengths, limitations and experiences with your audience. Be authentic, maintain consistency, and focus on delivering value.

2. Differentiate yourself

There is so much content being generated by the minute; how do you create distinction? Have a unique value proposition which becomes the foundation of your brand and comes through in all your interactions. Take from your personal experiences and cultivate original thoughts on subjects of your interest. Marketing, communications, women empowerment and sustainability are some of the areas I've developed an expertise in and share my perspective on, often.

3. Acknowledge digital overload

In today’s world, digital overload exists. In an environment where people are constantly bombarded with content, relevance is the most important thing that the audience is looking for. Once you’ve found your niche and your platforms, don’t jump from one to the other and confuse your audience. Have careful consideration for the people who consume your content.

CHAPTER 22

Grace Mary Vasanthi



Divisional Head - Cash, Payments, Banking & Loan Operations, Northern Trust

Grace Mary Vasanthi's journey, spanning over 27 years in the banking industry, unveils a narrative of overcoming challenges, embracing opportunities, and crafting a personal brand that resonates with authenticity and resilience. It's one that transcends job titles and she carries her brand, 'Grace', true to her name.

My career began in 1996 with the Standard Chartered Bank. While my education was in Science (Chemistry), the banking world posed meaningful challenges which I was excited to take on – beginning with the service desk, handling priority customers, and then scaling upwards.

Throughout my career, I have emphasised the importance of knowledge acquisition and keeping myself relevant through continuous learning, which included academic pursuits like the Senior Management Program at IIM Calcutta.

My foray into the financial crime space prompted me to earn credentials as a Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist. Furthermore, I am a Human Centric Design Practitioner, which enables me to lead transformations in a complex environment.

My ability to steer through diverse roles, from payments processing , investigation, reconciliation, technical training, loans operations, client onboarding and maintenance, risk & control, and financial crime

surveillance, showcased my learning agility and relentless pursuit of growth.

Amidst professional growth, my personal life evolved with marriage and raising a family, exemplifying the delicate balance many women manage.

After an illustrious 25-year tenure at Standard Chartered, I was at a pivotal juncture – a decision to explore new horizons, which marked my transition to Northern Trust where I assumed the role of Divisional Head - Cash, Payments, Banking & Loan Operations. The move was not without its challenges but it underscored my commitment to continuous learning and embracing new prospects. Northern Trust's culture of inclusion is a highlight which propelled me towards taking on this opportunity.

For me, personal branding was not a conscious decision at a specific point in time. Instead, it emerged organically from my experience.

A defining moment in this respect occurred early in my career, when I successfully handled a disgruntled customer, earning me the moniker 'Grace'. This incident laid the foundation for my brand as a leader who handles challenges with composure, warmth, and empathy.

My authenticity became my trademark and over the years, my brand evolved as I began being perceived as a game changer – one who is results-driven yet compassionate.

The brand I have built over the 27 years of my career navigating family life, tough work environments, and difficult individuals has not always been smooth sailing. I recognise the challenge of unconscious biases and perceptions held by people – being seen as compassionate and empathetic does sometimes pose as a hurdle when being considered for roles that are deemed to be tough. Overcoming these challenges requires personal conviction, confidence in my brand, and a clear distinction between being assertive and aggressive.

I put my hand up for tough roles, irrespective of how I am being perceived. I also cultivate allies, sponsors and mentors who know my

work and what I am capable of. Allyship matters as perceptions are being formed all the time.

> **People may have tremendous potential but because of the way they are perceived by others, they do not get a chance to use that potential.**

A personal brand is not about a drastic life or career change, but about staying true to yourself. Being aware of my brand has empowered me to approach situations with confidence, reinforcing the belief that the manner in which I deliver result matters as much as the results themselves. Personal branding extends beyond the professional realm, shaping interactions in all spheres of life.

Lessons in personal branding

1. Brand or be branded

Brand yourself or risk being branded by others. If I do not put myself forward, others might label me incorrectly, based on their assumptions. In the professional arena, personal brand equals reputation, and your work should serve as an amplifier for that brand. Taking control of your narrative is the key to ensuring that the brand you project aligns with your true capabilities and aspirations.

2. Be your authentic self

In a world where external influences can sway us, I advocate cultivating a brand personality that reflects your genuine self. Be at peace with yourself and have confidence in your identity. This takes time and effort but it is foundational for personal branding. True confidence and peace with yourself form the bedrock for delivering your best in any given situation.

3. Visibility and self-promotion matter

You may have a brand but if you don't sell it, it's noise. Even the most exceptional qualities can be overshadowed without visibility. I cannot stress enough the importance of making yourself visible, especially as you progress into leadership roles. Waiting for recognition is not enough; proactive self-promotion is crucial. Whether through

showcasing achievements or articulating your value, making your brand visible is a decisive factor in establishing credibility, expertise, and ultimately, achieving success.

Acknowledgements

A big and heartfelt thank you to the phenomenal women we have had the privilege of featuring in this e-book – Gunjan Pai, Bhuvana Subramanyan, Swayta Murarka, Aditi Garg, Deepti Dayal, Priti Sanghavi, Indira Jois, Sushma Chakkirala, Surekha Mandadi, Natasha Shirazi, Lata Daswani, Ann Ann Low, Aarti Saran, Sonali Gupta, Kavita Mehra, Hema G, Sahar Mansoor, Tina Mansukhani Garg, Sheenam Ohrie, Grace Mary Vasanthi, Ranjani Mani and Shyamala Jhaveri.

We are tremendously grateful to you for trusting us with your story, and being open to share it with our community. In doing so, you've contributed to an empowering narrative that resonates far beyond the pages of our e-book – one that we hope will shape the lives and careers of future generations of female leaders.

Thank you to all the women who showed interest in contributing to the e-book, but whose stories we could not feature due to limitations on our end.

The project would have got precisely nowhere without Bhavna Toor, Founder & CEO of Shenomics, who we thank for the original idea of creating e-books for anyone who wishes to benefit from Shenomics' work. Her pertinent questions on the purpose of the project, asked and contemplated upon routinely, lent insights which have influenced the e-book immeasurably.

Special thanks to the Shenomics Team comprising Sreelakshmi Balasubramanyam, Puja Mathur, Charu Mathur, Shreya Pandey and Bhagya Sivaraman, for their unwavering support, and ardent encouragement throughout the project.

And finally, gratitude to the Editor and Curator of the e-book, Tapshi Dhanda, for her care, attention and skill across the editorial, design and

production processes of bringing this book together. She has built into the e-book a cohesiveness which allows every independent story to shine, while being an indispensable part of the collective arc of the e-book.



Tapshi Dhanda

The Editor and Curator of this book

Tapshi Dhanda is the editor and curator of this book, and has with great skill and care brought these stories to life. She has built into the e-book a cohesiveness which allows each independent story to shine, while simultaneously being an indispensable part of the collective arc of the book.

Tapshi is a freelance writer and editor with over 10 years of experience spanning print and digital publications, as well as content strategy, design and curation.