

KIMBERLY FAITH

# BREAKTHRU BRANDING™



Thought Leader In Personal Branding & Systems Thinking

## 3 Powerful Ways to Clarify Your Personal Branding Journey

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*I saw him waiting to talk with me after the branding workshop I conducted that day at the Corporate Learning Center. Finally we had our chance. After a lengthy explanation, he asked me a very poignant question. "It seems to me," he started, "that extroverts have an advantage over the rest of us when it comes to personal branding." He sighed. "What do introverts like me need to do to even catch up?" What he did not say spoke volumes as I could tell this tug of war between two extremes had bothered him for some time.*

*I shared it had been my experience that extroverts only get so far if they don't have the substance to back it up. While he may see what looks like success initially, I see them years down their career path, sometimes struggling to get on the right track. I encouraged him to keep pushing himself out of his comfort zone so that his sphere of influence could grow. He was visibly relieved as he walked away. Little did he know his question sent me on a journey to articulate some of the unspoken laws of personal branding.*

*Kimberly Faith*

**At the core of personal branding is CREDIBILITY and INFLUENCE.** I hear these words time and time again when people are describing leaders WITH executive presence, and even more often, when they describe leaders who lack "executive presence." Executive presence has become a catchphrase in the corporate world to describe the ever-elusive "it" factor we desire in our leaders. A great deal of my personal and professional energy has been invested into discovering what these words really mean.

I now use a tool I developed called a BrandMap™. It is a simple, four-quadrant visual designed to guide leaders seeking a more introspective look into their personal brand.

## 1. Where are You on the BrandMap™?

You will notice the bottom axis is credibility and the left axis is influence, with both having a low and high end of the scale.

Each section is described below:

**HIGH INFLUENCE/LOW CREDIBILITY** – Leaders who find themselves in this block can be a lot of talk and little action. These can sometimes be the extroverts I referred to earlier that can appear initially to have significant influence. They can fall into a habit of over-promising and under-delivering. There is a short window when this is tolerated because most of us are hopeful with someone new. We tend to excuse why they might be lacking in credibility. At times these managers are moved from department to department with HR hoping the right "fit" will eventually be found. Most people don't intend to find themselves in this block. Sometimes their inexperience or passion gets in the way. These people will usually course correct once they become aware of the perception.

I encourage these leaders to **BE PURPOSEFUL**. Make more of an effort to under-promise and over-deliver. Be careful of using overly expressive language which inflates expectations.

**LOW INFLUENCE/LOW CREDIBILITY** – I have found two sets of people who fall into this category. The one I see most often are people new to the company and sometimes to their career. They are still learning the nuances of the organization. They are assimilating the culture trying to find exactly where they fit in. In that case, this is a temporary stage, and they will find themselves moving in a positive direction on the continuum. I advise them to **BE PATIENT** and seek mentors within the organization.





The second set of people I was surprised to find were the ones who have consciously (or unconsciously) made a decision to stick with the status quo. They tend to fall in the middle of the credibility and influence spectrum and, truth be told, they are tolerant of that place. When I dig deeper, I tend to find they tried to exert their influence before when someone, perhaps unknowingly, put them in their place. Much like a turtle who retreats into their shell for protection, these people did the same . . . figuratively. The problem with being stuck in the middle is the undercurrent of complacency. Over time, this puts out their fire, or they simply move on to another organization with the past employer wondering what happened. In this case, I advise them to BE CHALLENGED. Look for the new assignment. Ask for added responsibility. Do something to light your fire again so you can use your knowledge for the good of the organization and for yourself.

**LOW INFLUENCE/HIGH CREDIBILITY** – People who fall into this section have the most opportunity to make a significant difference in their personal brand. It is heartbreaking for me to see leaders with enormous credibility – vast experiences, technical savvy, and groundbreaking ideas – be pushed aside because they have limited ability to influence. The more vocal influencers in their world overshadow them or senior executives discount their ideas simply because they are not presented properly. It is in this arena where I have watched some of the most groundbreaking progress. If you find yourself in this section, make a choice to BE BOLD! The organization is missing out on Brand YOU. Invest time in learning techniques to better manage the audience during Q & A, learn how to be more concise in your messaging, and gain perspective into the message your professional appearance is sending.

**HIGH INFLUENCE/HIGH CREDIBILITY** – This is where we all strive to be in our careers. When you reach this level, you have Brand Power which translates into Brand Equity™. Opportunities find their way to you and influence grows exponentially. It is similar to the notion of an “overnight success.” Anyone who has found themselves in a position of overnight success will tell you it took many years of hard work to get there. Do you notice the gap between the two quadrants on the right? I now call that THE GAP. This is where I see most mid to senior level careers stall. These are the ones who often find their way to executive coaches trying to figure out why they are “stuck”. If you have posted for a position two or three times with no luck, then you might be in THE GAP. If you find yourself there, step back and invest time into building your influence. Chances are you have the credibility needed but need to polish your influencing skills. The good news is it CAN be done with effort, energy and strategy.

## 2. What Three Words are Guiding Your Brand?

Personal branding is a new concept for many, but not so new for others. It is important to recognize that who drives this branding process has fundamentally shifted. Long gone is the day when all we had to do was focus on doing our job until the next opportunity naturally presented itself. The “employer” or “boss” was typically in the driver’s seat. Today? We have to personally take ownership to clarify and drive our personal brand.

**NO ONE IS GOING TO BUILD YOUR BRAND EXCEPT FOR YOU!**

“Having worked with thousands of leaders, I’ve discovered the HEART of personal branding is the mindset driving it.”

I can train leaders all day long on how to make a strong first impression, how to improve their professional image, and how to manage the audience so their message is at the forefront. There is a laundry list of skills you can work on to improve your brand. Yet . . . there is an undercurrent. What people don’t say often speaks louder than what they do! This realization led me to start asking leaders what words are guiding their personal brand.

Each time we see or hear a popular logo, an impression quickly comes to mind. Let’s test this out. Write down the impression that comes to mind when you think about Coca-Cola. What about Starbucks? Nike? McDonalds? Uber? Amazon? Apple? I have done this exercise hundreds of times with audiences across the world. It never fails that for each logo I share, people immediately share an impression – sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes nothing comes to mind. Just like the most famous brands in the world, our name carries an impression as well. What do colleagues think when you invite them to a meeting?

What comes to mind when a senior leader sees they have received an email from you? In the immediate white space around a name is an impression . . . our brand. We have a brand whether we have consciously built it or not. That brand impression plays a critical role in how our brand is perceived.

Make a note in the block below on the left hand side. What three words or phrases do you think comes to mind when other people think of you?

#### STEP 1

**What Do I Believe Comes to Mind When Others Think of Me?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### STEP 2

**What do I WANT my brand to be?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Once you complete the box above, then ask yourself: "Is this the brand I want?" If not, then decide for yourself what you desire for your personal brand.

Having done this exercise with thousands of leaders, I find that many people list predictable words like "hard-working" or "results driven." The issue here is that your brand words should be about the value YOU bring to the table, NOT qualities which are inherent to the job. You are expected to be a hard worker and to achieve results. If you don't, you might find yourself looking for other opportunities! How do you go above and beyond your basic job requirements?

Another common issue is people use ordinary words like "reliable" or "dependable." That sounds like a comfortable old shoe, doesn't it? Is that what you want for your brand? NO! Look for words that describe you like "trustworthy" or phrases like "bring order to chaos" or "deliver despite the noise." I can usually ask someone about why they are good at their job and by the seventh why, the REAL brand qualities will emerge. As you do this, be careful about falling into the trap of weak words (ladies – listen up here!) like "friendly," "helpful," or "resourceful." If you are in a support position, then maybe those words work. More times than not, I find there are better words to describe your brand like "approachable," "connected," or "enterprising."

Here is your chance to revisit what you wrote above and take a second look to discover the words you WANT to represent your brand. Make it something easy to remember. A thesaurus is a wonderful tool when searching for your core brand words. Asking colleagues to describe you in three words can also be helpful. Investing time identifying your three core brand words or themes lays a foundation to continue to build your personal brand. Remember, YOU are in the driver's seat. I have been repeatedly told by coaching clients that identifying this has provided a compass for them when determining the next step. Which brings us to . . .



### 3. Using The Branding Compass™ To Put It All Together

You have now identified where you are when it comes to influence and credibility. You have made a CHOICE about your brand words. Now ask yourself where you are as you review the Branding Compass™ which shows the key stages of building a brand. Make a mental note that this is an ongoing process. Too many people assume their past efforts will always follow them. We need to remember if we do things right, we will complete the cycle over and over again as opportunities take us to the next level. Every time we start a new position, move to a new division, or change companies, the branding cycle starts over again.



Let's start with the "E" on the right.

**ESTABLISH** – The establish phase is when we are at the beginning of building our brand. Typically this is when we start a new job, move to a new department, or take over a leadership role in a different division. The establish stage is a collection of first impressions – how we introduce ourselves to employees, peers, and senior leaders; how we enter a room for a meeting or networking event; the steps we take to build relationships with others we meet for the first time. It is making sure our body language is congruent with our message: we are glad to be here and looking forward to the opportunity. We have all heard the old adage about how hard it is to change first impressions. I find many people don't make bad first impressions, but they DO make neutral first impressions. They don't take time to think about their introduction, which should come across as confident, thoughtful, and indicative of the value they bring to the organization. What a missed opportunity!

**SHAPE & BUILD** – This is the longest stage of building our brand. It can last from a few months to a few years. It includes everything from the way we manage meetings to how effectively we influence in virtual communication. It includes our ability to start our presentations with a powerful opening that grabs the attention of the audience right away to having a well-communicated message instead of simply dumping information. It includes compelling subject lines on emails and concise messages, not a litany of data points which does nothing to actually entice the recipient to read the entire email. It is the language we use in meetings, striking a careful balance between "I" and "we." The list goes on. This stage is sometimes characterized by taking a few steps forward and then a step or two back. The objective is to keep moving in a positive direction while building Brand Equity™.

**WORK TO EXPAND** – Once you feel you have solidly built the first two stages, then it is time to really expand your influence. This is where networking and raising your visibility comes in. Just like a brand on the shelf of a grocery store, you can have all of the right ingredients, but if no one knows about it, it doesn't do any good. The hallmark of this stage is strategically building connections with others outside your immediate world. Maybe you volunteer to lead an affinity group within the company. Perhaps you contribute an article to an industry newsletter or volunteer to speak at a corporate event. Maybe you update your look and update a new photo for your company or LinkedIn profile, showing you have stepped up your game. Whatever you choose, you make a conscious effort to raise the visibility of your personal brand.

**NOW, WHAT'S NEXT?** – Assuming the first three stages are done well, the next opportunity presents itself. Perhaps you are promoted to a new department/division or you are recruited to work with a new company. The cycle then starts over again. As I said before, we can never assume our past efforts are enough to keep our personal brand relevant. It is an ongoing investment in our future.

Notice the C3 at the center of the compass. This is to remind you that the three key words or phrases describing your brand defines your core - your foundation. When you have CLARITY about your CORE, it translates into **CONFIDENCE** which is unmistakable.

Personal branding **IS** a journey. Your brand is being built, either with your conscious effort or without it. The power lies in shifting your mindset and making a **CHOICE** to put yourself in the driver's seat.

No one is going to build your brand except for **YOU!**

# Accept it . . . Own it . . . Drive it!

Kimberly Faith is known as a thought leader in systems thinking and personal branding. She has had the privilege to train and coach over twenty-three thousand leaders from Fortune 500 companies including Amazon, American Airlines, BMW, Boeing, CVS, GE, HCA, Kimberly Clark, Lockheed Martin, Nielsen, and Target, as well as worked on licensing deals with Warner Brothers, Disney and MGM. She understands the challenges of navigating a career within large organizations and uses her systems thinking expertise to inspire leaders to see the forest vs the trees. She was trained early in her career by Dr. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*. Kim inspires leaders at all levels in art of systems thinking so they can integrate this wholistic approach to their personal and professional lives. **The personal branding system she has created called Breakthru Branding™ is now available as an on-line course where leaders can dramatically enhance their personal brand in as little as 21 days.** Kim is a sought after keynote speaker, author, and executive coach, and will be publishing two new books in 2017.



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