

# LEADERSHIP

## BUILDING YOUR LEADERSHIP BRAND

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We hear a lot about personal branding these days. But why? What does it actually mean? Is it really even necessary?

With rapidly changing technologies and ever-growing social media platforms, creating a strong, unique, and clear personal brand is critical to maintaining a competitive edge, for individuals and businesses alike. Leaders especially can no longer afford to fly under the radar; in order to be recognized and respected, creating a genuine brand is key.

### **What Is a Leadership Brand?**

There are many different kinds of branding, including consumer, personal, corporate, and employer. In part, a brand outlines a company's, individual's, or employer's core principles and the value they offer to the people they serve (e.g., consumers, business partners, employees). A brand is what you develop and what others perceive.

A leadership brand accomplishes all of this, but it's specific to who you are as a leader. Your personal strengths and talents plus your behaviors (e.g., what you do, how you do it, what you prioritize) equal your value to the audiences and people you serve. In effect, your brand is your reputation: what you want to be—and are—known for.

# Strengths + Behaviors = Perceived Value

## Closeup: Two Leaders, Two Leadership Brands

**Exhibit A:** Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States from 1861–1865 and one of history’s greatest leaders. Though branding did not exist in his time, what Lincoln is remembered for is a kind of leadership brand that is the essence of being a president, including, among other things, conviction and courage.

**Exhibit B:** Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin Group since 1973. His leadership brand is defined by innovative thinking and unconventional, adventurous business maneuvers. This aligns with how the world perceives him: he is routinely referred to by the press as a daredevil. Having been a leader for some forty years, Branson’s leadership brand has likely evolved as time has passed and his reputation has become better known worldwide. As you grow as a person, achieve new successes, and move into more challenging roles, your skills and behaviors—and, therefore, perceived values—need to change as well.

## Why Are You a Leader?

The first step in defining your leadership brand is to examine what inspires you to be a leader. If you could summarize, in just one sentence, your purpose for being a leader, what would it be?

As author Simon Sinek discusses in his [2009 TEDxPugetSound talk](#), the organizations and people who examine their actions from the inside out are the remarkable leaders of history. Many people understand what they do and how they do it; these are outside factors. Sinek’s concept of the Golden Circle asks individuals and businesses to consider why they do what they do. The “why” isn’t about profits or sales; it’s the reason you get out of bed in the morning, and it’s the reason customers and other people should care.

There are innumerable reasons a person might be motivated to be a leader. Perhaps you’re a leader because you’re deeply committed to improving your organization. Or maybe your motivation is to work with others to help them reach their full potential. Another reason might be bringing people together to achieve a common goal. Whatever your reason, having a clear understanding of your motivation and purpose is the starting point for your leadership brand.

## What Will My Leadership Brand Achieve? How Does My Brand Fit in the Big Picture?

A leadership brand helps you achieve three main results:

1. **Authenticity:** A genuine, authentic leadership brand that is true to your purpose will gain you the respect and trust of your colleagues, peers, and clients. Identify your purpose—why you’re a leader—and your brand will be an honest reflection of your self.

2. **Inspiration:** A strong leadership brand should leverage your strengths. Studies show that employees are more engaged when their leader is operating at his or her best. When you perform at your best, so will your employees.
3. **Deliverability:** Follow through and deliver on the goals you and your organization have set out to achieve. As you move up in your organization, the goals, results, and values you mutually hold will evolve.

Ask yourself, “What do I want to be known for as a leader?” To answer this question, compile a list of your strengths, starting with the adjectives that describe you. You can use resources to help identify your strengths (Tom Rath’s [StrengthsFinder 2.0](#), for example), or you can simply ask for feedback from your peers, friends, and family.

Next, make a list that describes your current and/or future position. Your leadership brand isn’t just about what you’re good at; this list will help you to determine the values that will be required for you to achieve your long-term career goals.

Leadership values evolve as one moves from junior to senior management and duties, priorities, and responsibilities change. Thus, it’s crucial that you identify the values and competencies you’ll need in order to meet your goals. Here are some examples at different levels in an organization:

- **Middle Management**
  - **Value:** Work through others
  - **Competencies:** Communication, delegation, and accountability
- **Upper Management**
  - **Value:** Strategy, work through managers
  - **Competencies:** Making difficult decisions, coaching and developing lower management, and holding crucial conversations
- **Business Managers, CEOs, and Presidents**
  - **Value:** Overall business strategy
  - **Competencies:** Financial decisions, operating mechanisms, long-term vision, reflection, and analysis

## Defining Your Leadership Brand and Making It Last

The process of defining your leadership brand can be broken down into these five steps:

1. **Define what leadership means to you.** What makes for strong, inspirational leadership? Knowing how you feel about this will help you create a leadership style that is genuine.
2. **Identify your strengths.** What do you want to be known for? What are you good at? Which adjectives best describe you? Working with your strengths will inspire others and achieve results.
3. **Analyze your potential derailers.** Derailers can be weaknesses, but they can also be strengths that are taken to extremes (e.g., perfectionists who are unwilling to delegate). Derailers can get in your way as you build your brand, and they can even hold you back

from advancement. The [Hogan Leadership Assessment](#) is one tool that can help you to identify potential derailers.

4. **Examine your value to the organization.** Determine the values that others perceive about you and your business today. Then, determine what your values need to be in the future.
5. **Assess your blind spots.** Understanding your blind spots doesn't simply mean identifying your weaknesses. It also means soliciting feedback from others, doing research, and undergoing serious introspection to identify and understand the weaknesses you didn't know you had.

By following these steps, your leadership brand should evolve from a vague idea about your strengths into a comprehensive understanding of who you are, what you stand for, and how you'll achieve your goals.

As you establish your leadership brand, it's important to understand that branding is fluid. It should grow as you do. To bridge the gap between your current brand and the brand you'll need in the future, examine the gaps in your brand and create a plan of action to fill them. There are many ways to fill skills, strengths, experience, and knowledge gaps: formal training, mentoring, coaching, job rotation, or self-training using books, articles, and the Internet. Use any available resources to keep yourself on track, and set standards and targets so that you can measure your progress. One fail-safe way to ensure you meet your goals is to make sure they're SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. Finally, compare your leadership brand to your company's brand. Are they aligned? Do you share related goals, values, and purposes?

Leadership branding can help you lead with your strengths, passions, and talents, and overcome your derailers and blind spots. It can inspire and engage your employees and coworkers. But, most importantly, it can also help you plan for and achieve future success.

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