

Engage Asia with Paul Keijzer

# Building a Leadership Brand

How to become the best version of  
yourself as a leader



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During my leadership sessions, the most difficult steps I take people through are always about the future. I've noticed that leaders are so focused on delivering today and maybe 12 months and *maybe* 3 years down the line that a question for them to articulate how people want to remember them on their 80th birthday is really difficult.

Ask yourself: what's your personal leadership brand? Consider this question in detail by considering:

- Who you want to be?
- What you want to be known for?
- What you want to achieve?
- How you want to contribute to others?
- What you can do to leave a better world for future generations?

These are big questions to answer and some of the answers will come automatically while the others may require you to search for years for the answer and maybe even then you'll never find it. Identifying your leadership brand is important as it gives you direction. People will know what to expect from you and it articulates what you want to be known for. It's your brand, it makes you who you are. And as with any brand it should reflect as much of what you are as well as what you are not. It's about what makes you different and sets you apart from others.

You may wonder why you should articulate a leadership brand in the first place. The answer of course is, you don't have to. But, if you want to ensure that your actions are consistent with how they are perceived by the people that you lead (regardless of hierarchical relations), you need to take steps that are in a direction so that at the end of your life you don't look back and have regrets.

Your leadership brand should be rooted in your past, based on what drives you today, aimed at the contribution that you want to make and aspiring to the legacy you want to leave behind.

## Do You Know What Your Personal Leadership Brand Is?

For me, developing yourself as a leader starts off with answering the most basic of questions:

### What type of leader do I want to be?

Of course answering this question is not easy. In my leadership development journeys I spend the first day with senior leaders helping them to reflect on this question. What amazes me is how little time leaders spend on who they are and who they want to be, *every time*. It feels like even at the most senior level in an organisation people live from day to day, from target to target and from quarterly statement to quarterly statement. In most cases they are better able to explain the company brand or the capabilities their company is building to succeed in the future rather than their personal leadership brand and how they will personally grow in the future.

So when I help leaders articulate their leadership brand I take them through the 4 stages below and help them address these 14 points.



*The Four Stages of Defining Your Personal Leadership Brand*

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### 1. Your Past

A future has to be built on your past. Whether you like your past or not it will influence you and will create the foundation on which you'll have to build your personal leadership brand. In reflecting on your past you have to identify which jobs, projects, and/or activities helped you achieve "flow" and which did you hate. You have to ask what other people said about you, who your role models were and how do these reflections impact the leader you currently are.

### 2. Your Current

Having reflected on your past you need to check in with today. Consider,

- What you're truly excited about (both personally and professionally)?
- What talents do you have in which you know you're better than most people?
- What values are important to you?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What career preferences do you have?

All of these answers will help you by arming yourself with the knowledge of your strengths which you can use to address the next stage.

### 3. Your Future

Whereas your past and your current builds on elements that are currently there, when you start thinking of your future it's all about putting on your thinking hat and start contemplating the leader you want to be. You have to think about the people you want to have an impact on. It's all about imagining the possibilities, having a vision of the person you want to be and what you want to achieve. In thinking about your future, it's putting yourself in the future and looking back on what you want people to say about you. And finally it's about reflecting how you can achieve balance in life, between your physical, mental, social and emotional needs.

### 4. Your Legacy

The final element is about your legacy, how do you want to be remembered and what do you want to leave behind? You need to reflect on what contribution you're going to make on the planet, society, and family. That you're going to leave everything you've impacted for the better. You'll reflect how

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you're going to contribute to the lives of the people that matter to you, the masterpiece that is going to define you and who you are.

If leaders who have the intellectual capability, the resources and area of influence that is larger than most others are not able to answer these questions, who will create a better tomorrow and a planet in which our grandchildren can live comfortably on?

## Understand Your Past to Build a Killer Leadership Brand

### REFLECT ON YOUR PAST

1. Your Track Record
2. Your Feedback
3. Your Influencers

Being clear on how you want to be known as a leader, how others want to describe you and the contribution you want to make to the world is a great starting point for your leadership journey. The ability to articulate this is what I call your leadership brand. It's like any brand: how do you want people around you to know you for?

Some may want to be seen as a servant leader, others to be known for their achievements and still others for their ability to be a pillar of support for their community.

I've spent quite some time thinking about what I want to be for and the impact I want to make on people around me. I started with half a page, capturing the answers to these questions and after trying to distil the most important elements I was able to come down to two words that capture the essence of my personal leadership brand:

### ***"Pushing Boundaries"***

I want to be known as a leader who constantly challenges the status quo, pushed himself and others beyond what they thought they were capable of and did things that had never done before.

In my leadership work I now help others define their own leadership brand and over the years have developed and fine-tuned a process that seems to work and assist leaders of all kinds and shapes to help articulate what they want to be known for. In this leadership discovery process I guide leaders through 4 stages and want them to:

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On your journey to define your leadership brand you should start with a reflection of your past and to do this follow these 3 steps.

### 1. Your Track Record

Looking back, I want leaders to identify moments, jobs, positions, projects where they were in, what **Mihaly Csikszentimihaly** calls:

***“A Flow of a highly focused mental state in which they’re completely absorbed by the activity at hand”***

I encourage leaders to go back to stages in which they performed in this stage of flow, where all their efforts seemed effortless and impact was beyond expectations. Most of us have experienced this only a couple of times in our lives and I encourage leaders to go back and identify what made them come into that state by answering:

- What was the environment that created this?
- What was the task at hand that inspired this?
- What did their bosses and organisation do to enable it?

It is important to understand and then articulate how going forward you can create the circumstances for yourself to re-enter this state.

### 2. Your Feedback

The next question I ask leaders in their reflection of the past is to reflect on the feedback they have received. Either formally through 360 feedback processes, peer reviews, informal conversations with colleagues, bosses, mentors or family members. You need to know how you come across to

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them, what they value in how you work and act, and what are the things they observe that could possibly have a negative impact? Reflect on what people say, take it in and use it to understand what you want to keep and what you would like to change.

### 3. Your Influencers

We all have people that we look up to, people who have shaped us into who we are today. Looking backwards it's important to identify the people that have shaped your life, shaped your view of what success looks like and select the characteristics you admire and want to emulate in them. You have to know why you admire your mentors because deep down you want your leadership brand to be very much (at least for the part that you admire in them) to be like theirs. Pick up the elements from your mentors that you want to inculcate in your own leadership brand.

When I help leaders identify their shapers and influencers I often ask them whether the people they have identified know what kind of impact they've had on their lives. More often than not the answer is 'not really...'. If the same applies to you, why not send your mentors a short note (a hand written card, email, LinkedIn or Facebook message) expressing your gratitude for the impact they've had and how you admire them for it? I promise you that by doing that you'll not only make their day but yours as well. After all, displaying gratitude is a very **powerful practice in making yourself happy!**

## Create a Leadership Brand You Can Be Proud Of

### TEST TO SEE WHERE YOU STAND TODAY

4. What do you value?
5. What do you love to do?
6. What can you be the best in the world at?
7. What lifestyle would you like to pursue?

How would you describe the leadership brand of **Elon Musk**, **Paul Polman** or **Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum**? I'm pretty sure that the words innovation, visionary, bold come to mind when you think of Elon Musk. Sustainability, growth and taking responsibility for Paul Polman and visionary, achiever, benevolent for Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid. All three of them are great leaders who are very aware of how they want to be known and how they want to contribute to this world.

Just consider when Elon Musk personally denying a Tesla Model X to a "rude customer" and very publicly acknowledging the move on **Twitter**. If he doesn't emanate boldness I don't know who does.

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It doesn't matter whether you have the "designation" of a leader. Every person can be, act and think like a leader. Therefore, each person can and should have a leadership brand. In my view there are no "good" or "better" leadership brands. They're just different and should reflect the person that you are, the events that shaped your past and the future you want to create. Not everyone can or wants to be Mother Theresa, or Donald Trump for that matter. At the end it doesn't matter what leadership brand you have so long as you have one.

### What Do You Value?

To create a personal leadership brand that you can be proud of, the first question to understand is what do you value? What drives you? Do you want to be known as a sincere, smart, funny or creative person? Of course most of us would like to be known as all of these values, but obviously this isn't how it works. You have to articulate in writing what your values are and then test whether you actually live them through the daily decisions you make.

### What Do You Love to Do?

Several arguments have debates have taken place figuring out whether you have to '**Do What You Love or Love What You Do**'. I think the jury is still out and proponents of both camps make persuasive arguments. One thing is clear though – you have to know what you are passionate about, the work you love doing and the work you hate doing. Your leadership brand should focus on building what you love to do because

1. You will be better at it, and
2. it will be much easier to talk about it and convince others that this is what you are about.

The infamous "work-life" balance is an incredibly large topic but the fact of the matter is, you're not truly going to succeed at something unless you enjoy doing it. And this is one of the core concepts of creating a leadership brand that you can truly own.

### What Can You be the Best in the World at?

I'm very passionate about football but I'm also pretty sure I'm a lousy football player. It's simply something I'll never be known for. Your passion has to line up with what you are good at and/or you can be the best in the world at.

If you think about it, it's a pretty simple concept. You really can't be remembered for something until you excel at achieving a goal. There are so many incredible leaders in the world making all sorts of positive impacts in every industry imaginable. You have to be the best at what you do. What's the point of it all if you don't stand out from the crowd?

### What Lifestyle Would You Like to Pursue?

Some leaders are driven by progress and advancement, others are looking for a career that provides them with a sense of stability and security. For others it is about the high of creating or contributing something. Part of the reason why truly driven people feel the need to work on their leadership brand is because they know exactly what they want to achieve in life.

Whatever you fancy, you have to be known for what drives you and what life style is important for you. Being clear on what works for you is important in shaping your leadership brand. This doesn't mean that you have to live a life in flamboyance and "show-off" every single accomplishment you achieve. You simply have to be known for what you stand for.

## How to Create a Leadership Brand Based on Your Legacy

Leaders often find it difficult to think past their own life-times. But as **Peter Willis**, thought leader on Business and Sustainability, says:

***"50 years from now business leaders will get imprisoned if they would do the things they currently do to our planet"***

To help leaders think about sustainability and the importance of it Peter makes leaders contextualize what they are doing today in a larger time frame by showing that their 80 years on Earth is just an

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insignificant fraction of the age of our planet. And more importantly he makes it personal. The question that he wants you to answer is:

**What am I doing today that will help create a better life for my favorite ten-year-old for when he / she is 80?**

Since people find it difficult to think 30 or 40 years ahead, thinking 80 years ahead is a real brain twister. We're often so self-absorbed and focused on the 'here and now' that we forget to step back and recognize that we're borrowing this planet and its resources from our (future) grand-children. We forget to reflect and think on how our actions as leaders today impact the world 80 years from now. So when you consider your leadership brand, think what you can and want to do to leave a better planet behind for your special young one.

And yes, it's about the small things we can do on an individual basis but I think we can have a multiplier effect within the organisations and teams we're leading. After all, what's stopping you from being seen as someone who:

1. Teaches kids the importance of tolerance, integrity, humility and compassion?
2. Builds companies that are an integral and net contributor to the community you're part of?
3. Makes sure you genuinely and sustainably impact people that are important to you?
4. Has a vision of helping manufacturing organisations to give back and offset everything they take from this planet?
5. Reduces inequality and creates a platform of equal opportunities for all?

When you look deep inside you, the answer is simple, no one! In this age of the hyper-empowered and connected individuals the only person that stops you from doing this, is you. And if you capture this spirit in your leadership brand, review it on at least an annual basis I promise you that, even if you don't achieve it in full, you'll have achieved more than if you didn't think about it and steered your actions in that direction.

## Use Your Leadership Brand to Balance Your Life

### REFLECT ON WHO YOU WANT TO BE

1. Use your imagination
2. Think About Your 80th Birthday
3. Weigh Your Leadership Brand and Life Balance

Understanding where you come from and where you stand today are important components for your Leadership Brand. Your past molded you and what you value today guides how you behave now. Both are key to ensure your leadership brand is rooted in who you are.

We often want to develop our leadership brand because we aspire to grow, have more impact and change some elements in our leadership style that prevent us from moving forward. Take for example a CFO that I recently coached. He was extremely successful and had become the youngest CFO in his industry. He joined his company at its inception in a junior position and over the

past decade grew to lead the finance function. Due to his understanding of the business, intellect, passion and work ethics he was punching well above his weight, impacting not only the finance function but the business as a whole. People expected him to be the next CEO. The only thing that held him back was that he had a strong Machiavellian streak in which his progress and intellectual superiority translated into disdain for his colleagues. And the worst thing was that he was not able to keep his opinions to himself. Obviously, this led to serious collaboration issues between him and the rest of the team, negatively impacting the results of the organisation at large.

Luckily in my coaching conversations I was able to help him understand how his behavior impacted his relations with his team members, how this effected the overall business results and how this would negatively impact his own career ambitions. By trying to help him understand that his past behavior would not help him in where he wanted to go, we created a platform to discuss the leader he wanted to become, the impact he wanted to have and the results he wanted to achieve for himself and the people that matter to him.

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In doing so I helped him reflect on who he wants to be through 3 exercises:

### 1. Use Your Imagination

In looking for a solution I've found it powerful to look at the options through 2 different lenses by asking these questions:

**If there were no limitations, what would I do?**

**If there were severe limitations what could I still do?**

If you want to articulate your own leadership future, it would be great to consider what you would be doing if you have not limitations. Ask yourself the question:

**“What would you do if you had unlimited time and resource and knew you could not fail?”**

Maybe it is not realistic and you don't have the resources, capabilities or you have commitments that prevent you from choosing this direction now, but at least you know what you would do if there were no limitations and you could at least start thinking, if not working, towards that direction.

### 2. Think About Your 80th Birthday

In our hyper-fast, -connected and -competitive world, we often focus on getting results this year, quarter or even week. It's often about immediate gratification. Of course you know that in order for you to build a leadership brand and make a lasting contribution it's not about tomorrow, or about next year, or even about next 5 years. It's about what you achieve during your life time. **To my surprise** very few people think through on what they want to accomplish, how they want to be recognized and the impact they want to have on the people they love towards the end of their active live.

To help leaders think through this and start working today on how they want to be remembered by the end of their professional life I always ask people to imagine their 80th birthday. Imagine the people that are going to be there and what people would say if they reflect on your life time of contributions and impact you've made. Reflect on:

**What would people that are present at your 80th birthday say?**

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Though it may seem like a simple question, it's an excellent way to wrap your head around a concept bigger than the here and now. It pushes you into the envisioning the future and pushes you to plan for a much larger picture.

### 3. Weigh Your Leadership Brand and Life Balance

An element I often touch upon when I help people think through their leadership brand is how they can create a better balance in their lives. At a certain stage in life, most leaders question their work-life balance. We wonder if it's worth spending so much time at work, earning so much money for the ones we love and whether we're able to spend quality time with them. We also think about how to grow if we just focus on spending time with colleagues from the same function, company, industry and not learn from other people with other interests, views and perspectives. It's all about wanting to create a healthy balance between your physical, emotional, social and mental self in your leadership brand.

So in articulating where you want to take your leadership brand think what you would do if there were no limitations, think with the 'end in mind', what you want to be remembered for and make sure you achieve and maintain a healthy balance in your life to ensure you get there. It's a tough journey but these are the only ones that are truly worth travelling.