

Create a Powerful Personal Brand

We had the privilege of interviewing Lesley Everett, recognised as a thought-leader and international authority on personal branding.

Lesley is the creator of the internationally acclaimed Walking TALL Personal Branding Methodology, a proven system which helps individuals to define themselves with a clear, consistent and congruent personal brand image. Below is her response to our interview questions relating to some of her suggested techniques for improving your personal brand.

1. What makes you passionate about personal branding?

Being the best I can be has always been important to me and I have been very fortunate to have been able to build a methodology to help people to do this. Walking TALL is based on my true values in life – that of being authentic, true to oneself, considerate of others around you and presenting oneself in the best and most genuine way possible to achieve personal goals. So it's because it is a natural part of me that I am so passionate about personal branding. I have seen the positive results many times over with people I have worked with so it's wonderful to be able to share some key principles that make a difference.

2. How can one effectively build credibility?

Credibility is not built overnight of course. However, building a consistent "Personal Brand" is vital to enhancing credibility. We need to be consistent with how we project ourselves and how we communicate, verbally and non-verbally. We need a set of values that clarify on how we are transparent and don't compromise on our beliefs. These are some of the elements of building credibility. We have a seven point plan

for helping individuals to build their brand reputation and credibility:

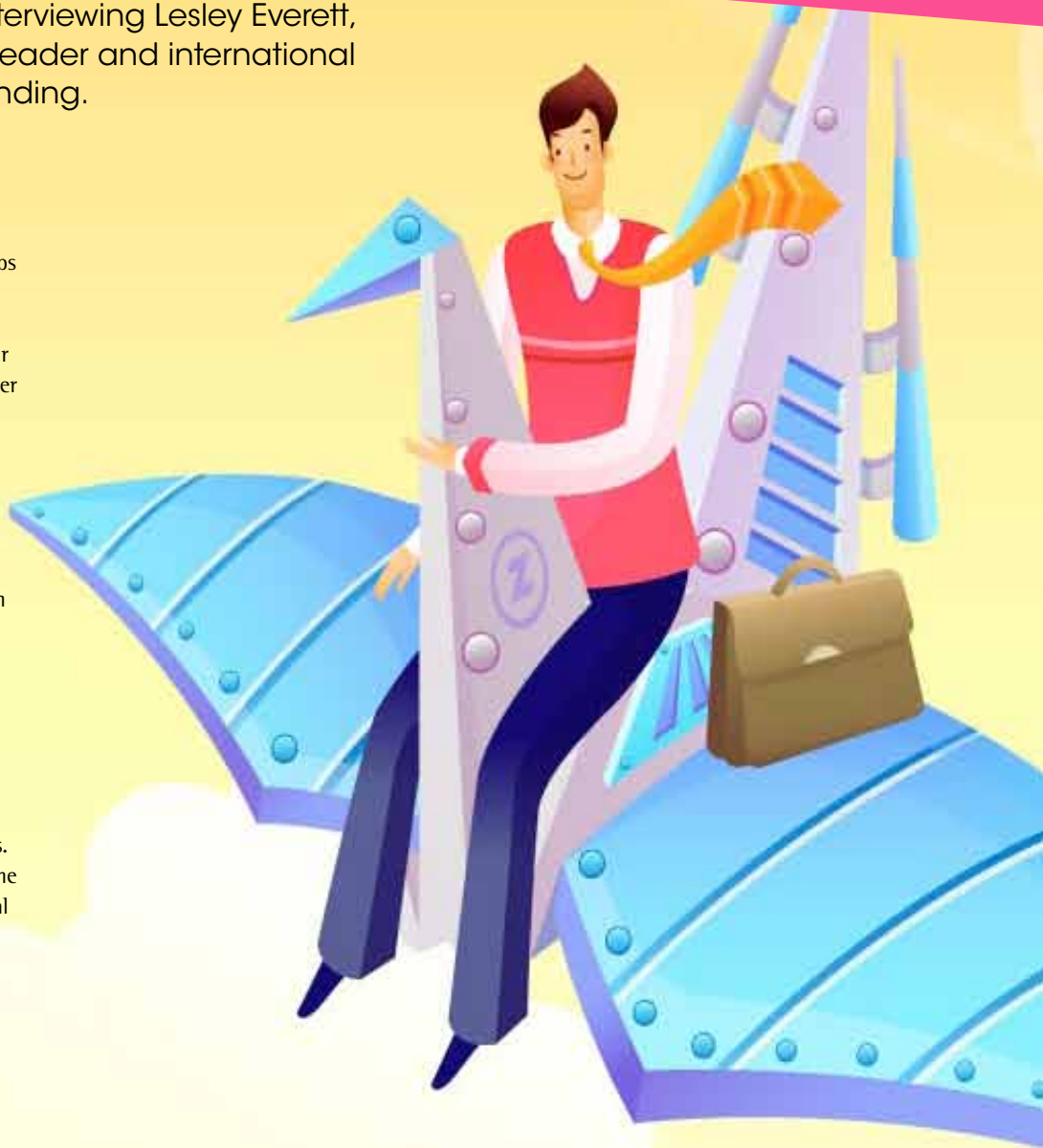
Stride 1 – Who You Really Are

Uncover your personality and individuality and what it is that you're outstandingly good at, also your values. We can often lose track of who we really are in the busy business world we all work in.

Stride 2 – The First 7 Seconds

It takes just 7 seconds for people to judge us initially. We make an immediate impact on people from the moment we meet them and how often do people get the wrong impression of us? There are 3 steps to a first impression:

- What you look like
- What you sound like
- What you say



Stride 3 – Dress Like You Mean It

Style and grooming are the packaging of your personal brand. Do you present yourself in a way that invites trust and credibility as an immediate perception of your brand? Your dress should be an extension of your personality and personal brand – what does yours say about you? Think about those smart casual days..... and those ties that are past their best perhaps!

Stride 4 – Silent Indicators

Your 'Body Talk' can speak volumes about you. A genuine smile, a good handshake and positive eye contact are essential when you meet people. You will be judged on them. Think about the impact a weak handshake has – this will get in the way of projecting your true professional qualities and abilities. Positive silent behaviour speaks volumes.

Stride 5 – Speak Easy

What does your voice convey about your brand? Have you listened to your voicemail message to hear how professional you sound? Never underestimate the potential power and influence of your voice including tone, volume and diction. Your accent is an essential part of your personal brand – be proud of it.

Stride 6 – Be Interested and Visible

Being genuinely interested in others will make you a more interesting person and more memorable.

How visible are you – do people really know who you are or do others have to describe you in great detail for people to know who you are?

Stride 7 – Each Time, All the Time

Consistency is crucial. For any brand to be 100% successful, it has to be 100% consistent.

3. Does it always require a long period of time before you can establish yourself as a

reputable and credible individual advocating a specific brand?

It does take time yes, but a reputation is built on consistency which of course cannot happen overnight! However, it can be destroyed overnight! If you have focus and clarity of what you want to project about yourself as a brand and follow a proven methodology for getting that message out there, then you will build that brand reputation a lot quicker. If you have a plan, a focus and stick to it, then over the course of three months you could establish and position yourself significantly. However it's an ongoing and evolving process.

4. What is the relation between business branding and personal branding?

A lot of my clients work with me because they spend millions of dollars per year on corporate branding but the way their people project themselves is often not in line with these messages. Therefore a large percentage of the corporate brand investment is diluted and lost. We cannot quantify easily how much, but it is significant. Just consider, if the company has a brand value of responsiveness, yet the staff repeatedly and consistently don't get back to people, what effect that has. I very often see an internal culture spill out to the external brand, so it's no good saying, "well we don't treat our customers and stakeholders like that"!

Therefore what personal branding programmes do for business branding is realign and sync the messaging, maximising the investment in corporate branding. Personal branding will provide the tools for individuals to be the best they can be authentically whilst reinforcing and underpinning the corporate values. Companies do not want their employees to all be and act the same – they encourage individuality, however we can be individual but still reinforce corporate messaging in our own way. So quite simply, without addressing the personal

brand needs of individuals, the corporate brand strategy just will not work to its maximum capability. We need to bring personal branding into corporate brand strategies.

5. Is the building of a strong personal brand only important for senior staff members of a company?

Absolutely not. In fact, the receptionist and secretaries are often the most important when it comes to reflecting the corporate brand. However, yes of course it is vitally important for the executive and senior management teams to set a great example and portray an authentic and visible face to the corporate brand, in an impactful way. Often the senior management team is the best place to start a programme so that the messages can be filtered down to the rest of the organisation effectively.

6. Can you advise on some research that you have conducted on the current state of personal branding in the UK?

We are continually doing what I call interactive research. This means that with every intervention with clients, we gain feedback. We have found the following key elements:

- A general increase in awareness of personal branding, what it is and the need for it in business
- An increase in the acceptance and use of personal branding as an integral part of management development programmes
- Less negativity associated with the term than 5 years ago. It was often seen as superficial and the word 'brand' seen as spin. This is not the case so often now.

7. What are your recommendations for improving your online visibility?

- Make sure you have online visibility first of all! Without it you 'do not exist' – is the perception.
- Remember online brand can very quickly become diluted if you don't manage your brand well. Avoid those flippant comments and posts that weaken your brand.
- Get an up-to-date and high quality, flattering photo!
- Only connect with people you personally know and whose integrity is high. You will be judged by who you are connected to also.
- If you are using social media, keep it up-to-date otherwise you will appear a 'has-been' and your reputation will be tarnished.

- Write a great profile that says something about you, not just a CV.
- Comment and contribute to relevant blogs and articles.

8. What is the quickest way to impress people in business?

Most definitely, by being yourself, being authentic and genuine and being consistent. Also a powerful and positive first impression is vital and long-lasting.

9. Can you outline how personal branding varies from culture to culture?

With my work around the world, the practice of personal branding doesn't differ that much if at all. Some cultures are more resistant to it than others, especially when there has been a cultural focus on skills and experience rather than how we project ourselves and our image. However, even these cultures are now recognising the importance of personal branding in line with skills and qualifications in order to get where we want to be in our careers and in business.

For more information about Lesley Everett, please visit:
www.walkingtall.org and
www.lesleyeverett.com

