



Lesley Everett, author of Walking Tall, is an authority on personal branding and image impact.

(Picture by Tom Tardif, 1094683)

First impressions...

Personal branding expert Lesley Everett's top tips for making them count...

- Before you go through the door, take a few seconds to really think about how you are going to be perceived.
- Dress appropriately for the event.
- Smile and keep good posture.
- Have a good handshake and maintain eye contact.
- Remember people's names – people often forget them because they are not listening.
- Don't overly sell yourself but instead listen to other people. Being interested makes you more interesting.
- Do what you say you are going to do. If you say you will call someone the following day, do it.
- People look at shoes. If your shoes aren't polished, people will notice.

Brand leader

How do people describe you behind your back? The way they do is your 'personal brand' and for people and companies that want to get ahead, it's important that it's right.

Nicci Martel spoke to an expert on it, who explains why Kerry Katona's all over the place, while Lady Gaga has it nailed...

WHAT does David Beckham get right that Katie Price gets wrong? What makes Lady Gaga unstoppable and why is Cheryl Cole at risk of losing hers? As for Kate Middleton, has she even got one yet? I'm talking personal branding – how you project your image and wish to be perceived by others. It's not just what you wear, it's what you say and do – and whether you're a platinum-selling superstar, future Queen of England or office filing assistant, knowing what your brand is can help you stay one step ahead of the game. Lesley Everett, author of *Walking Tall*, is an authority on personal branding and image impact. As a media columnist she has written for *The Guardian*, *The Express* and *Financial World* and her expertise is often called upon by BBC News, Sky News and CNN. Her international client list includes 16 FTSE 100 companies as well as the United Nations, GE and Bank of America, plus a number of celebrities – although she remains professionally tight-lipped about who exactly is on her books. However, the concept of personal branding, she said, is an essential tool we all should exploit in this increasingly competitive world. 'Personal branding – it's how people describe you behind your back. It's the words people choose to use about you when you're not there. Everybody has a brand already, whether they know what it is or not,' she said. 'Between five and seven seconds is all it takes to make your first impression. We take in someone's appearance and body language and when they start to speak, we're more likely to believe what we see than what we hear. 'If you look the part, what you say will carry more weight. 'It can take about 20 further experiences with somebody to change their first impressions and you don't get that opportunity often in business.'

Lesley was in Guernsey hosting workshops with Partnered Solutions, an accredited partner of *Walking Tall International*. The *Walking Tall* methodology is built on a number of different principles, a lot of which she was brought up with from a young age. It's the kind of thing one gets told as a child – don't forget to brush your hair and polish your shoes – but she found that when applied to the business world, they couldn't have proved more true. 'My mum always said that first impressions were the most important. She also said to look people in the eye, be true to yourself and always wear a clean pair of knickers because you never know when you might get hit by a bus – all sorts of things like that,' Lesley said. 'My mum wasn't somebody who dressed exceptionally well, but she knew how to present herself and she gave me those basic principles. 'Obviously the method goes into much more depth, but the concept is the same.' In 1994, Lesley was working in corporate business when the importance of personal branding really hit home. She had a boss who should have been at least two levels above where he was on the career ladder, but with his cheap grey suits and long grey beard he was missing out on promotion because of his unkempt style. That's when she realised there must be a market for image impact. 'Before that I'd done a lot of work in the beauty industry. I'd studied image and non-verbal communication. I sold make-up when I left school and I'd studied a bit of beauty therapy. But what the idea has evolved into is much more than image consultancy.'

Beyond the voice quality, grooming, image, behaviour and body language tactics that make up the *Walking Tall* methodology, at the heart of it, Lesley believes people have to be themselves. They have to be authentic. 'A brand doesn't work when people try to be something they're not. What I do is help people figure out what their strengths are, how best to demonstrate them and how to make the best possible impact,' she said, before turning to kebab-lover turned fitness guru Kerry Katona as an example. 'I'm always looking at celebrities and what their brand is. I look at her and she is someone who's not clear about who she is. We get all these different images of her from different periods in her life and the same can be said about Jordan, or Katie Price. Her brand is very confused – we know nothing about who she really is.' Someone who has got it right, however, is David Beckham, who is one of the most valuable personal brands in the world. Put his face on a product and the chance of it succeeding will skyrocket. His lure and the success of him as a brand is authenticity, according to Lesley. 'He's consistent and he couldn't keep it up unless it was real. Did you read in the paper that he stopped in his car to help out another motorist? He didn't have to do that, but he did, because that's who he is,' she said. 'Lady Gaga – that's an incredible brand. She's popular because she is off the wall, she is kooky – it comes off as authentic. Madonna is a master at manipulating her own brand, while keeping it consistent. Not many people can do that.' Another example of just how powerful personal branding can be is Cheryl Cole. She's gone from tramp with an assault conviction to national icon, via a cringeworthy stint as a footballer's wife. The transformation could not be more pronounced. But while this is a brilliant example of how to market yourself, it could all become unhinged just as quickly as it came together. 'She has to be careful now – she's in danger of becoming over-exposed and diluting the brand. She needs to be more focused.' Once branded a national sweetheart by the tabloids, now Ms Cole has some serious competition for the title – the soon-to-be Mrs William Windsor, Kate Middleton. Lesley will be watching carefully how she establishes herself within *The Firm*, while maintaining her own individuality. So far, Lesley said, she's really got her work cut out. 'I almost hate to say it, but that lunch date she had with Camilla, with her black tights and jacket over a dress – it wasn't great. She's hanging onto a studenty image and she needs to lift it a bit.'

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'The Issa engagement dress was perfect, but the interviews she did didn't do her any justice. She came across as very ill-prepared, even when she was asked about the ring. She was looking to William for answers.'

What personal branding says about the rich and famous can be applied in the workplace and social situations. Most of Lesley's clients aren't huge celebrities, they are people who want help to make a better impact, or companies that want their staff to project a sleeker, more efficient image. One of the things companies don't do, Lesley said, is put enough emphasis on the behaviour of staff. They spend millions of pounds a year on corporate branding, but forget the gap between their ambitions and that of their staff. Using personal branding, Lesley works to get everybody singing off the same hymn sheet. 'Businesses need to clarify to employees what they are trying to portray as a corporate brand. Often, people in a company don't even know what its values are. I take people out of the corporate space and make it about them. I help them discuss who they are and what they can bring to the table for that company. It's got to be about the individual.' Projecting certain values while emerging as an individual is nowhere better illustrated than within politics, in which politicians have to embody a party ethos while positively marking themselves out from a crowd. In Britain, the last 15 years has seen a growing demand for poster-boy politicians who must look and sound a certain way. It's why last year's televised election debates were a battleground of personal branding – and one of the reasons why Gordon Brown lost. 'His personality didn't come through. He didn't look particularly comfortable, whereas Nick Clegg and David Cameron did. Nick Clegg looked very at ease. His body language was good, he used eye contact and remembered people's names. People are more likely to focus on that than what he was actually saying,' said Lesley, who has worked with politicians on image. 'Barack Obama has a real clarity of message and he communicates that with his body and posture. He's got it right and I think that Michelle Obama – I don't know if she has an adviser or thinks about it herself – comes across as absolutely sincere and natural.' Putting aside the higher echelons of international politics, the success of *Walking Tall* is proof that there's certainly a demand for Lesley's expertise. If the world really is becoming more image obsessed, then knowing how to master your own would certainly be a worthwhile place to start.

Lesley Everett was in Guernsey to host workshops with Partnered Solutions, an accredited partner of *Walking Tall International* in the Channel Islands.

Getting it right...



Lady Gaga's kookiness comes across as authentic.



Madonna is a master at manipulating her own brand.



Cheryl Cole has transformed herself into a national icon.



David Beckham is one of the most valuable brands in the world.



Michelle Obama comes across as sincere and natural.



Barack Obama has a real clarity of message and communicates it well.

Getting it wrong...



Kerry Katona appears to be unclear about who she is.



Katie Price/Jordan's brand is very confused.



Kate Middleton really has her work cut out.



Gordon Brown's personality fails to come through.