



BRAND YOUR *PASSION*

The idea of branding yourself is today's hot topic—and for good reason. We are all free agents in a workplace full of free agents. Cultivating a personal brand is critical for career development – your employers, potential employers, customers and contacts need to know what you're all about. Branding ourselves is important to standing out and being recognized. But I'll go farther than saying you just have to brand yourself—you have to “brand your passion.” Why? Because building and selling your brand is a lot easier if you care deeply about it.

Katharine Graham, the first female CEO of a Fortune 500 company, The Washington Post, once said, “To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?” The problem is, a lot of us in the workforce do not love what we do and we often question whether it matters. I didn't find my passion until I was 50 years old because I always followed the money. Whether it was upon graduation from college or business school or simply switching jobs, I usually took positions where I would make the most money. My bank account and resume looked fantastic but I wasn't happy. I chose work that I was good at but not passionate about. I was looking at the money—the scorecard against my business school classmates—and I never stopped to think about what I wanted to do in life.

Therefore, I tell women professionals that the first step to branding themselves is to figure out what they like to do. To get started, make a list of what you do in your leisure time. Does the stock market fascinate you? Are you the ringleader always getting people motivated to do something new? Leisure activities can be translated to jobs: interest in the stock market can equate to a career in money management, banking or estate planning. The “motivator” would probably make a good salesperson or human resources manager.

Once you've determined what gets you jazzed, think about what gives your life meaning—what matters to you. It's immaterial whether you want to solve world peace or help small companies make the most of the Internet—it just has to have meaning *for you*. Then, combine what you like to do and what has meaning for you with what you're good at doing. You may enjoy playing tennis but you're probably not going to make the pro tour if you didn't pick up a racket until you were 25 years old. But that doesn't mean you can't have a career that involves tennis. Your strengths may be in sales, management or one of the myriad other functional areas that support the business of the sport. So go ahead—make another list but this time include those activities that you are good at doing. The intersection of these three concepts holds great possibilities.

And you're not finished yet. The most important actions are in front of you. The next step of branding your passion is to create the verbiage for your branding message. Think of 5 bullet points that describe YOU. Be sure to include business aspects such as a particular industry or functional area that you identified earlier as important to you. You should also include other interests or abilities such as sports, travel, or hobbies that make you special. Pretend that you are writing about someone else and you'll feel better about self promotion. You are now your own personal PR manager so it's important to do something that most women shy away from and that most men are good at—boasting. Most men are comfortable letting others—at work and in their personal lives—know what they have to offer, what differentiates them and why they should be chosen—for

the job, the project or the inner circle. Often, success means the ability to sell yourself persuasively, to show others you are proud of your accomplishments. Tactful self promotion is often the difference between those who make it and those who don't. If you are would rather have root canal than talk about yourself, find a friend to practice on. It gets easier over time. And if you're passionate about your brand, it's a lot easier to sell yourself than if you're not.

You are now on your way to making your career a lot more fun and probably more profitable—yes, more profitable. Just because you are doing what you like to do does not mean you have to sacrifice financially. If you like what you do, you will probably put more time into it. You will become an expert faster and you will have an easier time branding and selling yourself. When I worked in Investment Banking in the mid-80's, most of my colleagues "ate, drank, and breathed" Wall Street. When asked when they decided they wanted a career on the Street, a common answer was "in grade school." Most of them were very successful. I, on the other hand, did not even know what investment banking was until I attended business school. I accepted a job in corporate finance right out of school because it was one of THE hot jobs at the time. I left not because I couldn't be successful as an investment banker but rather because I would never be as successful as my peers. I just didn't care enough.

So don't wait until you're over 50 to follow your passion. Start right now. Here is my acid test: if you won the lottery tomorrow, would you quit your job? I would not. I have "branded" my passion – work doesn't feel like work anymore. It feels like play. That's a much better way to live than just following the money.