

Second Edition, Updated and Expanded

BE *your own* BRAND

Achieve More of **WHAT YOU WANT**
by Being More of **WHO YOU ARE**



Excerpt of 2 chapters describing the
Three Principles of Personal Brand

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PART I

Personal Brand Basics

1 Personal Brand: The Perception That You Made a Difference

Let's get straight to the point. Everybody already has a brand. Your personal brand is a perception held in others' minds, and it has evolved through their interactions with you. Through repeated contacts between you and another person, his or her perception of you sharpens and your brand in that person's mind becomes clearer. In other words, people are constantly observing who you are, what you do, and how you do it. Having a brand is not the point: more important is the question, How *strong* is your personal brand? The strength of your personal brand grows or weakens depending upon the consistent impact (positive or negative) you are making on other individuals. Want to be a stronger brand? Make a difference!

Ever get the feeling that people—even people who know you (or should know you) very well—just don't "get" you?

Ever get the feeling that the relationships in your life—some of them, anyway—are a little out of sync with your ideals and what you really want?

Ever get the feeling that there's a troubling disconnect—maybe only minor, maybe profound—between your personal life and your professional life?

In every case described above, a gap seems to exist between the "real you" and the you other people see and interact with. At work,

at home, in the community, in life in general—it seems that you’re not getting as much credit as you feel you deserve for what you contribute and what you truly believe.

The framework of personal brand management set out in this book is designed to enable you to shift others’ perceptions so that you can be acknowledged and receive credit for who you are and the difference you make for others. At the base of this framework is a set of simple principles (which we refer to as “personal brand basics”). In this chapter, we will explain two of these three principles: the role of perceptions and the importance of making a difference in relationships.

Understanding these two simple, commonsense principles of personal brand will make it possible for you to immediately start building a stronger brand.

However, before we’re off and running, let’s make sure we agree on the definition of “personal brand.”

A personal brand is a perception or emotion, maintained by somebody other than you, that describes your outstanding qualities and influences that person’s relationship with you.

A strong personal brand does not result from a contrived image, colorful clothing, snappy slogan, or from having put on an artificial veneer to disguise the true nature of what’s within: A strong personal brand describes a person who chooses to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others and who builds trusting, valued relationships. A weak personal brand describes a person whose attributes and perceived qualities lack clarity, and more importantly, someone who is not perceived to extend him- or herself to make a difference for other people.

What does a personal brand, strong or otherwise, look like? How will people know it when they see it? Think for a moment of someone you know well professionally. How would you describe your relationship with that person? Is this someone with whom you can

easily discuss a problem, or someone you'd probably avoid in a sensitive situation? Do you think of them first when you need help or expertise in a particular area, or do they never come to mind? Why does an individual stand out among the hundreds of people in your mental address book?

One of David's colleagues, Sue Stanek, describes how she is consciously evaluating individual personal brands by noticing how she thinks when she passes fellow workers in the office. Looking at one, she might say to herself, "You really make my life easy!" Looking at another, she thinks, "You really make my life difficult." Sue's bottom-line judgments are a reminder of the importance of making a positive difference if you want to be perceived as a strong brand.

Now think about the more intimate relationships in your life, and you'll experience distinct, and often deep, feelings. When you think of your spouse, partner, children, parents, or closest friends, there's a real emotional kick to the mental image, "Oh, that's my dad," "my mom," "the love of my life," "my kids," or "my best buddy from college/the Navy/the team at work." Special relationships have emotions tied to them—that's what makes them so special.

The brands of the important people in your life exist in your mind (just as your brand exists in theirs) based on who you've known them to be and what you've known them to do. Their brand is how you judge them now and how you know what to expect from them the next time you interact. Your perceptions may or may not match what they've consciously worked to create in your mind . . . but that's getting a little ahead of our story.

One Really Nice Guy (and a Strong Personal Brand)

For Karl, a good example of a strong personal brand is Dr. Chip R. Bell, who is an author, a trainer, and a consultant. He has a well-developed sense of humor, an engaging Southern drawl, and a

depth of expertise that extends from customer service to leadership and the protocols of great partnerships. But most importantly in this context, Chip Bell is a nice guy.

“So what?” you may say. “The world is full of nice guys. Big deal.” Chip Bell is a *nice guy who makes a difference*.

Chip Bell embodies an off-the-chart exuberance for life. To anyone who has come within the gravitational pull of his personality, he is the poster boy for contagious enthusiasm. He radiates into a room his active, assertive, outgoing friendliness. A couple of years ago, he and Karl partnered on a consulting road trip in the Pacific Northwest—and Karl still clearly recalls witnessing dimensions of enthusiasm he had never suspected existed.

By his actions and example, Chip Bell inspired Karl—and undoubtedly a lot of other people—to take the personal brand component of optimism and enthusiasm to a whole new level. People do that to us periodically: they take something we believe is one of our own greatest strengths and redefine it right before our eyes, simultaneously transforming it and us.

But why Karl finds Chip Bell such an extraordinary example of a strong personal brand is the sheer genuineness of his behavior—from the moment Chip greets you to the moment you part. When you look into Chip Bell’s eyes, he’s completely there. In that moment, the connection he makes has a power and a relevance that transcends anything else going on in the room.

Did Chip Bell set out to be the nicest, most enthusiastic guy on the planet? Not at all. He’s not engaged in a competitive endeavor, and his effect is not a function of his actions alone. Rather, Chip Bell values friendliness—values it extremely highly—and that, in turn, dictates his outgoing, involved behavior.

It’s an amazing thing to stand next to and watch Chip Bell. He has no self-consciousness, no sense of pretense or artifice. In other words, Chip Bell’s authenticity (a word we’ll come back to at

some length in chapter 4) is so apparent that its impact on others is immediate and lasting. Chip Bell's brand of exuberance and passion for life rubs off on other people and changes their day—and maybe their perspective on life. Chip Bell is an excellent example of a strong personal brand.

Your values and habits may not be the same as Chip Bell's. Nor should they be, if his brand doesn't contribute to an accurate reflection of who you are. But when you can indelibly imprint yourself on the mind of someone else, you've arrived as a strong personal brand.

It's fair to say that most people have a similar perception of Chip Bell, and that's the beginning of being a strong brand. The other quality that makes him such a strong brand is that he uses his distinctive qualities to make a difference for others as often as possible. This brings us to linking the first principle, the power of perceptions, to the second principle, making a difference. (The third principle will be the subject of chapter 2.) The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to providing you a practical understanding of these two important concepts.

“It Isn't What They Say About You, It's What They Whisper” —Errol Flynn

When it comes to your personal brand, what *you* think doesn't matter, but what *other people* think matters a whole lot. Your brand exists on the basis of a set of perceptions and emotions stored in someone else's head.

The good and bad news about how others perceive you is that once locked in place, perceptions have tremendous staying power.

Perception is reality. Sound familiar? Most people have heard this simple aphorism. Yet it is reasonable to assume that although many people understand that other people have certain perceptions

about them, too few people make the effort to proactively manage the perceptions they leave with others. Why is that? Some people are confident they will leave the right impression. Other individuals feel it is too difficult to influence what others think. And still other people claim they don't care about what others think of them. Frankly, we know from asking thousands of people—they're not sure exactly what perceptions they want to leave.

An important competency of building and growing a strong personal brand is to harness the power of perceptions. If others' perceptions define our personal brand, we need to be purposeful about managing the perceptions we leave with them. Let's be clear that how people perceive us has a significant impact on how they relate to, and react to, us. And, in some cases, their perceptions may impact whether they will even take the time to meet with us. So, to leverage our personal brand and make the most of our relationships, we must improve our competency of managing the perceptions we create.

Even with our best intentions of managing others' perceptions of us, it is not easy. Commonly we view ourselves one way while others have a very different perception of us. Can you imagine, or do you know, someone who takes pride at being a hard worker—while other people perceive him or her as a workaholic? Who's right? How does that difference in perceptions impact their relationship? How about the person who is proud of being well informed but who others see as a know-it-all? Whose point of view matters more? In the end, the perspective others have of us will clearly bias how they perceive and relate to us.

There are many reasons why a difference exists between how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by others. We each have a unique set of lenses through which we view others, so to speak. Each person's lenses are colored by life's experiences, attitudes at the time, and how the person feels about him- or herself at a partic-

ular moment. The result is that a person's actions or words may be interpreted differently by various other people or at different times. Building a strong brand requires a level of wisdom and flexibility to ensure that one's actions and words consistently reinforce the way one wants to be perceived. No one said building a strong personal brand didn't take some effort!

Misperceptions can also result from a certain plan of action not turning out as intended. Now let us give you an example: A young lady (Sally) in her early twenties went home to her mom and told her that she and her fiancé wanted to save some money to buy a house before getting married. She asked her mom if she could move back home to save money, and her mom said, "Well, how long will you be here?" Sally looked disappointed because she took her mom's comment to mean she wasn't welcome back home. Mom was thinking that if Sally would be home for a minimum of six months, Mom could put her back on the family's car insurance and save her daughter even more money. But that's not the perception Sally was left with, and it took time to reassure her that her mom understood her situation and wanted to help.

The third point to keep in mind about perceptions is that people sometimes base them on our actions and other times by what they judge as our intentions. In either case, perceptions are what matter. Perceptions define our brands. And we all must hold ourselves accountable to the perceptions we leave—not to our intentions or solely the actions we take.

So what's the bottom line, and why should anyone work so hard to manage the perceptions others have of them? It's all about the gap: The size of the gap between the way you want to be perceived and the way you are perceived by another person will have a big impact on the general tenor and productivity of the relationship. A narrower gap supports a productive and enjoyable relationship. Conversely, a wider gap results in a relationship that will require

more effort to accomplish things, and interacting may not be as much fun.

It's Not About Being Different, It's About the Difference You Make

The second principle of personal brand is centered on the importance of using your special qualities to make a difference. Strong personal brands thrive by finding ways to contribute and make a positive difference for others. Although this concept is uncomplicated, we explain it because it is a most important principle to understand.

The perceptions others have of you are directly related to how much of a difference you make for them. The bigger the difference—positive or negative—the longer the perception remains in their minds. When you make little or no difference for someone, his or her perception of you evaporates faster than you might think. Think of how many people you have interacted with over the past two weeks. How many can you recall? How clear or complete are your perceptions of them? It's safe to say that the number of people you remember and the number who left you with a clear set of perceptions is a fraction of your total interactions. How many people would recall their interactions with you because you made a discernable difference?

It's a Whole New Social Networked World

Social media, as we know it today, was nonexistent when *Be Your Own Brand* was first published. It is a huge understatement to say social media has profoundly changed the way people interact and relate to other people. In a personal brand context, this brave new world greatly impacts the way people make impressions and are

perceived by others. The social networked world has added a new dimension to building and managing a personal brand and the perceptions that define it. In this revision of *Be Your Own Brand*, we provide critical insights about how to use the power of social media to build a stronger personal brand.

For starters, a myriad of different tools exist (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, Flickr, YouTube, MySpace, Ning, Classmates .com, Friendster, orkut, Multiply, and Match.com, to name only a few) to represent your personal brand in the social media world. The many and diverse social media tools allow you to broaden the awareness of your brand across a much larger audience, with many different segments. These tools vastly transcend the possibilities of extending your personal brand across many audiences in the real world (by which we mean the nonvirtual, not-online world). Using a portfolio of social media tools to proactively extend your personal brand offers exciting brand-building opportunities and, of course, challenges.

Hyperlinking, tagging, linking within networks, social bookmarking, SEO strategies, sharing, and becoming “friends” are all examples of tools that catapult and enormously expand the potential for creating perceptions of your personal brand in the social media world. Ideally, people self-direct and manage the power of social media tools to grow their personal brand. But experience suggests that world is not so clean or controlled. Perceptions of your brand can be influenced by someone else—and without your permission.

There has always been gossip in the real world, but the social media world is gossip on steroids! Then there is guilt by association, so to speak. One of personal brand management’s axioms is “Your brand is known by the company it keeps.” It is a lot easier for people to “associate” with you, and without you knowing it, in the social media world.

The other potential of using social media tools is the enormous

number of extra possibilities to make a difference for someone. Sometimes with only a few keystrokes you can contribute something of value to someone else. Because of the power of the linked network, you may have a chance to encourage, empower, assist, or help to make a difference for someone you have never even met.

The social media world offers opportunities (and some pitfalls) to building a stronger brand than was ever imagined when we first created the concept of personal brand. We provide specific examples and suggestions for using social media tools and strategies to build a stronger brand in chapter 9.

Feelings Create Lasting Perceptions

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

This profound aphorism attributed to Maya Angelou has real, important meaning for personal brand building. When you make a truly positive impact on another person, you leave them with a warm feeling. Strong feelings create lasting memories. Making a positive and distinctive difference for someone is the surest way to become a strong brand.

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A Strong Personal Brand Delivers on Three Important Expectations

Do the people you know perceive qualities in you that are truly distinctive? Do they believe that you make those qualities relevant to them and their needs? Are they convinced that you will demonstrate those qualities consistently? If you can confidently answer yes to all three of these questions, you can expect to reap the benefits of having a strong brand with those people.

Most of us can answer yes to all three with some people in our lives. But how many? Is your network of strong personal brand relationships large enough to help you achieve what is important to you?

Three key components combine to determine the strength of your brand. These components combined form the third fundamental principle of personal brand. Strong brands are perceived to be:

Distinctive: They stand for something. They have a point of view.

Relevant: What they stand for connects to what someone else considers to be important.

Consistent: People come to believe in a relationship based on the consistency of behaviors they experience or observe.

Taken together, these characteristics create value and trust in a relationship—the core definition of a strong brand. Simply stated, the math goes something like this: when someone believes that you make your distinctive qualities relevant to them, the value you bring to the relationship is clearly established (i.e., you made a difference); when you are consistent in creating value, people know they can trust you to add value time and time again.

Strong Personal Brands Are Distinctive

Your brand starts to become strong when you decide what you believe in and then commit to acting on those beliefs. At that very point, you begin to separate yourself from the crowd. Here's why—making a commitment means doing what you said you would do despite the obstacles. Since your beliefs are not always shared by another, standing up for and holding to them is often a courageous act—and courage of this kind is not too common in our world. That, by definition, is distinctive.

Since the first edition of *Be Your Own Brand* was published, thousands of people have been surveyed to find out which of these qualities—distinctive, relevant, or consistent—is the most difficult to achieve. The majority of respondents indicate that being perceived to be distinctive is the least difficult. This is a common misconception. Most people underestimate what it takes to be perceived to be distinctive in some way. Moreover, being perceived as distinctive can make many people feel uncomfortable. It takes considerable effort and internal fortitude to be perceived to be distinctive. For example, if you believe one of your outstanding qualities is that you are a caring person, are you willing to demonstrate your caring nature in front of people who might disagree with, and be highly critical of, your actions?

To truly understand what it means to be distinctive is to learn that it implies much more than merely being different. Brand building is not image building. It is not selling yourself to someone else. It results from understanding the needs of others, wanting to meet those needs, and being able to do so while staying true to your values.

As we'll see in greater detail in chapter 4, clarifying, understanding, and acting on the basis of values is a core building block in the art of developing a strong personal brand. For now, suffice it to say that your values are the beliefs you hold to be true and the principles by which you live your life—all of which influence how you prioritize competing demands.

Your values affect not only what you think and feel, but also how you behave. How you act on your values is what distinguishes you from the crowd. As people observe your actions, they make judgments about why you do what you do. Those judgments then become the perception of you they carry around with them. The more distinctive your actions, the clearer their perceptions and the better defined your brand becomes for them. In other words, personal brands grow strong when they are focused on meeting the needs of others without sacrificing the values on which they are based.

We cannot emphasize enough that building a strong personal brand takes much more than looking good, finding the right logo or stationery, or even designing an eye-popping website. While those things may bring attention to you, your brand will ultimately be a reflection of the ideas and values that are distinctively you. This is the only substance upon which a truly lasting relationship can be built. The lesson:

Your personal brand is based on your values, not the other way around.

Strong Personal Brands Are Relevant

Being distinctive is not the only thing that matters to someone else. What you stand for needs to be relevant to them.

Relevance begins when a person believes that you understand and care about what's important to them. It gains strength every time you demonstrate that what's important to them is important to you. The synergistic effect of being both distinctive and relevant is what ignites the power of a personal brand. It takes wisdom, insight, empathy, intuition, and often extra effort to be relevant to another person.

Relevance is also a function of circumstances. Parents are naturally relevant to their children, for they are the caregivers and protectors of those children. The relevance of one spouse to another extends far beyond the bonds of a marriage contract: the actual relevance occurs when both people in the marriage are concerned about and committed to each other's well-being.

Relevance is what distinguishes a friend from an acquaintance. A coworker may be relevant only to the degree that what they do affects what you do, whereas a mentor's support and interest in your career and future makes that relationship far more valued and lasting than an ordinary relationship with a fellow employee. Your relevance to your clients or customers is determined not only by your product or service, but by how it (and you) can proficiently solve their problems and meet their needs. The more relevance you demonstrate, the stronger your brand becomes to them. Relevance is what makes strong brands continue to attract attention and stand out from the crowd.

Building relevance involves a skill we call "thinking in reverse." If you want to be considered valuable to others, you must move out of your world into theirs. Your first concern is to determine their needs and interests. Then you connect those needs and interests to

your own personal strengths and abilities. The sages throughout the ages have said in many different ways: “Before you can get what you want, you must first help others get what they want.”

That means relevance is a process. It starts with questions. What do they want? What do they need? What do they value? What do they expect? When you have a sense of someone else’s needs and frame of reference, that information allows you to guide your actions in ways that will make you relevant. The best salespeople are highly skilled—and in some cases intuitive—about discovering what is relevant to a prospective buyer. To ensure their success, the salesperson discovers what is of the utmost importance to a prospect in terms of his or her needs and problems before presenting ideas. Targeting comments or solutions toward the issues that are relevant to the particular prospect allows that person to see clearly the value the salesperson brings to the relationship.

There is a strong aspirational element to being truly relevant to others. Webster’s defines “aspiration” as “a strong desire to achieve something high or great.” Most people would be pleased to hear that someone described them as a “great person.” But people don’t tend to hand out that label randomly. The lesson:

Relevance is something we earn by the importance others place on what we do for them and by their judgment of how well we do it.

Strong Personal Brands Are Consistent

The third component in building a strong brand is consistency—doing things that are both distinctive and relevant, and doing them again and again and again. Consistency is a hallmark of all strong brands. As a brand, you only get “credit” (acknowledgment, acceptance, or recognition by others) for what you do consistently. Consistent behaviors define your brand more clearly and concisely

than the most polished and practiced patter. Consistency requires the discipline to overcome circumstances, personal feelings, and frankly, some of the spin and hyperbole that is often thrown at us.

In the American public's consciousness—even for people who have never met them and may not like or even agree with them—figures such as Martha Stewart, Oprah Winfrey, Rush Limbaugh, Sarah Palin, Lou Holtz, Warren Buffet, Bono, and countless others stand as strong personal brands based on the consistency of their actions. In other countries and cultures, the list of names changes, but the stature doesn't.

Which strongly branded public figures an individual labels admirable and which ones they label not so admirable will vary based on point of view. Everyone defines distinctiveness in his or her own terms. Each public figure's relevance to your needs and values will also vary. But like them or not, need them or not, you feel you know what to expect from these people because their behavior has been so consistent over so many years.

In a relationship, consistency is established by dependability of behavior. Over time, people learn that they can trust you if they experience consistent, trustworthy behaviors. In the absence of personal experience, they may decide to trust you because of what they have learned of your track record from others. Your previous actions—not your intentions—lead them to believe that you can be counted on to behave in a similar way again. And every time you behave the way they expect, you reinforce the strength of your brand with them. Trust grows.

Conversely, the quickest way to diminish and ultimately destroy someone's trust is to become inconsistent. No matter how high the highs may have been, roller-coaster behavior will work against the long-term prospects of any relationship. The lesson:

Consistency is the hallmark of all strong personal brands.

Inconsistency weakens brands and suspends belief.

The Power of Example

Some people live decades and never really achieve a lasting impact on the people around them. Some leave a lasting legacy based on a few short years. The latter group has brands that stand the test of time, even though time itself is denied to them in any great amount.

An excellent example is Canadian Terry Fox, who was the subject of David's award-winning film, *The Power of Purpose*. At the age of eighteen, Terry Fox was diagnosed with bone cancer. His right leg was amputated six inches above the knee, and he spent a long time in the hospital in recovery and rehabilitation. While there, he was moved by the suffering he saw all around him—so moved that he decided to do something about it. Three years after losing his leg, he vowed to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research. His goal: Raise at least one dollar for every man, woman, and child in the country—over \$24 million.

He started in mid-April, dipping his artificial foot in the Atlantic Ocean. During the next 143 days, initial casual interest turned into a national phenomenon. Terry Fox was running 42 kilometers (over 25 miles) a day. On September 1, just east of Thunder Bay, Ontario—two-thirds of the way to the Pacific and over 5,300 kilometers from his starting point—his run came to a premature end. His cancer had returned. He died the following June, one month before his twenty-third birthday.

Terry Fox lived, however, to see what many had described as the “impossible” fundraising goal of \$24 million reached and exceeded. He raised \$28 million.

Those who knew Terry were quick to say that he was no saint. But he showed tremendous integrity about why he was running and what the money he raised was going for, and he would not let anyone muddy the waters. He made sure that all his expenses were

covered by sponsorships or contributions so every dollar donated actually went to cancer research. He made every step count.

That was in 1980. Today, Terry Fox Runs are held in more than thirty countries, from Albania to Zimbabwe. The extraordinary legacy he left—directed now by the Terry Fox Foundation in Toronto, Ontario—has raised more than half a billion dollars for cancer research. In 1999, a national survey conducted by the Dominion Institute and the Council for Canadian Unity found that in the minds of his countrymen, Terry Fox is Canada's greatest hero.

Is Terry Fox a strong brand? Let's look at the criteria: Is he distinctive? Yes. Has he made his distinctive qualities relevant to others? Yes. Is he consistent? Yes. Has he made a difference? No doubt!

Our journeys through life may not be as dramatic as Terry Fox's; but when our values lead to distinctive, relevant, and consistent actions, the effects we have on the world around us can transcend the limits of time and place and transform the lives of others.

Climbing the Brand Ladder

Because of the dynamic nature of a relationship, the process of being distinctive, relevant, and consistent has some subtle shading. Each interaction builds on the one before it and sets the stage for the one that will follow. As the relationship deepens and grows, it acquires a history—a breadth and depth that takes on increasing significance over time.

When you look back to your first experiences with someone important in your life, do you find yourself marveling at how little you knew about each other? From the perspective of time and experience, you can see that your relationship now exists at a much higher level. It's as though you'd been climbing a ladder, with each rung taking your relationship to a new level.

In business, the concept of brand ladders is used to determine

how—through repeated encounters—distinctive product and service features connect with the relevant emotional needs and values of customers. The purpose is to develop depth and breadth in the relationship. Each step leads to another, gradually getting closer to the emotional core that makes for enduring relationships.

When you open a checking account, your brand-based expectations for choosing one bank over another are likely to be pretty simple: “Keep my money safe for me until I need it. Send me a clear, accurate statement periodically. Be open for enough hours and in enough locations to make it convenient for me to do business with you.”

Those are lower rungs on the bank’s brand ladder. But then one day you need something more—a mortgage, a loan for a new car, or a savings program for the kids’ college fund. Now the bank’s brand connection has a chance to move up your emotional ladder. You likely place a different—and significantly higher—value on your home or your children’s future than you do on your checking account. As the bank justifies your trust at this higher level, the brand connection moves up a rung.

The same dynamic works on a personal scale as well. You start by finding out what is initially distinctive and relevant to other people in your life. What are their values and beliefs? What do they stand for? What do they need from others in a relationship? What, in particular, do they need from you in the beginning stages of your relationship?

The brand connection grows as you use this knowledge to progressively work your way up their ladder of ideas, desires, and values. The experience and insight you gain as you move up the scale allows you to better understand the higher-level benefits and emotional rewards they derive from connecting with you consistently. First contacts often are tentative: neither person involved is quite sure what to expect. As our relationships move to higher levels of

emotional connection, we seem to instinctively know what someone needs from us, and often we don't have to think twice to provide it.

When a mother or father asks a child at dinner, "Is your food okay?" they want to make sure things taste right. That's a lower rung on the brand ladder of "parent." But an enthusiastic—especially an unsolicited—"Wow, this is really good. Thanks!" says a lot more than that the meal is okay. It says that the child values the time spent on his or her behalf, which makes Mom or Dad feel appreciated. That's a higher step on the ladder.

When that feeling of being appreciated is relevant to what people believe are their responsibilities, a much higher level of connection has been achieved. Their values are reinforced—which means that, in our example, finding the time to be together at mealtimes is likely to continue to be an important part of building the relationship between parent and child.

Some Reflections on Building Your Brand

Because of the back-and-forth nature of a relationship, a commitment to being distinctive and relevant to others has important carryover effects for you. Determining ways to be relevant to others reflects your desire to learn and grow. This, in turn, is expressed by continually creating meaningful connections, solving problems, and making things better for others and yourself.

But because others determine whether or not you're effective at brand building, your relevance to them is ultimately their decision. And sometimes the connection simply won't be there. You won't always get along with everybody. You can't. Nobody can. Your values, however distinctive, simply won't appeal to everyone. Neither will they be relevant to everyone. You can't be all things to all people, nor should you try to be.

So one key determination you need to make in building your

brand is how relevant specific other people are, or can be, to you. If you're going to be true to yourself and be acknowledged, accepted, and recognized for who you really are, your core values must be respected in each relationship, not compromised. To think you will never leave someone dissatisfied runs counter to the idea of a strong personal brand. So you also must decide if a particular relationship is worth the effort.

Clarity in relationships is a key advantage of a strong personal brand. As your brand becomes better defined, people find it easier to figure out where you stand and, consequently, what value you can represent for them. They'll learn to respect your values because it will be clearer to them that those values are of utmost importance to you. As a result, they won't expect you to act in a way that contradicts those values. The payoff for you is that the number of conflicts in your life will likely diminish.

Strong vs. Moral

Personal brand is not the same thing as morality in the spiritual sense—though there are, to be sure, a lot of common elements. Personal brands are not good or bad. There are strong and weak brands. In essence, a strong brand signifies a person who has clearly chosen values and is recognized for the difference he or she makes for others. A weak brand would be a label for a person who shows ambivalence about what he or she stands for and doesn't exert much effort to make a difference for others. Everyone knows people who have clearly defined brands as well as character traits and behavior patterns we (or others) may find anything from mildly distasteful to absolutely horrifying.

Think, for example, of the recently deceased and infamous convicted mobster John Gotti. Strong brand? Absolutely. People who knew him knew exactly what he stood for, what his values were,

and how he could be counted on to act in a given situation. Did that make his brand attractive? To some people (those to whom his distinctive actions and values were consistently relevant), yes. To most, no. In essence, it was strong for all the wrong reasons. But in selected relationships, he clearly established a strong personal brand.

Stand for Your Brand

Not all brands are attractive to us. Your values are your values. Our values are ours. We won't presume to judge them against a universal scale of right or wrong. Figuring out the "right thing" for you—that's your job.

But, when your actions and your behavior reflect your values, the result is integrity. The pieces fit. The picture you present to others is in focus, not blurred around the edges or incomplete. As stated above, we'll come back to values clarification at greater length in chapter 4. For now, though, it is vital to appreciate that acting in concert with your values not only affects your relationships with others, it also has a highly positive effect on your relationship with yourself.

For purposes of this analysis, the "right way" to go about building a strong personal brand is to make sure your brand resonates and is relevant, in the most distinctive way possible, for those people with whom you want to build strong relationships on a long-term basis. The "wrong way" is to not develop a distinctive, relevant, consistent brand at all—to base your behaviors on inconsistent, ever-shifting values that aren't clear to you or anyone else.

As noted earlier, building a strong personal brand takes discipline—because consistency takes discipline. You not only need to be clear about what you believe, you also need to be willing to base

your actions on those beliefs time after time, no matter how great the temptation may be to compromise them. The way to make a distinctive, enduring, positive impression on someone else is to ensure that who you are, what you say you are, and what that person experiences from you are the same, time and time again.