

How your network can help you review your personal brand

Our goals, ambitions and dreams usually depend on other people, and the decisions that those people make will have far-reaching effects on our lives. Therefore, it is imperative to understand what people think of you now, and how you need them to think of you going forward, so you can plug any gaps to ensure the two perceptions are aligned.

Your brand is the reputation that precedes you and how people perceive you. With people you haven't met before, your reputation might be based largely on first impressions. Therefore, as you wander into new territory, your brand must match your goals as closely as possible.

Your network can play an important part in helping you understand and grow your personal brand, and creating a Personal Board ensures a trusted group of people who you go to for advice. A Personal Board is a well-respected group of people built from your network, with whom you have regular contact, and whose advice you will carefully consider (even if you end up not acting on that advice). It emulates a corporate board as a group of key advisors who meet often to make strategic decisions about the recommended next steps for a person or organisation. There are several key stages to a personal brand review.

Stage 1 – Solicit feedback

The phrase ‘personal feedback’ brings many people – at any level of seniority or experience – out in a cold sweat. In my experience, the main reasons people shy away from soliciting personal feedback are as follows:

Fear: People rarely welcome honest feedback, worrying about what they might hear about themselves and what might reinforce their inner critic.

Negative bias: The chances are, even if somebody receives lots of positive feedback and one piece of constructive feedback, they will discount the positives and focus exclusively on the implied negative.

Perplexity: How do you ensure you receive the feedback in a digestible format that you can do something with?

Unstructured feedback can therefore do more harm than good, sending your inner critic into overdrive so the only words you remember are the negative ones. Here’s how I recommend soliciting personal feedback:

1. Write down three words that you think represent yourself.
2. Ask your Personal Board member to write down three words that they think reflect you.
3. Compare, contrast and discuss the two lists.

Your own three words could all be positive ones. This isn’t a bad way to start, as it makes the personal feedback exercise a confidence booster. Then you could introduce, or ask for, just one improvement word. This has the benefit of limiting negative feedback – the fuel for your inner critic.

This three-word method is a spin on Carla Harris’s methodology, as explained in her best-selling series of books.

There are other advantages to the three-word feedback method. They are:

Confidence-boosting: Often, your Personal Board member will think of positive words about you that you hadn’t thought of. This gives you insight into how others value you and provides you with more positives to focus on.

Safely presented: Because you’ve set the agenda and the scope of the feedback, there is no danger of this turning into a ‘hatchet job’, ie, a fierce attack on you or your work. You will receive bite-sized feedback, which you can digest in a safe environment.

Actionable: You can do something with this feedback. If your Personal Board

member's positive words match your own, that's great. However, if they don't, you can explore why this might be and take steps to make your self-perception others' perceptions of you. This might only require you to reinforce a particular quality in other people's minds.

Stage 2 – Why you want feedback

'Sharpen the axe': In a positive sense, this refers to you working on your self-awareness.

Drown out your inner critic: Your inner critic is often the loudest voice in your head and needs to be kept in check. Positive feedback is always confidence-boosting if you allow yourself to listen to it.

Understand yourself better: Find out what others think you're great at, or (with constructive criticism) where could you 'sharpen your axe'?

Influence others: One of the best reasons for soliciting feedback is to ensure the people who make decisions about your career or business are aligned with how you want and need to be perceived. This will increase your level of influence over them and your career path.

Prepare for the next process: Promotions and pay rises are influenced by other people. Understanding how they perceive you, and if the feedback is not as you would like it to be, will enable you to create an action plan.

Stage 3 – Make your feedback actionable

Now you have a few sets of words:

The words you want to be known for

The words you have solicited in feedback

The words you need to be known for to progress

If all words match, great – you know you're pitching yourself along the right lines. One of the key strengths of a Personal Board is that it provides a range of feedback, so do check your three-word list with feedback from your other Personal Board members for a fuller picture.

If your sets of three words don't match, you can:

Brainstorm with your Personal Board: If one or all of your keywords are critical, consider the actions you could take to ensure external perceptions match up.

Change your perception or words: Having checked with a couple of Personal Board members first, if the external perception of you is consistent, then focus on the positives – look at yourself in a new light and see where the new path might lead you.

Consider actions to course correct: Consider the actions you can take with your Personal Board to change the perception of others. Do you need to modify your actions, your references or the language that you use?

You can play around with this concept. For example, you could brainstorm with your Personal Board and ask them to identify three keywords that represent the attributes a great sales manager (or whatever position you are targeting) should possess and then work towards these three attributes.

In short: Three words can become your personal brand roadmap. They help you to understand where you are now and where you're heading.

This is an adapted extract from [The Personal Board of You Inc.](#) by Emma Maslen

Emma Maslen helps female-founded businesses with funding, having become an angel investor in 2018 through Angel Academe. Attributing her career success to the network seeded in the early stages of her career and fostered throughout her last 25 years in business, Emma now works with startups, scale-ups and large enterprises coaching their teams to higher growth.

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