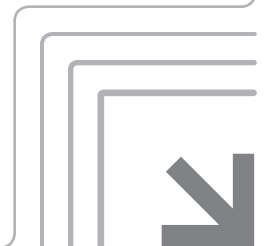


From Leadership Point of View to Personal Leader Brand



DAVE ULRICH AND NORM SMALLWOOD

White paper overview



From Leadership Point of View to Personal Leader Brand



Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood

For 30 years, we have been on a journey to help good leaders get better. One of the techniques we have used on this journey includes inviting leaders to prepare a statement that reflects their personal point of view about leadership. These personal points of view consider a number of issues such as what leaders believe, how they aspire to behave, and who they are and want to become.

We have used several high-impact techniques that enable individuals to reflect on their personal leadership passage. For example, we have shown film clips of inspiring leaders like Martin Luther King who articulated his dreams, and then invited each leader to craft their personal vision. We have asked leaders to do a time log of where they spend their time, then probe the extent to which their actions reflect their intentions. We have given leaders thorough personal feedback assessments that identify their predispositions and style, then helped them develop a personal position statement. We have helped leaders audit their careers and build a career development plan. We have coached leaders to be more authentic and true to whom they want to become.

Each of these efforts has been rewarding for us and helpful for leaders as they define who they are, what matters most to them, and where they are going. The exercises result in leadership visions, missions, aspirations, and points of view.

But lately, we have recognized that these efforts have completed only half of a successful leadership journey. Leaders who are more self-aware may have personal insight and intensity, but unless it is directed in the right ways, it won't have sustainable impact. To have sustainable impact, a leadership point of view needs to become a personal leader brand. In this essay lay our four characteristics of building a leader brand.

BRAND FOCUSES OUTSIDE FIRST, THEN ON THE INSIDE

Most work in leadership starts by looking at oneself. Most of the leadership points of view we hear begin with many "I" statements:

- I believe . . .
- I aspire to . . .
- I want . . .
- I hope . . .
- I will . . .

These personal statements have passion, inspiration, and purpose. They are meaningfully read and shared with those leaders lead. But we realize now they are incomplete. The brand metaphor focuses on the outside, not inside. Brand value shows up in the mind of the customer. The pizzazz of Apple, the experience of Disney, the place of Starbucks, the Easy-ness of Staples, the low price of Wal-mart are all brand identities that communicate to customers and investors. Brand power comes from the outside in.

A leadership point of view is generally internally focused; it's about who I am as a leader. A personal leader brand is outside in and focuses on how my leadership impacts others. When a crisis hits, a leader with a personal point of view focuses inside to get grounded on values, strengths, and style. This leader has authenticity and emotional intelligence to handle the crisis. But in a crisis, a leader with a personal leader brand perspective asks how the crisis will affect others; what is the impact of the crisis on employees, customers, investors, and communities? This leader's job is to make sure that the response to the crisis serves these stakeholders. The outside focus determines what is the right thing to do, the inside perspective is about having the character and energy

to do the right thing the right way. Both inside and outside perspectives matter, but the sequence must be followed—first outside, then inside.

By focusing outside first, the leaders make sure that their point of view will be of benefit to someone else. Sometimes leaders may have a point of view founded on their strengths, but unless they strengthen others, they will not be as valuable or as sustainable. In the movie, “The Bucket List” we learn that the Egyptians believed that the gatekeepers of heaven ask new arrivals two questions about their lives on earth: Did you find joy? Did you bring joy to others? The first question is about building on your strengths to find joy. It is necessary, but not sufficient. It is about the self, not others. The second question shifts the focus of joy to helping others find it. In terms of leadership, this means turning a point of view into a brand that serves others.

In a recent workshop, leaders were asked to write their personal points of view. Most of these statements were consistent with the criteria we described above. But, one of them stood out as more reflective of a personal leader brand:

As a leader, I am here to be of service to others and in the service of a meaningful purpose. In the context of financial services, I am inspired by the risks our organization continues to take to deliver greater transparency and value to our customers, to shift the accepted ethical boundaries of our industry. I believe there is always a better way to do business, and superior returns will come with our customers' interests at heart. Within this context, I hope to be recognized as a leader with courage, who puts the interests of her team and the organization before her own. I strive to make the decisions that are right, regardless of my personal imperatives.

Note that she focuses less on herself and more on the service she provides to others. Her identity is not from the inside out but from the outside in.

Leaders may strive to acquire personal strengths of authenticity, judgment, emotional intelligence, credibility, and other noble attributes. However, following the outside in logic of brand-building, until a leader applies these strengths in ways that create value for others, they have not developed a personal leader brand.

BRAND IS CARRIED THROUGH NARRATIVE AND STORY

A leadership point of view offers insights and perspectives on what the leader needs to know and do. A leadership brand

offers a narrative and story that captures not only what is known and done, but also the emotion and feeling behind it. Brand has an emotional pull that sends a signal of what matters. We don't wear branded clothing to be clothed, but to send a message about who we are. We don't drive a branded car for transportation, but to communicate our identity. Most brands tell a story. The Montblanc pen we use is a gift from a friend. When we use the pen, we remember the friend more than the pen. A brand has a personal and public narrative and story.

Leaders who shift from a point of view to a brand do more than discuss what they should know and do, but what they feel and value and ultimately who they are. Their personal leader brand offers a narrative about their identity.

In helping companies craft a firm brand that reflects its culture, we often ask the question, “What are the top three things your company wants to be known for by your best customers in the future?” The responses to this question shift strategy, mission, and vision statements into firm brand and organization culture. Likewise, we have asked leaders a similar question, “What are the top three things you as a leader want to be known for by those you lead?” This question is not just about what the leaders know and do, but the identity the leaders hope to create in those they lead. This identity forms the leadership story that plays out to shape a personal brand narrative.

BRAND ELICITS TRUST THAT CUSTOMERS PAY FOR

A hotel we frequent changed its ownership to a different and more respected lodging brand. When we returned after the name change, we paid a 25 percent premium for basically the same room, services, and location. Branded food in malls, airports, and stadiums nets an increase of 20 to 25 percent revenue per square foot. Branded clothes, pens, shoes, and cars sell for more. Brand also creates intangible market value as investors have more confidence in future prospects.

Likewise, leaders who focus on their brand more than just their point of view elicit greater productivity from employees, more confidence from customers, and increased security for investors. Employees who work for leaders with a strong personal brand know more clearly what is expected from them and how to meet their leaders' expectations. One technology leader was known for his passion for innovation and creativity; his employees were more willing to take risk, offer new ideas, and challenge the status quo to respond to their leader's brand.

We work with another leader who is known to her customers by her extreme dedication to service. She spends a large portion of her time directly with customers, reading and personally responding to customer concerns, and actually shopping as a “hidden shopper” to have a customer experience. Her employees recognize this passion, and her customers sense that she has their interests in mind. Brand implies a partnership between the firm and its customers. Leaders who coach, collaborate, and communicate are partners with those they lead. They co-create an agenda for the future and co-deliver with them on a shared agenda.

BRAND IS SUSTAINABLE

Brands have impact beyond any single quarterly period, product, or advertising campaign. Lasting brands endure because they are patterns, not events. These organization brands do not emerge merely by rhetoric or design, but by many consistent actions over time that communicate and embed a brand promise. Brand recall comes when the brand endures over time and place.

We see too many leadership points of view that are more rhetoric than resolve, more aspiration than action, and more

hopeful than real. Brand promises without subsequent results are not sustained. Leadership wish lists need to be replaced with leadership vows. When we ask leaders to prepare their personal brand, they are making commitments about what they have to do to sustain their personal brand in the eyes of those they serve. A brand focus builds leadership sustainability.

Leadership sustainability means that noble ideas are linked to daily behaviors. Leadership sustainability focuses on how simple actions influence and make a difference in long-term results. Leadership sustainability requires personal passion coupled with interpersonal awareness and a commitment to constant learning. Leadership sustainability builds on personal values as they create value for others. Leadership sustainability endures over time.

So, we challenge ourselves, call on those who help build future leaders, and encourage those who want to be better leaders to move beyond a leadership point of view to build their personal leader brand. We make leadership sustainable when we focus outside in, create stories based on creating value for others, and shape trust for today and tomorrow.

About the Authors



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Dave has consulted and done research with over half of the Fortune 200. Dave was the editor of the *Human Resource Management Journal* 1990 to 1999, has served on the editorial board of four other journals, is on the Board of Directors for Herman Miller, is a Fellow in the National Academy of Human Resources, and is co-founder of the Michigan Human Resource Partnership



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