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Personal Branding: Why Do I Need a Personal Brand When I’m In-house?

Skills and Professional Development



Did you breathe a sigh of relief when you moved in-house? Finally, no more billable hours, no more peaks and troughs in workload, no more all-nighters, and no more painful networking events filled with small talk trying to connect with potential clients. I used to dread those networking events as I always felt that I had to be inauthentic. Blow my own trumpet. Promote myself. Sell. It made me feel arrogant and uncomfortable.

When I moved in-house, I found myself relieved that I no longer needed to woo people. I could get to know my clients over time as I was working with them day-in-day-out. And that's exactly what I did.

But who did they get to know — Niti the person, or Niti the lawyer?

A turning point

A couple of years after returning from maternity leave for my first child, I was asked to participate in a project looking at changing perceptions relating to flexible work. Having dealt with perceptions relating to my own flexible work arrangement after maternity leave, the project felt personal. When I finally shared the outcomes and action plan resulting from our work, I also told my colleagues my story and why I was so personally invested in seeking meaningful change.

Unbeknownst to me, that was the start of my journey towards creating my own personal brand.

Over the next year or two, I became more heavily involved in projects and initiatives that engaged a different side of me — projects that related to my own personal passions such as raising awareness of mental health in the company and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. My involvement in these and other initiatives resulted in me being nominated for PMI's Project 42 — a campaign where stories of 42 women from all over the world were shared on social media. It humbled me to know that my

tagline was “Walking the Talk.”

So, what is a personal brand?

I had always thought of a “personal brand” as something that you stepped into — a persona you wished to present to the world, where you talked up your personal achievements, and consciously sought to influence others’ perception of you. The idea of “building” a persona held as little appeal to me as all those networking events I attended while in private practice. It felt inauthentic.

But over the past year, I have come to understand that we all have a personal brand. The question is whether we know what it looks like and if we will tap into it and let others see.

Discovering my personal brand

When I first started engaging on LinkedIn more regularly last year, I had no intention of “creating” a personal brand for myself. The platform was merely a forum to share my journey through the tumultuous year that was 2020. However, as I continued to engage on the platform and shared more and more of my own personal stories, values, and beliefs, I got closer to understanding exactly who I was and what mattered to me. As my cousin said to me last year, we’ve had “a lot of time alone with our thoughts.”

My reflections enabled me to understand that my personal brand is really all about who I am as a person, what I believe in, and how I show up in my life. My personal brand is about me standing tall in my authenticity and owning it.

Why does it matter?

As in-house counsel, people turn to us for legal advice. It is a space we occupy comfortably.
But as we look to progress in our careers and step into positions of leadership, it becomes more and more important that we are known for being more than just a lawyer. We should be looked at as leaders who can inspire others. We should stand apart from the crowd. We should be front of mind for those making decisions about our career progression.

Stepping into your own personal brand and putting it on display can allow you to do just that.

Personal branding goes beyond the title.

People connect with and want to work with people, and lawyers are no exception. By showing up as our true, authentic self, our colleagues get to know who we are beyond the title. No longer just “the lawyer,” but a real person with strengths, weaknesses, passions, responsibilities, values, and emotions.

Personal branding builds trust.

When we show up as ourselves and put our values and beliefs on display for our colleagues to see, we build trust. Over the last year, I have had people reach out to me to discuss how my stories have resonated with their own — stories relating to mental health, inclusion, parenting through a pandemic, and more. These connections are far deeper than those built through a lawyer-client working relationship.

Personal branding breaks down barriers.

Those who do not regularly work with lawyers often fear us, having built up an image of who we are based on our title and the fact that we sometimes need to say “no” and act as the “fun police.” But when people get to know who you are and see you being vulnerable and authentic, you can effectively break down these barriers, resulting in a more comfortable working relationship, even with those with whom you do not often interact.

Personal branding can set you apart as a change-maker.

Standing up for the causes you believe in and putting your values on display can help you stand apart from the crowd and be seen as a leader of people — a “change-maker.”

Do I need to have a social media presence to build a personal brand?

No. You do not need to have a social media presence and you can effectively build a personal brand through engagement within your company. Bringing your passions to work and sharing your personal stories can absolutely reap dividends.

However, in a world that has increasingly moved to digital connection due to the pandemic and the rise of hybrid working models, social media presence and engagement can be instrumental in accelerating the speed at which you can build your personal brand internally and externally.

In the past year, my internal profile has grown exponentially. I often have people within my company reach out to me to thank me for sharing my thoughts — people I did not previously know, but with whom I may one day work.

It’s time to get started.

It’s easy to become insular as an in-house lawyer — to think that being a “good lawyer” is sufficient. But good lawyers don’t necessarily make great leaders.

Help yourself by taking the first step. Get started! Discover your authentic self and let others see it.

Niti Nadarajah



Founder, Coach, and Freelance General Counsel

Coaching by Niti

After serving as the head of the legal team for Philip Morris in Australia and the Pacific Islands and member of the local management team where she advised on a variety of legal issues in a heavily regulated environment, she has transitioned to coaching and acting as a freelance GC.

She is an advocate for a range of issues at work, from mental health to flexibility, gender equity and authentic and inclusive leadership. She has also advocated for other issues such as pregnancy loss,

DEI in all its forms, and changing the old-school culture of the legal profession on LinkedIn and Clubhouse, in the hope that her voice, and her stories, might just make a difference.