



## Are You a Brand Name?

**BIG COMPANIES HAVE MARKETING DEPARTMENTS THAT BUILD AND MAINTAIN THE COMPANY'S BRAND, BUT SMALLER COMPANIES, AND EVEN INDIVIDUALS, CAN BUILD THEIR OWN PERSONAL BRAND.**

In 2010, Bill Schley, the co-founder of BrandTeamSix, wrote *Why Johnny Can't Brand* and one of the most powerful points he made is this: "There's a Big Idea waiting inside your brand that can make you #1. Find it and shape it yourself or competitors and customers will do it for you. And we promise, you won't like the tagline."

I was thinking about that this week. Many people either do no branding at all or go about it in a way that actively hurts their brand.

Creating a personal brand is hard work, but if you manage to do it well, the rewards will be substantial: The kinds of clients you want, believability, a higher perceived value for your product or service, and opportunities for leadership are just a few.

If you're a minnow swimming in a sea of sharks, you're not going to beat the sharks by battling them head-on. Don't pretend that you're a Toyota if you're more the size of a Tesla. That begins with how you communicate. Write in first person! You are "I" and your client is "you". Be personal.

Big corporations have to be careful not to offend anyone, but smaller companies have the luxury of being able to define a niche for themselves. Having an opinion is OK. Forget about trying to be everything to everybody. Take a stand on issues that affect your clients and speak out about them.

Be visible. Use your photo everywhere and don't go the cheap route. Hire a seasoned professional to create the photo. A studio shot is OK, but an even more effective photos will show you in your environment.

Listen! There's an ancient saying about why we have two ears and just one mouth. Ask questions and then listen.

### Be Sociable

Make your mark as someone who's willing to help. You can do this by becoming active in various social media, places where your clients (or those you want to be your clients) hang out. It may take a while to figure this out and it's important not to barge in to an unfamiliar forum and start yammering.

I've seen this happen many times on various forums, from industry-specific online discussion groups to LinkedIn to Facebook interest groups. A new user tries to show off and succeeds only in looking foolish. This is easy to avoid. Sign up for a group that appears to be promising and then read messages for at least a couple of weeks before responding. By then, you'll have some understanding of the group's dynamics. You'll know who the most respected members are.

It's time to post when somebody asks a question that you can answer. Provide a full but concise answer, complete with supporting information. If there's something specific on your website that would help, provide a link to it. Make sure your signature includes your e-mail address and your website address, but nothing more, if the group allows website addresses in signatures.



And be authentic. French diplomat, dramatist, and novelist Jean Giraudoux is credited with saying "The secret of success is sincerity. Once you can fake that, you've got it made." It's also attributed, in one form or another, to George Burns, Groucho Marx, and Samuel Goldwyn. Regardless of who said it, don't make this your motto!

Figure out who is it you need to talk with and then develop a lead-generation program (see last month's issue) to get started. [Ω](#)

# Dealing with Substandard Performance

A. J. STINNETT

ONE OF A MANAGER'S MOST DIFFICULT TASKS IS TELLING EMPLOYEES THAT THEIR PERFORMANCE IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. THE TASK HAS BECOME EVEN MORE DIFFICULT IN A BUSINESS CLIMATE WHERE INDIVIDUALS HAVE DEVELOPED A LENGTHENING LIST OF EXPECTATIONS.

The corporate world is littered with poorly designed or outmoded processes to record and review performance. Because of this, simple facts may be insufficient to justify even a gentle admonishment. Instead of just muddling through the process, why not develop a plan to confront underperforming employees? The intent is to improve, not to punish.

Consider this process, which is designed to provide a framework for the employee to accept responsibility for the performance record and to work out a self-improvement plan.

**Gather the facts.** Compare the employee's actual performance to the performance that you expect from the employee. This assumes that you have made these expectations known to the employee. It also assumes that you believe the employee knows how to do the job, is capable of doing it, and nothing is standing in the way of successful completion.

**Prepare your presentation.** With the facts in hand, create an outline.

- Start by summarizing the job the employee is assigned to perform. For example, "Charlie, you've been handling the Foonman project."
- Remind the employee of your expectations. For example, "When the client reports a problem, we are supposed to resolve it within 8 business hours."
- Now summarize the employee's performance record. For example, "In the past 6 weeks, 27% of the incidents have not been resolved on time and one instance was unresolved for 53 business hours."
- Summarize by placing the burden of poor performance where it belongs—on the employee—by asking what he or she intends to

do about the poor performance. For example, "There is a problem here, Charlie, and I need to know what you intend to do about it." And then wait.

Silence is a powerful tool. You may feel the urge to say something more, but wait quietly for the employee to respond. If, after a minute or so, there has been no response, you may need to gently repeat the question; but you must wait for the employee to answer.

In most cases, the employee will respond with a relatively vague promise to do a better job. Accept the commitment without question. "That's great, Charlie. Let's meet again in two weeks to see how you are doing."

## Two Weeks Later

Prepare for the follow-up meeting as carefully as you prepared for the first. Ask how the employee is doing, accept whatever answer the employee offers, and then summarize the performance record since the first meeting.

**If performance is now acceptable:** Praise the employee and then end the interview rapidly. For example, "That's great, Charlie. I knew you could do it. Thanks for coming in and now let's get back to work."

**If performance is still in need of improvement:** Summarize the performance record since the first meeting and repeat the statement, "Well, Charlie, you still have a performance problem, and I need to know what you intend to do about it."

The employee's reaction is again likely to be a commitment to improve. If so, accept the agreement but shorten the time until the next meeting and put more emphasis on your requirement for improvement. For example, "All right, Charlie, we

A.J. Stinnett is President, CEO, of The Stinnett Group and a former member of the *Columbus Business First* Advisory Board Exchange. He is at 614-889-9534.

can wait one more week, but it's important that you make good on your promise to do a better job."

## Crunch Time

**If performance has improved:** Thank the employee and end the meeting by telling him or her that you expect the acceptable performance to continue: "You've done OK, Charlie. I expect you to continue to do your job right in the future."

**If performance has not improved:** Now it's time to resort to whatever disciplinary action your company requires or permits.

## The Principle

These meetings must be conducted as business discussions; the employee should be treated as an adult, not as a misbehaving child. The issue is performance, not the employee!

This process has been presented to managers and supervisors of more than 100 business organizations. The feedback indicates that the process is easy to use, is appreciated by employees, and usually results in improved performance. Ω



n-Lighten.us

Division of William Blinn Communications

179 Caren Ave., Worthington, Ohio 43085  
614/859.9359 • www.n-lighten.us