Discover Your CEO Brand
Secrets to Embracing and Maximizing Your Unique Value as a Leader
by Suzanne Bates

Your Reputation Precedes You
How to Build an Authentic, Credible Brand

QUICK OVERVIEW
Whether you’re at the helm of a major corporation, lead an organization of independent salespeople, or are an army of one, you have a brand. Your brand is your reputation, and it shapes the way clients, team members and employees respond to you.

In Discover Your CEO Brand, Suzanne Bates explains how to create and communicate your personal brand with the intention of bringing value to your company. Because just as people choose to shop at a particular store because they like the service, team members and employees are loyal to people they respect and can relate to.

Bates delves into the reputations, leadership styles and successes of several iconic leaders to reveal how they shaped their brand—and to show you how and why you should create your personal brand.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
Oprah Winfrey and Dave Ramsey share in common an ability to tell their personal stories in a very authentic, relatable way. Their unique stories of hardship and triumph are essential elements of their brand.

The ability to tell your story is also essential to communicating your brand. You may be the leader of a major corporation or an independent business owner dealing with clients one on one. Regardless, you need to become effective at sharing your personal story. This week, make time to write your story using the techniques Bates shares. Begin by focusing on a single aspect—a turning point that helped shape your success. Remember to adapt your story to a specific audience and be clear about the lesson you want to impart to your listeners from your experiences.

SUCCESS Points
From this book you’ll learn:

• How to grow your reputation so that it has a positive impact on your business and career
• Why authenticity is essential to building your brand
• Why you need to be intentional about creating a personal brand
• How to tell stories that effectively communicate your brand
Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”
—Abraham Lincoln

One hundred and fifty years ago, branding wasn’t a word associated with leadership, but Abraham Lincoln’s words form the fundamental principle of this book. As the tree grows, the shadow of your reputation grows. A successful brand is built on what is real and authentic about you. Authenticity is critical. People know an authentic brand when they see one. It gives you enormous influence, and it also enhances your company’s reputation. The first step to discovering your brand is to embrace the idea that you have a brand, that it has power, and that you can harness it for the good of the enterprise.

Even if you never want to become the CEO, if you are a leader, you need a brand. Your brand will help you attract the right people to your team and align them around a common purpose. Your brand will help you to win trust, create legions of fans, attract new opportunities, and advance in your career.

And if you want to be a leader someday, now is the time to start thinking about your brand. As you go forward in your career, become mindful of the events that shape you. This will help you define yourself as a leader. You’ll be able to communicate your brand in ways that make an impact on the organization you lead.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT AND FUTURE VALUE OF YOUR BRAND?

When marketing experts talk about brand equity, they are referring to a set of attributes that include brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other associations such as people who endorse it. These attributes all create value.

When people know you, believe you represent certain qualities, and resonate with those qualities or attributes, the value of your brand is high. You attract great employees, new clients, opportunities, business partnerships, referral relationships, endorsements, testimonials, and networks of leaders, all of which you will be able to trace to revenue and profitability. The better people know and respect your brand, the more they understand it and feel alignment with it, the more these valuable relationships and profitable opportunities come along. Your brand value grows.

So, the present value of your brand is measured today by how well people know you and how much they value your brand; the future value of your brand will be determined by how much more clearly you define that brand and communicate it to others.

It stands to reason that just being clear about your brand values isn’t enough; people need to know who you are and what you stand for. That’s why communicating your leadership brand, so it is recognized in a variety of forums, will make your brand potent. The better you communicate your brand, the wider your circle of influence, the greater asset your brand becomes.

HOW EXCEPTIONAL LEADER BRANDS ARE BUILT

You don’t have to be Richard Branson, Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, or Oprah Winfrey to be standout leader in your own category. The idea is not to become like them, but to learn by analyzing the way their personal brands became so valuable. How did they go from nowhere to somewhere to everywhere?

Richard Branson, Virgin Group

The biggest and boldest business and CEO brand today arguably belongs to Sir Richard Charles Nicholas Branson, the daring, adventurous British industrialist who presides over Virgin Group. His business empire encompasses 400 companies. His reputation is global. From Virgin Atlantic Airways to Virgin Mobile, Virgin Blue, Virgin Trains, Virgin America, and Virgin Vodka (one of the few brands that haven’t been a success), Branson has made his mark. He is known for setting audacious goals and building hugely successful enterprises. He has an astounding imagination and mind-blowing courage. One of his most amazing and creative ventures: the space tourism company, Virgin Galactic, whose mission is to take civilian passengers into suborbital space.

Branson isn’t just a business magnate; he’s a swashbuckling adventurer. He has attempted dangerous ocean crossings and crossed continents in a hot-air balloon. He’s gone global on humanitarian efforts, becoming a financial backer for a group of world thought leaders, led by Nelson Mandela, whose charter is to solve conflicts and foster world peace. Branson’s passion, gusto, and zeal for life are boundless.

What makes his story all the more compelling is that he was born in a nursing home for children with special needs, has severe dyslexia, and had always struggled in school. He started humbly, selling cutout albums from the back of his car—a small venture...
that morphed into his first successful business, Virgin Records. The Virgin name, by the way, was a reference to how he and a few first employees considered themselves virgins in business. Boy, have they come a long way!

If I asked you to select three words to describe Branson’s brand, you’d have to narrow it down from a long list, but perhaps you’d offer trailblazer, explorer, and buccaneer. In his autobiography, Branson said, “My interest in life comes from setting myself huge, apparently unachievable challenges and trying to rise above them... from the perspective of wanting to live life to the full, I felt that I had to attempt it.” Branson has made his mark by going big, then going bigger, and then imagining how much bigger he could go.

Branson’s brand is fearlessness. This brand attracts people who drive the vision and help him create enormously successful enterprises. His quest for adventure has become his calling card.

**The Road to Developing Your Brand—Barbara Lynch**

A brand value emerges over a period of time; sometimes it takes years to understand it and communicate it effectively.

Barbara Lynch grew up in the Mary Ellen McCormack housing project in South Boston, the sixth of seven kids. Her father died a month before she was born. School was a disaster; in the era of forced busing in Boston, Lynch ended up at Madison Park High School, which she describes as a racial war zone. She became a troublemaker, with no discipline. The only class Lynch attended was home economics, where a teacher took interest in her; cooking was the reason she stayed in school.

Out of high school, Lynch took a cooking job on Martha’s Vineyard, where, she says, “I was working 80 hours opening cans and pouring them.” When a chance to cook on a dinner cruise boat came along, Lynch was asked if she could make lobster and filet mignon; she lied and said yes. “I went to the library and bought books on how to butcher meat,” she says. The boat gig was successful, and Lynch “fell in love with the creativity of cooking.” Then came a break. Lynch was hired by celebrity chef Todd English, and became a student of food, sassy and independent, but pushing herself to learn. “I would go home every night and read *Foods of Italy* by Waverly Root,” relates Lynch. She borrowed a friend’s credit card, went to Italy, and tasted real Bolognese sauce and Italian prosciutto. She cooked with an Italian woman and vowed she would master the art. After winning a major award, celebrated chef Gordon Hamersley called to advise her, “Don’t waste this opportunity.” She opened her own place, No. 9 Park, in Boston.

**Communicating the Brand to Your Team**

Lynch recalls that “I hired some of the best servers in the city, but they didn’t like the way I wanted it done. For example, I wanted to change the silver at each course [rather than creating an intimidating set of utensils across the table] but it was a lot of...
work for them.” Lynch wanted great food but not an intimidating atmosphere for customers.

It was a moment of truth—one that defined her leadership and set the course for her success. She closed the restaurant on Friday, called a mandatory meeting of the staff, and made it clear that they should return only if they could do it the No. 9 Park way. “I will give you the weekend,” she told them, “but you are not going to run my restaurant. If you don’t like it, don’t come back on Monday.” Some people didn’t come back; those who did were now as committed as she was. No. 9 Park became a huge success—people were buzzing. Her brand started gaining velocity.

Today, Lynch has eight other restaurant properties. Her brand is evident in every restaurant: the vision, the creativity, the quality, and the love for Italian and French food. She now earns rave comments. Her amazing personal story is a signature of her brand.

FROM BRAND VALUE TO RESULTS

Imagine that an important value, an essential part of your brand, is persistence—never giving up. Maybe you came by this value when you were young. Perhaps, the story goes, you played the sax, joined the high school band, lost interest, and wanted to quit, but your parents insisted you stick it out. As you stayed on in the band, you became a very good musician. The longer you were there, the more friendships you found there. You became one of the best and received an award for excellence; later you went on to play in a jazz band in college and found a profound sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. That experience taught you the value of persistence. It is now core to your brand.

Now let’s imagine that you have been leading your team through a challenging time. They’ve been working on a big deal for months. Now they’ve learned that they’re on the brink of losing the business. The prospect has invited another company do an initial assessment, which could lead to securing the contract. Your team members are discouraged, dismayed, and ready to give up. You want to remind them of the importance of never giving up. You believe deep down that they don’t really want to quit. They need someone to remind them that digging deep and giving it your all is one of the secrets to success. You share that story—and remind them of that value of persistence. They are inspired. They now know they will never attain the satisfaction of winning if they quit now.

Real-Time Challenge

Let’s turn our attention to a current challenge. Are you facing an obstacle or difficult situation in your business? The core leadership beliefs and values that helped you prevail in the past will help you do so again. You can draw on your experiences and the lessons you’ve learned to help other people see a path to success. Perhaps things are not going so well on a project; perhaps you are feeling competitive pressure, you’ve lost business, sales are off, or you’ve failed to meet a deadline. Maybe a major system has crashed or you’ve lost a key member of your team. Your team is feeling frustrated or angry.

It’s time to draw on those leader brand values. Dig deep, and recall what got you here. Remember a time when you faced a similar challenge. This exercise should help you recall what worked before and communicate a solution or approach that will work.

Name a situation that is frustrating you or challenging your team, one that is very difficult to resolve.

What is this like? How is this similar to a challenge you successfully resolved in the past? What is the value and message you want to convey to your team?

When you tell stories about your experiences, you illustrate how you authentically came to embrace certain values. Authenticity is so important to being a strong leader with a powerful brand. When people hear these stories, they know what you say is real. Your story brings a brand value into focus in a genuine way and makes it relevant. When you do this consistently, you change behaviors and drive values into the enterprise.

Look at your life and career as a rich source of wisdom and strength for others. Understand what your stories say about your leadership, and share them. When challenges arise, look for opportunities to share the examples that provide context and meaning.

Set the agenda, communicate the plan, align the organization, monitor results, hold people accountable, and inspire them to the highest level of performance.
CHOOSING TO LEAD, NOT DO

After a long career with Dow Chemical Company, Matt Davis took on the role of the company’s senior vice president of global public affairs. Finding the best way to lead in that role was challenging at first. “It was tough, I’d been such a doer, and I had to reexamine how I saw myself,” says Davis. “I had to become the motivator, inspiring people. I also had to focus on getting the right person into the right job.”

Transitioning to being a leader who inspires and motivates others is perhaps the greatest challenge many face in moving into leadership roles. You have probably been there yourself. You know how to do it. You’ve proven that. But you have to put doing aside and learn to lead.

“You don’t have time to sit at your computer and do the tactical work,” says Davis. “Yet, I see that at the very top of large companies. People get to that level because they turn out results, but then they get promoted and need to get things done through other leaders.”

Davis successfully transitioned. Now, as a mentor to others, he advises them to step back and learn to effectively communicate. As energizing as it can be to get in there and get it done, when you’re doing, you’re not acting as a leader. Set the agenda, communicate the plan, align the organization, monitor results, hold people accountable, and inspire them to the highest level of performance.

As a coach I’ve watched new leaders crash and burn after a promotion for this very reason. If you find yourself in a similar situation, it’s time to hit the pause button. The choice to lead by communicating your values and insisting that your leaders do the same, is one of the most important you can make. “Now I run the function globally and think bigger picture,” reflects Davis. It’s a change in mindset. Then, you begin assessing which new skills you need to be an effective leader.

• What are you “doing” that you need to let go of, so that you can lead?
• What steps will you take to let go of doing and start leading?

YOUR UNIQUE BRAND

A branding campaign will fail if it isn’t based on what is real about you. The idea that you can manipulate your image is passé. It conjures up images of publicists paid handsomely to create a perfect public persona.

You’re not a blank canvas. You are an interesting person who has lived a life. You have your own unique personality and style. You build your brand, the activities should feel authentic to you. Publicity or marketing that doesn’t ring true will be rejected. Falsely created public facades crumble under scrutiny.

Leaders within the same industry, company, or association have unique brands. They bring different experiences, values, and public personas to their work. Just as competitive companies have distinct brands, so do leaders. One of the best ways to fast-track brand building is to embrace the uniqueness of your own brand.

Look at the two most successful NFL quarterbacks in the league today—Peyton Manning of the Indianapolis Colts and Tom Brady of the New England Patriots. Both of these athletes are widely admired. Both are record holders. Both are winners. Both transcend sports. People see them as competing for the same mantle—best quarterback. However, their personas couldn’t be more different. Consider their press and their sponsors.

In 2011, Manning had eight major endorsement deals with companies like Gatorade, MasterCard, and Nabisco/Kraft (Oreo cookies), worth approximately $9 million annually. Brady had deals with Uggs, the cologne maker Stetson, Movado watches, and Audi.

Their brands reflect their personal philosophies and their personalities.

Manning comes across as a quarterback “of the people,” with a friendly, accessible persona and a goofy sense of humor. Brady exhibits the image of a super-cool, easygoing jet-setter, his brand burnished by fashionable clothes and a thousand-watt smile. Manning jokes in a mock interview in a TV commercial that he needs to get “more production” out of sports announcer Jim Nance. Brady strikes a GQ magazine-model pose in a print ad for a luxury watch. Two Hall of Fame-bound quarterbacks—two utterly distinct (and incredibly valuable) brands.

Your brand, likewise, is distinct. You have your story. You have your experiences. Only you can be your brand. Think about that. Do it your way. Communicate who you are.
ACTION STEPS
Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned to your life. Here are a few questions and exercises to get you started.

1. How would you describe your personal brand?

2. How would your team members describe your brand?

3. List a few turning points in your life: a challenge or significant event from your childhood or early career.

4. Choose one of those events and describe it in detail—the location, time, outcomes, how it shaped your character and leadership style.

5. Review the sidebar, “What’s Your Story?” and write out this story with a specific audience in mind.

6. Write your answer in response to the author’s question, What are you “doing” that you need to let go of so that you can lead?

7. Review your activities and associations. Are all your efforts in alignment with your unique brand?

About the Author
Suzanne Bates is an executive coach and speaker. Prior to launching Bates Communications, she spent 20 years as a television news reporter and anchor. As the president and CEO of Bates Communications, she helps leaders improve their results by teaching effective communication and brand-building skills. Bates is the author of Speak Like a CEO and Motivate Like a CEO.

Recommended Reading
If you enjoyed the summary of Discover Your CEO Brand, you may also want to check out:

Enchantment
by Guy Kawasaki

The Little Book of Leadership
by Jeffrey Gitomer

Resonate: Present Visual Stories That Transform Audiences
by Nancy Duarte