

Attention students: personal branding is important for you too

An article to share with your students

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Stephen Zuluaga (L) and Silva Wei (R), co-founders of Peer Camp

Personal branding is important, but to understand it we need to look at branding first. Branding describes the ideas, perceptions and values associated with a label or brand. It's about reputation, trustworthiness and whether others believe the brand has adequate capability or suitability for something. Personal branding is about an individual person's brand. Let's say you're known as a star performer in maths class, this reputation you have is part of your personal brand, because it's something your teachers and classmates associate with you.

Personal branding isn't important just because it helps people in your school community know you as a student. It will evolve into the reputation you'll ultimately use to support your professional or entrepreneurial career path. If you are known to be accountable and good at taking personal responsibility for your actions, this aspect of your personal brand is already helping you stand out

as someone reliable. If you maintain this trait (you should), then it will make its way from your student personal brand to the one you have as a professional or business owner.

If you want to do a triathlon, how long in advance would you need to start preparing? How about if you wanted to get a particularly exciting job or win a high value contract? What do you think they have in common? None of these things will happen overnight; triathlons involve extensive training, while spending the necessary time building your personal brand makes others want to do business with you. The other thing they both have in common is if they are poorly maintained and treated with disregard, they will cause you serious problems. These problems will take time to repair, sometimes a lot of time, and in the worst case scenario, recovery is not possible.

Mark Twain once said 'If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember

what you said.' This sums up the value of being honest because this sense of honesty translates to personal branding through the value of being genuine. If you are genuine, things are easier, everything comes naturally and the reputation you earn is much more concrete. This is important because controversy and drama will happen and this will test the resiliency of your personal brand and reputation. You need to be able to rely on the integrity of your personal brand to help you recover. If you want to find examples of brands having to recover from controversy, just read the news.

Will you be the same person in 5, 10 or 20 years' time? No, you'll grow and evolve, and so should your personal brand. Again, being at a very dynamic time in your life, you should not feel worried if you aren't sure how your personal brand should look in years to come. Even if you don't know what it should look like now, that's still ok. Now is the time to begin thinking about and shaping it.

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The relationship between your personal brand and career goals is important: if you can align them, it can be very powerful for you by helping you identify your niche. In terms of working out how your personal brand should be composed, you should start with values, things you believe in and principles you are willing to stand up for.

As you consider your future after high school, you might be thinking of different study options to help you enter your first career or business. Study is important, many of your peers will study too, so don't look at it as something that will make you stand out; look at it as something that will give you valuable technical skills. You will still need to know how

personal brand now or in the future. The hard part about understanding how something will impact you in the future is that the further into the future you try to look the harder it is to see what kinds of impacts something will have. Don't be worried, just be careful.

As well as being co-founder of Peer Camp, I'm also a teacher at a dual sector (TAFE & university) institution. Often, I ask students what they want to do after they finish their study; many don't know and most of those who do, don't know how they will get there after they graduate. There is no secret trick to landing your dream job or kick-starting your business, but there is much you can do to help yourself while you're still in

boiled down simply to the skills you have that make someone want to employ or do business with you, such as listening, speaking, writing, understanding body language, being accountable. I would encourage high school students to start thinking and working on their employability skills right now, if you look for them, you'll be amazed by how many opportunities school gives you to build these skills up. Employability skills are a major area that all employers require of their graduate employees. It takes time to develop them and if you start now and can show it through your personal branding, think about the kind of advantage you'll have over your peers who aren't paying attention to these opportunities.

Despite having an understanding of what personal branding is and why it is important, if you don't know where to begin, this can feel intimidating. Here are 5 simple steps you can take to get started:

1. Write down a list of things that you want to be known for. Don't worry if you feel stuck, stay at the task and write something down anyway.
2. Read back through your list, marking the ones you think are most important. If there are some you want to reword, then reword them.
3. Work through the list until you have your top 5.
4. Have a read back of your top 5 list and think about what they mean to you.
5. From now on, as you go about each day, look for opportunities to demonstrate these things to people around you in everything you do. You're still at school and that's a perfect place for you to start.

Congratulations, you've just started working on your personal branding: something that will benefit you for the rest of your life.

Employability skills cover a big area, but it can be boiled down simply to the skills you have that make someone want to employ or do business with you. Skills like listening, speaking, writing, understanding body language, being accountable.

to apply these skills to productive and valuable actions. Not only that, you need to get to the point where you can convince someone to choose you over the next person. If you have built a clearly unique personal brand for yourself by the time you are towards the end of your study, it will be much easier to find work than if you are trying to get a job by saying 'but I have these qualifications.' Getting multiple qualifications without purpose does not make it easier to find work if you're struggling from the outset.

Professional use of social media is a very powerful and effective way to build relationships with people who might be able to help you along your career journey in the future. Social media, like any powerful tool is to be treated like a sharp knife: be careful how you use it or you will get hurt. Be mindful of content you post and how it might negatively impact your

high school. Don't be the students who are late in their tertiary studies and still don't know what they want to do or how they will get there, like many students I see. Even if you're not sure where to start, have a go at something just to see if you like it. If it's not an area you're able to work in before you're qualified, like surgery or policing, there is still a lot of learning you can do outside the classroom. This will help you decide if it's right for you. It's much easier to build a strong and genuine personal brand if you have a clear idea of what career direction you do and don't want to head in.

The Career Development Association of Australia (CDA) published a media release on 4th October 2016 called *Don't wait until you graduate!* (<https://goo.gl/NBfUk3>). It urges tertiary students to work on their employability skills now. Employability skills cover a big area, but it can be