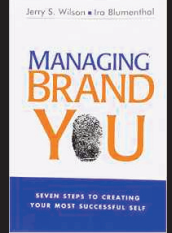


Managing Brand YOU

Seven Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self

Book by Jerry S. Wilson and Ira Blumenthal

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Synopsis

Do you feel as though you've accomplished all you're going to in life? That despite your best efforts, people who you feel have less to offer often seem to end up enjoying more success?

Managing Brand YOU (AMACOM, © 2008) suggests developing a more positive image by learning how to build a strong personal brand. Your “brand” comprises the virtues and abilities that affect how others perceive you—and how you perceive yourself.

Building a brand is a common process in the business world. Companies spend millions on consultants and marketing strategies to ensure that consumers have a favorable impression of their product. The same approaches can be used to improve the way you are perceived by your friends and colleagues—in short, to build what the authors refer to as a “Brand YOU.”



The key concepts of *Managing Brand YOU* can be distilled into the following seven steps:

Perform a Brand YOU Self-Assessment

What are your strongest and weakest personality traits?

Evaluate Your Brand YOU Identity

How are you realistically viewed by other people?

Envision Your Brand YOU

What do you want people's impression of your personal brand to be?

Establish the New Brand YOU

What can you do to create an individual identity that echoes your values and beliefs?

Solidify Your Brand YOU Objectives

How will your new Brand YOU help you attain your personal goals?

Confirm Your Brand YOU Approach

What impediments to long-term success need to be accounted for?

Implement, Analyze, and Fine-Tune Brand YOU

What are the variables—the who, what, why, where, when, and how—that will help make your Brand YOU plans a reality?

“Don't we all want to convey a consistent message and create an emotional bond with the important people around us? The process of building a brand is widely used in the commercial world, and you, too, can use these techniques to build a brand-new you—a Brand YOU.”

Based on *Managing Brand YOU: Seven Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self*, we discuss how authors Jerry Wilson and Ira Blumenthal lead readers on a journey of self-discovery to determine their most defining positive attributes, and communicate them in a way that maximizes their potential for success. Critical to this plan are seven steps for managing your personal brand. We share our interpretations of each in the following pages.

Step One: Perform a Brand YOU Self-Assessment

Who are you, really? Who do other people *think* you are? And what factors brought you to the place you are at in your life? The answers to these and other critical questions can only be discovered by performing what consumer companies call a *brand audit*.

An effective brand audit requires you to step back and take an honest “warts and all” look at yourself, how others see you, and the various successes and setbacks you have had in your life. To do this properly, this first step requires you to perform what experts in the industry call a SWOT analysis of your:

- **S**trengths
- **W**eaknesses
- **O**pportunities
- **T**hreats

The SWOT analysis is an invaluable opportunity to review the highs and lows that have defined the way your brand is currently perceived by the important people in your life.

Life's Five Phases

To begin your Brand YOU audit, the authors recommend breaking your life down into five clear-cut phases. By strictly adhering to the requirements of each phase, you create the framework on which your new brand will be built.

Phase One

The first phase involves your childhood from birth to 12 years of age. The clarity of the memories from this period, whether happy or sad, will vary widely from person to person, but will invariably be linked to the friends and family that were your main points of contact during the early stages of your life.

Phase Two

Phase Two comprises the adolescent years of 13 through 17. This is a time of great change and personal growth on the journey to becoming the person you are today. Most high school students feel tremendous pressure to “fit in” and invariably experience frustrations and rejections during these “in between” years.

Phase Three

Most people experience their first taste of real independence between the ages of 18 and 22. After high school the majority of young persons will move on to college, enter the military, or take on a full-time job. This transitional period from the end of the teen years into the early part of adulthood is a time of experimentation and self-discovery as newly minted adults struggle to forge the identity that will define their brand in the future.

Phase Four

The ages from 23 to 30 are when people strengthen their identity as a “real” adult. Career, travel, hobbies, relationships, children, all come together during our 20s to further define who we are and who we are going to be.

Phase Five

Phase Five encompasses age 31 right up until today. The defining characteristic of this phase is how you respond to the many challenges you will face over the course of your life. Will you survive and thrive, or flail and fail? The answer to this question is a reliable indicator of how successful your new Brand YOU will become.

The “Brand YOU” Audit

You’ve taken a hard look at your life in the context of the five phases. A successful appraisal should be an eye-opening experience that prepares you to fearlessly forge ahead into the final stage of your Brand YOU audit: analyzing the events, achievements, affiliations, and activities that brought you to the seat you are in right now.

The authors believe that completing your brand audit should be a thoughtful self-examination of the full spectrum of pride and disappointment you have experienced over your life. Many people find this to be therapeutic, but by its nature it encourages you to revisit past failures and potentially, reopen old wounds. “Facing the music” is a necessary part of an honest self-appraisal.

Step Two: Assess Your Brand YOU Image

In Step One, you took a detailed look at yourself to complete an honest Brand YOU audit. Step Two is where you begin to gain a deeper understanding of how your brand is currently perceived by friends and colleagues. This is called your brand image. (Your brand *image* may be quite different from your brand identity, which refers not to how you *are* currently perceived, but to how you *would like to be* perceived in the future.)

During your Brand YOU image assessment, you compare the promise on which you intend your brand to deliver to others’ perception of how successful you have been at doing this. For example, if a brand of detergent promises to remove the toughest grass stains but fails to do so, the brand image will be tarnished. If the detergent outperforms the consumer’s expectations, the image will be elevated. Your personal brand also rises and falls based on whether or not you live up to expected levels of performance.

Soliciting Input on your Brand

Great brands stay great by continually keeping their fingers on the pulse of consumers' feelings. To stay focused, relevant, and always delivering on your promise, the authors advise actively seeking out feedback on your brand. You cannot stay successful without knowing what others think of you.

So, what are the best ways to go about gathering information on how you are perceived? First, you should always be accumulating notes about any and all feedback you receive. You may be surprised how much insight these comments can offer when you take time to review them later.

Wilson and Blumenthal propose that you enlist your family and friends in the process. Explain to them that you have made a commitment to improve your life and ask for their honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. Most people will see your effort as a positive thing and support it however they are able.

Here are some suggestions of the types of questions to ask people to help them focus on the type of feedback you are looking for:

- How would you describe me to another person?
- What do you think others think of me?
- Do I generally project a positive or negative impression?
- In your opinion, what are my three biggest strengths?
- Can you give me examples of three areas in my life where I could improve?

Step Three: Determine Your Brand YOU Identity

Your goal in Step Two was to learn about your current brand image—what your friends, family, and coworkers really think about you. In this step you will use that information to set your *brand identity*—specific goals for how you want your personal brand to be perceived in the future. Crafting your desired identity requires a clear image of your ambitions, strengths, fundamental values, and how you want them to be represented.

The Brand YOU “Equity Chart”

Your strengths are the areas of your life in which you possess the greatest skills and have had the greatest successes; in most cases, capabilities that you have developed and nurtured over a long period of time and now come more or less naturally to you. Gaps are areas of your skill set that may be lacking and could pose a roadblock to development if left unresolved. (Gaps do not always represent weaknesses, unless they threaten to interfere with the process of building your new Brand YOU.)

Remember, your brand should be tightly focused on putting across a specific “feel.” Do not feel like you need to be pleasing all of the people all of the time. (That is not something anyone could ever be successful at, so

don't even bother trying!) Once you accept this, you will feel comfortable living with the gaps in your skill set that do not overtly affect your brand. During Step Three you will find that minimizing or eliminating certain gaps represents a significant overall benefit to you. This is one reason it is so important to undertake this exercise.

Determining What You Like and What You Don't

Many times people develop skill or strength in an area in which circumstances require them to become fluent; but they have little interest in pursuing the skill beyond that. Of course, in life there will always be things you have to do that you would rather not. You may not look forward to itemizing an expense report, but you will not be reimbursed if you don't. You will need to differentiate between required tasks and superfluous things that can be avoided. As the authors affirm, there is a direct connection between your performance and the enjoyment you take from whatever it is you do. Enthusiasm is an important element of success. Your Brand YOU deserves for you to do more than just "go through the motions."

Step Four: Position Your New Brand YOU

Brand positioning—in other words, the unique image and expectations your brand occupies in the hearts and minds of others—is going to happen whether you are proactive about it or not. It makes the most sense, then, to take an active role in this process. If a consumer brand pays no attention to its positioning in the market, it relinquishes its opportunity to influence perception to chance or (the worst!) to its competitors. Positioning conveys a promise that is fulfilled through actual performance.

Gaining Brand Insistence and Earning Brand Loyalty

Consumer companies fiercely compete for the all-important loyalty of their target customers. But earning, and keeping that loyalty are not something to be taken lightly. Even after gaining a customer's allegiance, some competitor will always be angling to muscle in on your market.

People become aware of a brand's existence by word of mouth, advertising, or everyday observation; this initial exposure determines whether they decide to give it a try. People in your corner of the world go through a similar progression in relation to your personal brand. Once a person becomes aware of you, he or she is likely to initiate a trial association—ask you for assistance with a challenging task, for example. The way you respond to the request and follow through on your promise goes a long way toward the person's future respect for and loyalty to your brand. Should you exceed expectations, you may be rewarded with the ultimate reward bestowed upon any brand—brand *insistence*, meaning that in this person's opinion there is no substitute for Brand YOU.

Step Five: Set Your Brand YOU Goals

Successful people and organizations know that they need to set specific, realistic goals to further the success of their brand. Whether the goal is a simple one such as wanting to perform in the school talent contest, or something more complex like winning the Super Bowl, the people involved immensely increase their chances of achieving their goals if they understand the importance of goal setting.

Deficient goal setting leads to unrealized ambitions. For this reason the goal setting process should be formalized in writing. The act of writing down and frequently referring back to a list of goals helps most people “see the big picture” and stay committed to achieving their goals more than they otherwise would.

Future Goals

When building your Brand YOU goals you should think long term. Where would you like your life to be in three, five, or 10 years? What would you like to be doing with your job, your free time, your friends? Where would you like to be living? How do you want to be remembered? These larger goals set the framework for the smaller, more specific personal ambitions you write on your list.

Step Six: Establish Your Brand YOU Strategies

The success you have at realizing your goals will depend greatly on the strategic options you initiate to achieve them. There will be many possible avenues to reaching your destination. Step Six is the time to consider all possible strategies and analyze all the obstacles you may encounter on the journey to the new Brand YOU.

The goals you wrote down in Step Five will just be empty statements unless you back them up with workable achievement strategies. Companies invest extensive resources in research and preparation during the strategic planning process. Your Brand YOU roadmap should likewise be given an extensive level of effort. Although the magnitude of resource allocation is not the same for a company vs. an individual, there are similar questions you should ask during the strategic planning process:

- 1 What options are available to achieve each of your stated goals?
- 2 What are the barriers to making each of these strategies workable?
- 3 What strengths can you call on to maximize your potential for success?

Smartly considered, the answers to these questions will dictate your strategies and bring your new Brand YOU one step closer to being a reality.

Step Seven: Implement, Monitor, and Adjust Your New Brand YOU

If you have followed along with Wilson and Blumenthal's process to this point, you have taken great strides toward achieving long-term realization of your goals. But success is not something that happens by accident; once you have done the legwork, there are five factors to confirm to ensure the highest level of implementation is achieved:

- Well-defined objectives have been established.
- Responsibility for all aspects of implementation has been assigned. (In the case of a personal brand, this means you.)
- Expected results are understood by the responsible parties.
- Performance is monitored regularly.
- The strategy is flexible enough to adapt to changes on the fly as necessary.

Successful companies adhere to these five guidelines to deliver on the brand promise their customers expect. Likewise, commitment to your strategic plan is essential if you want to successfully establish the new Brand YOU.

Following through on your implementation plan may introduce you to new activities and put you in unfamiliar situations. It will take exceptional courage to overcome these challenges. At times you may be tempted to give up or retreat to your comfort zone, but you must move forward with belief in yourself and confidence in your planning. Bringing the new Brand YOU to the world will improve your life, for the rest of your life!

Insights—Give the World Your Best Brand YOU

In *Managing Brand YOU*, authors Wilson and Blumenthal provide specific guidelines for evaluating how your personal brand has been viewed in the past, where it is now, and where you would like it to go in the future. To do this, they suggest you take a hard look at yourself and answer the following questions:

Who Am I and How Did I Get Here?

Get a handle on who you really are by performing an honest self-appraisal.

What Values Do I Represent?

Compare the promise on which you intend to deliver to others' perception of how successful you have been in doing this.

What Values Do I Want To Represent?

Crafting your desired identity requires a clear image of your ambitions, strengths, fundamental values, and how you want them to be represented.

What Do I Want Others to Expect of Me?

Brand positioning conveys a promise that is fulfilled through actual performance.

How Do I Want My Life to Look?

Successful people and organizations know they need to set specific goals to further the success of their brand.

How Do I Get Where I Want to Go?

The success you have at realizing your goals will depend greatly on the strategic options you initiate to achieve them.

How Am I Doing?

During implementation, monitor and adapt your plan however necessary to keep your ship on course and moving forward toward your ultimate goals.

Conclusion

We hope you are feeling excited to bring a new Brand YOU to the world. There will be plenty of planning to do before you can achieve success, and once you have implemented your plan it will always be a work in progress. Even if the plan seems to be working, you'll constantly be encountering new situations that require hard decisions be made. But, as the authors assure, if you remain true to your vision, the difficulty of these decisions should be lessened.

Realizing the new Brand YOU is an ongoing process worthy of revisiting when circumstances change in your life. Focus on continuous improvement, and plan your life to work your plan.

“Building a Brand YOU requires that you dig deep into your imagination and visualize what you want to stand for and what spaces in life and business you want to occupy.”

If you've enjoyed our insights on Jerry Wilson and Ira Blumenthal's *Managing Brand YOU: Seven Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self*, we encourage you to access the other *Managing Brand YOU* assets in the Skillsoft library, or purchase the hardcopy.

About the Authors



JERRY S. WILSON is senior vice president at The Coca-Cola Company, where he currently serves as Chief Customer and Commercial Officer. This is his first book.



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Also by Ira Blumenthal

- 1 *Ready, Blame, Fire! Myths and Misses in Marketing*, Griffin Publishing Group, © 1998, ISBN 978-1882180950.