

## IoNTELLIGENCE Brief | Newsletter 11 | February 2018



### Key Points

- **February's theme: Professional Relationships**
- **Acceleration Tip: Conduct a Personal Brand Audit**
- **Thinking Tool: Network Capital**
- **Read *The Brand Called You and Made to Stick***
- **Philosophical Espresso Shot: The profound observation that can be applied to everything from money to relationships**

In my native Montreal, February is known for soul-crushing strings of negative 20 degree weather. In the rest of the world, the month conjures up images of roses, romance and relationships. Full disclosure: I am a conscientious objector to Valentine's Day because I don't think a card company should tell us when to be thoughtful or romantic towards our loved ones. But I digress ...

Despite my curmudgeonly attitude towards Feb. 14, I concede that this is as good a month as any to discuss the topic of relationships - at least the professional variety.

Until Skynet takes over, our careers are still greatly influenced, if not governed, by the breadth and depth of these connections. In this edition, we'll look at two ideas to help you think differently about networking and managing yourself as well as distill the key points from a couple of the best books on this subject. *Let's get started ...*

## Acceleration

### ***It's a good idea to conduct a Personal Brand Audit***



To quote the great urban philosopher Ice-T, “don’t hate the playa, hate the game.” Some people might not like to think that we are “products” that have “brands”, but wishing it away does not make it so. If I say the names “Justin Trudeau” or “Oprah Winfrey”, certain traits and attributes immediately jump to mind. Those are the “brand values” associated with those people.

*Have you ever wondered what your brand values are?* When your boss thinks of you, do words like “reliable” or “innovative” roll off their tongue? If a colleague is prompted to identify the first five words that describe you, what would they be?

*You should find out.* People have impressions, if not opinions, about you and it serves no purpose to ignore this truth. This is daunting, I know, but it needn’t be. Consider at first asking five close friends the question posed above and note the words that come back. Chances are, you will recognize a number of them (“I’m not surprised people say I’m organized”) and be shocked by one or two (“People think I’m aloof? But I’m just shy ...”).

You can go further, but this is a great start. Simply becoming aware that you are, in fact, a brand might make you think more carefully about the brand values with which you’d like to be associated. For example, if you want to be seen as respectful of other people, don’t troll them on Facebook or arrive 25 minutes late for that coffee date. In other words, we need to act like brand managers - with each of us as the product. Being a

steward of your personal brand simply means proactively shaping the brand values that are associated with you, as well as those that you aspire to be associated with in the future.

You have a brand. We all do. Moreover, it follows you around. Jobs and titles are temporary; the only thing that is permanent is your reputation - in other words, your brand. The question is: *have you tried to intentionally influence it, or has it been a haphazard by-product of your actions this morning and over the years?* Think of the world's great brands: *do they leave their image to chance?* Be intentional about what impression you leave.

**Conclusion:** Starbucks is a brand, but so is Steven Spielberg. So are you. Get out in front of that fact by figuring out what your brand stands for.

## Thinking Tool

***Don't "network". Instead, be a "network capitalist".***

Networking is as tired an expression as it is a concept. In a hypercompetitive world which increasingly pits us against outsourcing abroad, algorithms and automation, authentic personal relationships will become even more valuable in the future.

In a hyper-connected world overflowing with social networks, you need to throw out the conventional wisdom that prioritizes "Likes" or the number of Facebook and LinkedIn connections. This isn't about getting an interview, a job or even a client; it's about developing a web of lifelong strategic partners or future co-founders, as well as meaningful professional and personal friendships.

We need to think completely differently about the entire exercise; we need to reframe this activity through an investment lens. That means building self-awareness, studying opportunities and having a long-term outlook - just like a good investor. Specifically, we need to consciously invest in building up our Network Capital.

*What does that mean?* You want to acquire resources and assets that you will accumulate, loan to others on occasion, and spend (invest) from time to time to produce desired results. **In other words, it's exactly like capital.**

Approach these relationships like an investment: think like a fund manager, not a car salesman. Moreover, you shouldn't be adopting this approach only at "networking events", or when you're looking for a job. You need to be constantly building your network capital.

**Conclusion:** Build your Network Capital by **investing** time and energy **intelligently** with a long-term view. **Think Relationship, not Reward and Connection over Transaction.**

*Note: If you'd like to explore this issue at greater length, email me and I can send you a deck I've given to organizations on this topic.*

## **Binge-Worthy**

**[The Brand Called You](#) by Tom Peters (published in Fast Company in 1997)**

This article blew my mind when I first read it over two decades ago, and it had an enormous impact on how I performed in my first professional position. At the time, I was a baby-faced press secretary working for the only "surfing Congressman" on Capitol Hill. It wasn't posturing; he actually *did* surf almost every weekend back home in the district (that it was San Diego didn't hurt!), and we actually had a longboard outside our office door. After reading the article, I presented a strategy to the Congressman to reinforce his public connection to surfing and being iconoclastic. We launched a weekly newsletter called the *DC Surf Report* that I faxed out every Friday (it was 1997, people!) to constituents who signed up for it, where we described the highlights of the week in Washington in simple language (with the occasional and obligatory wipeout tie-ins, of course!). It was very well received, and not because it was a gimmick; it worked because it strengthened an impression in the minds of the Congressman's voters that was *already* and *genuinely* there.

**The Key Idea:** This idea was revolutionary at the time and remains provocative today. People form opinions and associate us with certain attributes. In that way, we're like brands.

**How to Use This:** Be conscious of what those impressions are (hence the suggestion of a personal brand audit) and try to be true to the qualities that we aspire to be identified with us.

## **Made to Stick by Chip and Dan Heath (published in 2007)**

I know that I recommended a book by the Heath brothers last month as well, but they deserve the back-to-back shout-outs (and don't worry - no sponsorship deals were exchanged for these endorsements!). This tome is nothing less than a masterclass in how to communicate ideas effectively. The link with branding and relationships is that humans have inherent limitations as to how much we can remember. There are steps that you need to take to maximize the impact of your idea with an audience.

**Key Idea:** After years of research, the Heath brothers came up with a [handy mnemonic to remember](#) what those are:

**S - Simple** message.

**U - Unexpected** information tends to be recalled more consistently.

**C - Be Concrete.** Paint a mental picture.

**C - Demonstrate Credibility** (through sources or other indicators).

**E - Emotional** appeals are memorable.

**S - Tell a Story.** That's how humans have passed information for thousands of years.

**How to Use this:** These principles apply to almost everything in our knowledge economy as well as our everyday life. The increasingly digital world we operate in is ultimately a marketplace of ideas that get upvoted literally (with likes) or figuratively (with purchases), so use these tenets to get your point across more effectively. At home, use simple stories with emotional messages to teach your kids lessons that you want them to remember forever.

## **Philosophical Espresso Shot:**

*"All of the good things in life come from compound interest."* (Naval Ravikant)