

workwise

Do you find that people who have the same amount or less experience than you are on a faster career track? Are you relying on job advertisements instead of personal referrals to get job offers? Affirmative answers to these questions are telltale signs that you need to look at how you are marketing yourself.

In his book *The Brand You 50*, management guru Tom Peters said everyone knows who Oprah Winfrey is by the mention of her first name. Do people in your industry know your name? "If there is nothing very special about your work, no matter how hard you apply yourself, you won't get noticed and that means you won't get paid much, either," said Michael Goldhaber, author of *Reinventing Technology*, in an issue of *Wired* magazine.

Multi-million dollar personal brands like Oprah Winfrey and Martha Stewart are not built on serendipity. Just like building a product or company, personal branding requires investment (maybe time, money or both) and a committed decision to take charge of your life. "A passive approach to professional growth will leave you by the wayside. In the new frontier, the only way to protect yourself is to realise that you have to be the boss of your own show," said Peters in his article "Brand You Survival Kit" in *Fast Company* magazine.

Know who you are

One main reason for little or unconvincing self-promotion is that you may not have gone through a conscious process of identifying your mission statement and who you really are, not what other people expect you to be. You need to know your purpose or have a general idea of your direction before you can decide on

How to sell yourself

Stuck in a rut? Haven't got a raise in years? Perhaps it's time for you to re-evaluate yourself and see how you can improve your marketability in the workforce. By Noelle Lim



what value you can offer others.

"Before going into things like networking, people must firstly do some personal visioning. They need to define their strengths, what they are passionate about and what they want to be known as," says Chong See Ming, communication adviser for Hess Southeast Asia. "You need to have an elevator speech or slogan

that states your USP [unique selling proposition] and how you can help the other person." Chong, previously head of communications at Jobstreet.com, is a natural networker. She is a founding executive council member of Technopreneurs' Association of Malaysia (TeAM), and co-founder of WORD UP!, a network of writers in Malaysia. Her friends and ex-colleagues

recommended her to her current and former employers.

"When people know about themselves, they will become more successful in networking because they will sound more convincing. It could be the little zeal in your voice, the body language and the confidence, which will show. Not everyone can fake it till they make it," says Chong.

Bob Chua, entrepreneur and CEO of Pulse Group, an award-winning research process outsourcing company that serves the market research industry, says, "Everything is about selling but you have to do it with conviction." Prior to founding Pulse, he was at AC Nielsen, as an executive director, the youngest ever (he was 26) in the company's history. He was also recommended to the job.

As part of a self-discovery process, you may need to ask people what they think of you. This takes a fair amount of courage but it is a worthwhile process to ask those who can be honest with you. It may help you discover something positive that you do not see about yourself, and it helps identify your blind spots, which you can improve on.

Be seen as a thought leader

With a track record to show, you then need to put yourself as a thought leader in people's minds, says Reza Ghazali, country head and managing director of Korn/Ferry in Malaysia, which specialises in C-suite executive recruitment and leadership talent management consulting. "This could be achieved by speaking at seminars and writing articles or books. It helps to be active in something that stands for what you believe in or are passionate about," he says. Reza himself has given many talks in his area of expertise and was headhunted to join Korn/Ferry despite being an outsider in the headhunting business. He left Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) to join Korn/Ferry as a senior associate, and rose to become

the country head 10 years later.

Chua believes a career success attribute is to have your own vision of how you want your industry to be and to contribute to its development. Some of the things he does are contributing to blogs, giving talks and chairing events.

On doing all this, Daud Vicary Abdullah, chief operating officer of Asian Finance Bank, says, "If you don't have the track record, it will work against you. This is where integrity comes in. You don't want to be just all talk. So you have to balance this out while building your career." Daud is a commentator on Islamic finance. Since 1985, he says, his career moves have come from recommendations. He gets a call everyday from global headhunters.

Use good headhunters

"Good headhunters are your ticket to greater opportunities," says Reza. "But an unethical headhunter will sell you without you knowing it. A rumour may go around that you want to leave and this can backfire." Good headhunters should also understand your career goals and be able to provide some career counselling.

"In the headhunting process, we will understand the client's business and the leadership profile they need. Then, we will look into our database and check with our sources who are themselves respected individuals in their industries," says Reza.

"Individuals can contact us or send in their CV [curriculum vitae], or be referred to us. Our job as headhunters is to uncover talent that the public at large may not have heard of."

Apart from having a good past performance, which is vitally important, Reza looks for a candidate who is a good people person. "In this day and age, it is about being a people leader. People want a leader who is empathetic, a good listener, and has the ability to engage people to get their buy-in. They must have good



CHUA: Everything is about selling... do it with conviction



CHONG: Attend functions with an objective in mind

presentation skills too," he says.

"It comes down to whether people like you or not, more so in Asia. You must be a likeable person and what's important is making people feel at ease with you. Or they must be enlightened by what you say. Humour helps too," he adds.

Art of networking

Most people believe networking is important but probably fewer people have derived tangible benefits from it. To keep it simple, it helps to have a *carpe diem* (seize the day) and abundance mindset when networking.

"My mother and grandfather, who are highly successful entrepreneurs, have strong networks. I am a passionate networker myself. I try to find opportunities to put people together. Networking is about integrity and adding value. You have to be honest in your dealings and you must have the



REZA: Put yourself as a thought leader in people's minds



DAUD: Keep your profile updated, correct and precise

ability to bring something to the table," says Pulse's Chua.

It is important, says Chong, to be prepared with an objective in mind when you attend functions. When she was with Jobstreet.com, many fresh graduates came up to her and introduced themselves, while others who were more prepared asked questions like how they could get an internship.

"In networking effectively, I think it is important to strike the right conversation. Having general knowledge in a wide range of topics or in your industry helps," says Reza. "In a function of 500 people, it would be good to meet 10 good people, and get to know five of them well either on a professional or personal level."

After meeting somebody, the follow-up is key. Daud says, "Immediate follow through and connecting on a personal level are

important to get you remembered. My trick is after meeting the person, I will write on his business card where and when we met, and a little description [of him]. It might be something personal like his favourite football team. I will file the card according to date because I remember better that way. So, when I meet him again, I have something to say to connect with him."

"I usually follow up with an email or call. I may say something like 'let's meet again' but I'm selective, of course, because my time is limited. Both parties should derive benefit. I would usually arrange to meet in a casual environment like over lunch," says Chua.

"In the follow-up email, I may add something so as to have a connection again. For instance, I may inform them of an association meeting and ask them if they are attending," says Reza. He also cautions to play it by ear and as a rule of thumb, not to get too personal quickly. Your good intentions may be misinterpreted, he says.

Networking is also about communicating with those who are close to you or who can be your champion. Says Chua, "Apart from my staff and clients, I communicate regularly with my competition as there may be co-opetition [cooperative competition] opportunities. We also engage extensively with the media."

Although you may not be the spokesperson for your employer, it is personally useful to know journalists and for them to know what you are good at. Peters in his book *The Brand You 50* also gave other examples of whom you should network with. For example, he suggests that you could write to the author of a book that you enjoyed.

Use online social networks

Among various online social networks, LinkedIn is one easy and less intrusive platform for Daud and Chua to connect

with like-minded people, and to source for candidates and clients.

Daud says, "A change management guru from London who was coming to Malaysia contacted me through LinkedIn. We met for coffee and have since stayed in regular contact for the past two years. And more recently, prior to the opening of our representative office in Indonesia, I had used LinkedIn to send invitations to 20 plus people in Indonesia to attend the ceremony. About 10 of them came and one of them was a chairman of an Indonesian conglomerate."

Chua also offers an example when he used LinkedIn to reach out to high-profile people. "I had used LinkedIn to communicate with a famous entrepreneur who later came to Malaysia. We met for a meal and we are going to work on something commercially," he says.

Meanwhile, Chong says now that she is a mother, her lifestyle has changed, and she cannot attend as many events as she used to. So she uses online social networks extensively to stay in the minds of people.

Keep your profile on LinkedIn updated, correct and precise, says Daud, and use keywords that people will do a search on. There is also a section in which you can write recommendations for your friends and vice versa. Third-party endorsements are obviously powerful. Chong and Daud, who have several recommendations by clients and co-workers on their LinkedIn page, say recommendations are reciprocal.

Nevertheless, online networks do not replace offline personal interaction. Reza, for example, says he has not used LinkedIn to identify candidates for his clients but he would search on the Internet to do reputation checks or get additional information about someone. Daud also says that, "You would be in trouble if online network is the only thing you are relying on!" ■