

The Value In Developing A Leadership **BRAND**

When scanning the legal media, reading interviews on emerging issues, or seeing who gets asked to speak at various legal conferences and events, you should notice that it is usually those Firm Leaders who have invested the time to positioned themselves as innovators and thought leaders who seem to frequently garner the spotlight. These professionals may not, in your opinion, have anything more to offer than you, but the fact is that they certainly know how to brand themselves as consummate frontrunners within the profession. And developing a leadership brand should not be viewed as some ego trip or perverse exercise in executive hubris, because it can provide measurable benefits for your firm — and for you.

Your leadership brand is in essence your reputation. Reputation is the most important asset you have and is the *perception* about you as a leader and a professional. Your reputation isn't *who* you are, but rather what others *believe* about you. Every firm leader has a responsibility to create and manage a positive firm and leadership brand. As Fortune magazine once expressed it, "despite the complexity of our times, the person in charge still sets the tone, defines the style, becomes the firm's public face."

By way of example, back in 2007, I initiated a survey to an extensive list of law firm leaders asking them, among other things, which law firm managing partner (chair / CEO / etc.) they most admired for their management / leadership competence. Far and away the most revered was Robert M. Dell, the recently retired chair and managing partner at Latham & Watkins. Did Bob develop a strong, recognized leadership brand? You bet he did! In numerous inter-

views Bob talked passionately about how he believed in true integrated teamwork, building professional skills, always putting the firm first, and remaining committed to upholding core values, behavior and culture. His commitment oversaw a growth in the firm from 11 offices and 600 lawyers to 32 offices worldwide and 2000 lawyers — all without ever giving in to the temptation of big-book greedy laterals, ego-driven mergers, or star compensation systems that other firms have fallen victim to.

Now many firm leaders may be content to be perceived as just "your regular managing partner." They attend to their management and leadership responsibilities without much concern for their own public perception, so long as it isn't negative. That viewpoint however, may result in keeping both the leader and his or her firm out of the public eye, missing important growth opportunities. My observations and research would suggest that those firm leaders with strong reputations and the know-how to promote their accomplishments — that is, those with strong brands — can gain a noticeable advantage over competitors.

Having a recognized firm leader can put your firm in front of its target audience in a very favorable way. In one recent instance, when a prominent legal publication selected a particular law firm chair as "Law Firm Leader of the Year" the individual related to me how those accolades contributed significantly to his being able to successfully recruit a few very attractive laterals to the firm.

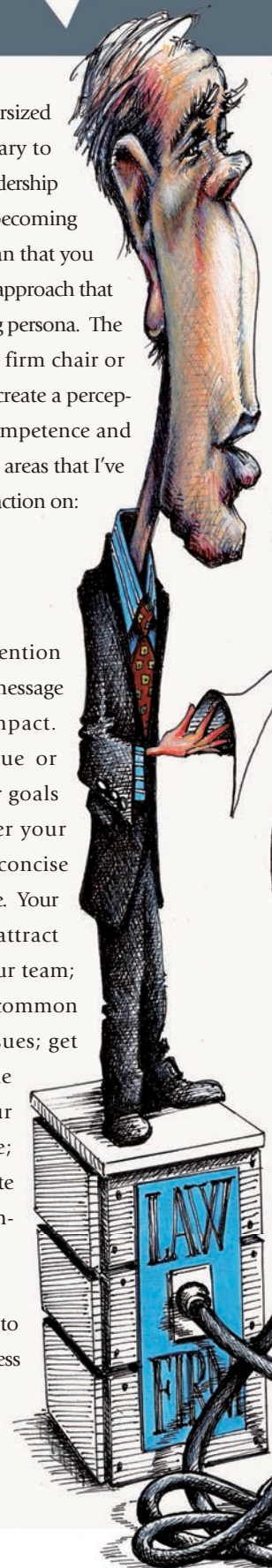
For many firm leaders, the thought of focusing on personal branding may seem uncomfortable. It doesn't mean that you have to

suddenly invent an oversized personality and contrary to any misconceptions, leadership branding is not about becoming a celebrity. It does mean that you need to think about an approach that works with your existing persona. The good news is that any firm chair or managing partner can create a perception of confidence, competence and success. Here are a few areas that I've observed others taking action on:

• Your Leadership Message.

People have short attention spans, so your brand message needs to make an impact. When some colleague or client asks what your goals are as the firm leader your message needs to be concise and it needs to resonate. Your brand can help you attract the right talent to your team; align them around a common purpose; mediate issues; get things done across the firm; influence your executive committee; and also help you create a more dynamic, high-functioning firm.

It is sometimes helpful to actually give your business philosophy a label that people can recognize and remember. So,



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when I say “legal lean”, what firm leader do you immediately think of? Stephen Poor, the long-serving chair of Seyfarth Shaw is among the thought leaders in promoting the application of process improvement techniques to the practice of law. And the new website that Stephen instigated, ‘Rethink the Practice: Essays on Change in the Legal Industry from Seyfarth Shaw’ integrates his and the firm’s brand very nicely.

Successful branding involves differentiating yourself from your competition and creating identifiable ways for observers to perceive your unique identity. Sometimes that can be accomplished through aligning yourself with a particular industry. One of the larger-than-life figures in Silicon Valley over the past three decades has been Larry Sonsini, Chairman of Wilson Sonsini. His high profile leadership has created a brand that has gained international recognition and that the technology industry knows and respects.

• Your Personal Bio.

The Personal Bio that appears on your firm’s website is another opportunity to clearly define your leadership essence. Not taking great care with your Bio prevents people from getting to know you better. Have a look at Andrew Glincher’s bio (http://www.nixonpeabody.com/andrew_i_glincher). Andrew is the CEO and managing partner of Nixon Peabody. In the past few months he has appeared on KABC News Radio in Los Angeles, been featured in a *Washington Post* article, been interviewed in *American Lawyer*, authored a column for Bloomberg, and been quoted throughout an article in *Fast Company* on

best practices in leadership.

Even, and perhaps especially, when your practice is highly focused in a selective discipline there are numerous opportunities to become active in associated media channels. Vincent Cino, Chair of Jackson Lewis has become a regular in *Employment Law 360* articles discussing trends and developments in the workplace, as well as being quoted in *American Lawyer* and in other regional business and legal media.

• Your Presence on Social Media.

Even if you hate social media, any firm leader who does not have a presence on LinkedIn is now suspect. Having a social media presence can begin to help brand you as a person of influence. Have a look at the Twitter activity of Mitchell Zuklie (<https://twitter.com/MitchZuklie>). Since becoming the new global Chairman and CEO at Orrick, Mitch has managed to post a couple of dozen messages a week congratulating individual partners, drawing attention to firm achievements, identifying new legal developments, sending kudos to clients and so forth.

And make no mistake. As a firm leader, you need to control your online presence. Have you Googled yourself lately? Do you like what you see? If not, change it. Just as social media can help build or destroy any brand’s credibility, negative Google results can also spell the end of your credibility.

ONE CAUTION

Having your managing partner establish a strong leadership brand toward the end of their time in office, often out of concern for their personal legacy, can have a negative effect where it contributes to extending their tenure beyond what may be best for the firm. A managing partner who becomes the public

face of the firm and commands high recognition from both the business and legal community may foster board members who find themselves in a situation where they view the incumbent as indispensable and feel pressured to extend his or her planned retirement date. Any firm leader with a strong personal brand may leave behind an iconic image, which ultimately poses a challenge to their immediate successor. I have witnessed a couple of instances where a new firm leader was elected to replace some leader that everyone idolized and instead of pursuing his personal strategic agenda and leadership style, he was overwhelmed with enormous partner expectations.

That said, it should be noted that many a firm leader’s brand, when done well, is portable. As you think about starting future ventures, your leadership brand can follow you. Just look at Ralph Baxter, former Chairman and CEO of Orrick, who is now a Senior Advisor and Chairman of the Legal Executive Institute at Thomson Reuters Legal. He writes a weekly blog on the LEI web site and chairs several LEI live events each year. His recognition for leading a prominent global law firm for nearly a quarter century also contributed to his being an active member of the Advisory Board of the Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession, and the Advisory Board of the Center for the Study of the Legal Profession at the Georgetown Law Center.

There is an old joke that states, ‘your leadership brand is what your partners say about you, when you’re not in the room.’ Your brand can give you enormous influence and can dramatically enhance your firm’s reputation. Of course, the exception to all of this might be if you are intentionally maintaining a low profile trying to create an aura of mystique and intrigue.