

1 You've written and spoken a lot about reinventing yourself in the workplace. Why is it important to be conscious of your personal reputation at work?

It's essential to be conscious of your personal reputation at work because that is what distinguishes you in the marketplace. Many people assume that if they simply work hard their reputation will take care of itself. That wasn't bad advice 20 or 30 years ago because you were often working at the same company for years or decades, and people got to know you over time. But in a fast-moving economy, there's not as much opportunity for people to really take in and learn organically who you are and what you can do. It's important to be cognizant of what impression you're sending and to make sure that you cultivate a strong reputation as having expertise in your field and being good at your job.

2 What does it mean to "manage" your reputation? Isn't your reputation just based on the quality of your work?

What's essential is for people first to be aware of what their current "brand" is, because everyone has a brand already. People think something about you. Next, it is developing a vision for how you would like to be known in the workplace and working, if necessary, to close that gap. Maybe it means developing new skills, getting new training, or working on attributes that can make you even better, like becoming a better manager or being a better listener. And then, finally, it's about what I call "living out" your brand, because personal branding is an ongoing process where every day you are showing the world in small ways who you are and what you are about. It's about making sure that your actions sync up with your words.

3 How do such common daily tasks as emails and brief conversations affect one's reputation in the workplace, and what are some tips for using them to good advantage?

One of the first tips that is a useful practice for any professional to implement is to think about and develop what I call a "mentor board of directors." Identify people in your professional life whom you trust and respect, and they can become a sounding board and a mirror to help you understand in an honest way how you're coming across. That's the first step. But beyond that, it is useful to think about the

Questions

WISDOM AND GUIDANCE FOR
SUCCESSFUL CAREER BUILDING

*An interview with Dorie Clark
on managing one's professional reputation*
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one or two attributes that you would most like to be known for. This can change over time. Maybe you have realized, for instance, that in order to get promoted you need to demonstrate that you are a strategic thinker. And so, for the time being, that's the most important attribute that you really want to drive. And so maybe in weekly staff meetings instead of focusing your comments on nitty-gritty tactical details, perhaps this is the opportunity to focus on a higher level of business operations.

4 As engineers approach the core elements of their jobs—design tasks, meetings with clients and superiors, and jobsite visits—what can they do to be sure they present a positive image of themselves as professionals?

When it comes to engaging with your colleagues and clients, it's useful to make sure that you keep in mind the metrics that matter most. Observe at your company what behaviors get rewarded. Look around at people who are successful and try and reverse engineer. What are they doing specifically? What qualities do they have? How would you describe them? And doing so could provide clues about the skills that people value in your department and company. The second piece of it is to think about where you are strong. Because there may be skills that are valued and important but there are not enough of them in your particular department. So if you can bring your "special sauce," you will stand out even more.

5 Having an "elevator pitch" for brief encounters with senior-level superiors is a well-known business suggestion. What would you recommend that people keep in mind for such encounters?

It can be very useful to frame your introduction in terms of the value that you provide or how you help people. So if you just say, 'Hi, I'm John, and I'm a structural engineer,' it's a pretty bland statement that doesn't tell the person you are talking to a lot about

who you are or what you're able to do. Instead, it can be extraordinarily valuable if you're able to help paint a picture for people. So if your audience is not familiar with engineering, you want to give them more information about your end products: 'Hi, I'm John—I'm an engineer, and I work to make bridges safer and more secure.' That's a much better and more vivid way to tell your story. If you are dealing with people who are familiar with the profession, you want to ground them with specific examples and give them conversational hooks that they can latch on to so that, ideally, they can ask you questions and you can continue to have a fruitful conversation. So you might mention specific well-known projects that you've worked on or other things that could spark a good conversation with a fellow professional in the field.

6 Do you have any tips for networking—either at conferences or at business-related social events—that people should keep in mind as they meet new people and chat with acquaintances?

If you have access to the list of attendees, speakers, or presenters beforehand, it's extremely useful to take an extra half hour or hour and do research on those people. Just peruse their LinkedIn profile, for instance, to learn some nugget about them, so if you have or seek out the opportunity to speak with them, you already know what your opening conversational gambit will be. Perhaps you went to the same college, or maybe years ago they used to work for a firm that you have also worked for. Or maybe they worked on a project that you really admire and have questions about. All of those things can lead into a good, meaningful conversation.

7 Finally, are there any pitfalls that you'd warn people about as they manage their reputations?

People assume very commonly that others are

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paying closer attention to them and to their career arc than they actually are. The truth is we live in a very busy, very fragmented world, and people aren't paying that close attention to others. Especially if you've been working at the same company for a while, people have a picture of you that is frozen in time because they haven't had to consciously update their impression of you. That's why you have to take charge of your brand and professional reputation. You can do it in very small or subtle ways. When—almost inevitably—someone will say to you, 'Oh, so what have you been up to lately?' instead of saying, "Nothing much" or "The same old stuff," you should use that opportunity as a way to make sure that you inject into the conversation the new things you've been doing: 'Oh, I just completed a certification in XYZ' or 'I'm working on this amazing project at work.' And tell people about it. This is different than you bragging about it or thumping your chest. You insert it in relevant conversations where they've asked you to tell them

something. That's how over time they will learn to update their impression of you so that they understand more fully what you're capable of doing today. **CE**



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