

Profile

An interview with Dawn Bentley: How personal branding can advance your professional career!

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According to Wikipedia, coaching is ‘training or development in which a person called ‘coach’ supports a learner in achieving a specific personal or professional goal’.¹ While on the other side, ‘personal branding’ is defined as ‘people and their careers marketed as brands’.² Nevertheless, we have the impression that there is much more to these simple definitions and we have turned to expert Dawn Bentley to better understand how ‘branding’ can help medical writers advance their careers.

Dawn is a professional coach accredited with the International Coaching Federation and a trained coach supervisor. In addition, she has a Masters degree in Business Administration from Sussex University, is a Master practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming and a somatic coach to boot. She offers executive coaching and facilitation to individuals and teams who want to explore more their potential and be the best that they can be. She has worked both with individuals (e.g., freelancers and entrepreneurs) and companies. Her corporate clients include Eurostar, Cisco Systems, Zurich Insurance, and Swarovski.

Medical Writing (MEW): First of all, we would like to hear about your own definition of what coaching and personal branding are?

Dawn Bentley (DB): When people hear the word ‘coach’, many think of sport as most sports people and sports teams have someone who is their coach. In simple terms the coach’s role is to help the team or individual play at their best. Quite often this allows the team or individual to fine tune their performance and recognise how much more potential they have. As a coach who works with business people, I do the same.

We start by exploring the specific topic they want to work on and then establish where they want to get to. The journey is then about enabling an individual to get there by sharing tools and techniques, providing feedback and a safe environment where they can experiment, practise and become more confident.

Personal branding, on the other hand, is about who you are. It’s what you leave behind when you

walk out of a room or office, or what people say about you when you are not there.

So whether you are aware of it or not, we all have a brand. The question is, are you optimising yours?

Are you letting people know your:

- Values
- Beliefs
- Skills
- Experience

Personal branding is all about you and how you operate. In short it’s your reputation.

What makes YOU UNIQUE.

MEW: Why is personal branding so important and how can it help professionals to advance their careers?

DB: When you understand your personal brand you can articulate, with great clarity, who you are and what you bring to the organisation and team you are working with. This clarity allows you to communicate confidently and congruently.

Many people think they know themselves well, however in an interview situation, struggle to explain what qualities they bring to a situation. They may waffle or be very generic – neither of which would leave a lasting impression and encourage someone to choose you for a job or piece of work.

When you really understand what your strengths, your beliefs and what motivates you, you can also easily discern between those jobs/organisations that play to your strengths and those that will make you unhappy and dissatisfied. When you are clear about your identity (brand), you will be able to:

Positively manage your impact. You can more easily behave in a way that is authentic to you to create the desired impact, rather than how you think others want you to be.

Clearly articulate who you are and what is important to you. You will be clear about your

values, your purpose, your skills and the value you bring to any organisation, or team.

Connect your ability to the reputation you have/want. You can clearly express what you are expert at, what you do best and what you are the 'go to' person for in terms of your experience and skills.

Differentiate yourself from others. You will easily be able to differentiate yourself from your competitors and communicate what makes you unique.

You will be 100% authentic and do the work you love, taking charge of your career rather than your career taking charge of you.

MEW: Building a personal brand and an online presence through Internet networks allow for individuals to network with potential clients. Does online personal branding differ from an in-person one?

DB: Great question and no it's not different. How you are online should portray exactly who you are as a person and professional. To build connections you have to be prepared to be yourself and by that I mean your best self. There is nothing worse than meeting someone who you first connected with online and finding out they are very different 'in person'.

Once you are clear about who you are, what you deliver and how you are different, you can be clear who your audience is. This takes time and the clearer you are, the easier it is to connect with them in the right medium and the right social network.

The danger with online networks is that many people can access them, so be consistent and authentic. Be focussed rather than taking a scattergun approach in the hope that something might hit the target.

The key to a successful personal branding is focus!

MEW: How long does it take to gain clarity on one's personal brand?

DB: Another great question! The honest answer is ... it depends, and it probably isn't what your readers want to hear. Most people want a quick fix.

The start to personal branding is knowing yourself, as Shakespeare said, 'To thine own self be true...'

When I work with someone on personal branding, we start with a brief online questionnaire to understand 'what makes them tick'. This becomes the doorway to explore everything I've mentioned so far and understand their story to identify the essence of their brand.

However, knowing yourself also requires getting feedback, so I always include this as part of the process. Remember, personal branding is what others say about you when you are not there. So, you have to be prepared to ask for and receive feedback and enter into a conversation about it. This can be scary! Many people are not great at asking for, or giving specific feedback and this is what's needed – and we could do a whole other interview on feedback!

From here it's then about reviewing what you've discovered and practising how you talk about yourself and how you demonstrate what you are great at. This is what takes time. It's a constant process of refinement, from the emails you write to the way you communicate to potential clients.

Dawn has given us a broad view of what personal branding means to her. It is, indeed, a topic that is highly relevant to freelance and employed medical writers alike, so we hope you found food for thought in this interesting interview.

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References

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2. Wikipedia. Branding [updated 2015 Apr 17; cited 2015 Apr 17]. Available from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Branding>.