

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Your Personal Brand

It was game time at the local Pro-Am golf scramble, and Lori from Florida was the pro who was chosen to be in our foursome. The four of us introduced ourselves, and I started the conversation.

“All right, Lori... are we here to win, or are we out here to have fun?” I asked.

Lori didn't hesitate. “We're here to do both.”

Lori, a 15-year pro golfer, proved her professional status time after time. She made several clutch shots for our team throughout the round. It was a joy to watch her effortless swings and the resulting shots. She was personable, and was enjoying our company as much as we were enjoying hers.

Toward the end of the round, as we were riding in the cart together, I asked her a question she had never thought of before. “You've been doing this a long time,” I said. “Have you ever considered what your personal brand is?”

She was taken aback. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Many professionals are known for something. A certain way of doing things, a recognizable trait, a style, something that's uniquely your own that the media and others can point to and say, ‘That's Lori’. Through the years, is there something that you've developed that you're known for?”

She was clearly annoyed by my question. “Well, there are tendencies I have, but I wouldn't call them a brand.” She quickly dropped the subject, and refocused on the game.

As I talked to a few of the other pros throughout the tournament and asked them the same question, I got a much different response. “Wow, that's a really good question. I never really thought about that before.” Many of them weren't able to articulate a certain trait or style, but I could tell that after our conversation, each of them began thinking a little bit about what that ‘brand’ should be.

What's YOUR brand?

Business author and futurist Tom Peters has been writing about this subject for several years. He suggests that people ought to think of themselves not as ‘employees’, ‘staffers’, or ‘workers’, but as actual ‘brands’ in and of themselves. Just like Tide, John Deere, Coca-Cola and Harley-Davidson, certain brands evoke specific emotions, feelings, and characteristics. The question to ask, says Peters, is: “What is ‘Brand You’?”

What are the traits or characteristics of you that you have developed throughout your life or your career that define you and set you apart? What do people notice about you that has become almost a trademark of yours?

It doesn't matter what you do, what your title is, or how old you are. Your personal brand is being established and reinforced with every action, every conversation, and with every decision.

Here's how you can begin considering the question yourself:

- What are some words people often use to describe you?
- What do you do that you are most proud of? Are you a good cook? A good problem-solver? A peacemaker? A knowledgeable fixer-upper? List them.
- What are the things that make you distinctive or stand out from your colleagues?
- What is an example of something you've done that others have complimented?
- Are others reminded of you when they see certain persons, places or things? If so, what are they? (*e.g., when people see the 800-Pound Gorilla on a current investment company's commercial, some are reminded of Bill Guertin.*)
- If you were to be famous for something, what would you want to be famous for?

Lori and our team didn't win on the golf course that day, but I discovered her personal brand, which was tenacity. She was focused, she was relentless, and she wasn't going to give up no matter what.

What's yours? And what needs to change in order for you to pursue it?

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