

Climbing the corporate ladder

Everyone has a personal brand, and it's not something that you can opt out of – it is inevitable, writes **Veronica Canning**

I recently gave a speech to the women of a large consultancy firm that was holding a one day session to kick off a mentoring programme for female staff.

The company was committed to supporting more women in getting to the top of their organisation, and asked me to give a thought-provoking address to encourage the women to ask the panel of partners and senior leaders probing questions about mentoring, and what they planned for them, the firm's future leaders.

I decided to describe the scene as I, an outsider, saw it. I said that I noticed that, when young people join these big organisations, it is akin to the experience of joining a tribe.

It looks fabulous from the outside, full of super-smart people in a dynamic and competitive environment, where there is an opportunity to make a name for yourself and earn lots of money.

However, once inside, you realise that the tribe has clear rules and rituals and is quick to expel those who don't fit in.

I opened my speech by observing that the women in this company were in the top 5 per cent of Irish women. They excelled at school, excelled in college, excelled in their Master's degrees and were, in fact, the pick of the crop.

They had passed the stringent recruitment process in a buyer's market. They had got through the internal cattle market process, and now here they were, all bright and shiny, impressive and ready to climb the corporate ladder.

Alas, there were so many of

them and they were all very impressive. They were at the bottom of a pyramid with a very pointy top. Only a few of them were going to make it to the top of this organisation, this 'tribe'.

I asked them whether they'd thought about what was going to make them stand out from such an impressive group of peers.

Asked another way – "what are you going to be famous for?" – I left them in no doubt that those who figured out the answer to that question stood the greatest chance of success. It is no different for you.

"What am I going to be famous for, and how am I going to achieve it?" is the question you need to ask if you want to stand out. You will stand out through your unique personal brand.

What is a personal brand?

Your personal brand is what others say about you. Remember one important principle: your personal brand is not what you say it is, it's what others say it is, what others say about you. My definition of a personal brand is: "What they say about you when you leave the room".

You know what I mean. Usually, the description is short, pointed and deadly accurate. Irish people are good with words, and there's none better when putting someone down.

Your personal brand is a definer of success in your career as it is the most visible marker of you and what you stand for and, as such, it offers you the chance to take control of



Veronica Canning: 'Your personal brand is what others say about you'

what people say about you in a corporate setting. It gives you a distinct advantage in having an active input into building your career.

Listen well the next time

you hear the side comments after a meeting, especially when someone has been upset.

How many times have you sat in a room and heard some-

one being written off with one sentence, or heard someone else being damned with faint praise? Whether or not you believe you have a brand, such comments constitute it. Think

of the most memorable descriptions that you have heard.

Remember that a similar comment could be attached to you. Often admiration is expressed in few words, like

About your brand

You create your brand daily, and you are responsible for it. Every action you take further defines it.

It is vital that you realise that it is not an optional extra that you may get to later, when you are happy, wealthy and wise. It is a big part of you now, at this moment.

There is no point blaming your colleagues or your boss if you are in difficulty at work. You are a key player in your own drama.

Often, when I work with people who hate their job and everyone they work with, they see the answer as leaving, so they can start afresh in a new place.

I always remind them that the unfortunate reality is that they take themselves with them to the new job. It's far too

easy to blame everyone else when you are the problem.

As people move away from having a job for life, or being a 'lifer' in one company, and move to having a career made up of different parts – jobs, periods of transition, breaks for education or child care and, increasingly, periods of unemployment – your brand becomes your most valuable transportable asset.

In an increasingly fluid workplace, you have to move to a 'portfolio' approach to your career. You are the only constant as you move through a career spanning decades.

You therefore need to concentrate on imagining yourself as a little enterprise, 'You Incorporated', with unique skills, competencies and a personal brand.

'rising star', 'jet-propelled', 'one to watch', 'born gentleman', or 'straight as a die'.

Your personal brand is either accidental or purposeful. Everyone has a personal brand.

It's not something you can opt out of. It is inevitable, but the good news is that you can control whether yours is 'purposeful' or 'accidental'.

A crucial point is that what your brand looks and feels like is up to you. I believe that when you take control of all aspects of your personal brand, you craft a purposeful one that is authentic and is an integral part of your career plan.

In addition, a purposeful brand is considerably more likely to be a positive one, as you will see as you read on.

I often say this to audiences when speaking at conferences, and I see the odd

sceptical face, but when I ask them if their personal brand is accidental or purposeful, the scepticism disappears.

They move to questioning which kind of personal brand they have.

It is an enlightening moment when you realise that every day people are interacting with you and judging you by your appearance, accent, behaviours, moods and your impact on them.

If you are unaware of this and just do and say what you want, as you want, without reference to those around you, then you definitely do not have a purposeful personal brand.

This excerpt is taken from Veronica Canning's new book *Your Brand: Advance your Career by Building a Personal Brand*, published by Chartered Accountants Ireland and priced at €17.99

People Problems

Unfair dismissal claim didn't end when the company folded

BY GERALD FLYNN

Some employers opt to ignore a complaint made to the Employment Appeals Tribunal. By not attending a hearing, or not responding to the complaint, however, they effectively concede the claim.

Founded in 1991, the Game Store chain ran into trading difficulties in 2012, when 277 of its 600 British and Irish stores closed. The company entered administration in Britain in March 2012, when more than 2,000 staff there were offered redundancy payments. No administrator



Gerald Flynn

was appointed separately in Ireland and Irish employees were not offered any redundancy payments.

Robert Tracey from Ballyfermot in Dublin started

working with Game Store in 2008. Three years later, he secured a place on a part-time health course. His shop manager was supportive and allowed him to work part time to fit in with his training course.

In July 2011, however, he was refused permission to take time off to take his health course exams, and was forced to quit his job to sit the exams.

Tracey made a complaint of unfair dismissal on the basis that he had been forced to quit his job because he had not been granted some time off to sit the exam.

When contacted by the

Employment Appeals Tribunal, the company's joint administrators responded that they had been appointed by the English High Court under British insolvency procedures. They argued, therefore, that administration took precedence over local legislation in Ireland.

The EAT pointed out that Game Store still had to make an appearance or send a representative to argue its case that the tribunal had no jurisdiction. Under the Unfair Dismissals Act, a case can only be withdrawn by a claimant. The employer's failure to attend means only that the claim-

ant's uncontested evidence can be heard.

Game Store's joint administrators wrote that, under EU regulations, no legal proceedings could be taken against the company without the consent of the administrators. The EAT secretariat in Dublin responded that EU regulations in relation to insolvency proceedings did not apply to employment contract disputes, which are governed solely by the law of the member state in which the contract applies.

Despite having worked at Game Store for three years, Tracey had no written em-

ployment contract, so he was working under an "implied contract of employment" in Ireland and it was bound by Irish employment law.

In the heel of the hunt, the joint administrators did not attend the hearing and Tracey effectively enjoyed a walkover. In January, he was awarded €30,000 for having been constructively dismissed when he was not allowed some time off to sit his exams.

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Movers & Shakers

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■ Support services company Sierra, which is part of the Siteserv Group, has appointed Paul Kenny as finance director. Kenny joins from Greencore USA, where he was chief financial officer for four years, based in Boston.

■ Ruth Curran is the new managing director of executive search firm MERC Partners. Curran has been a partner in the firm for the past ten years. Before that, she was a senior consultant there for six years.



■ Coady Partnership Architects has appointed two new associates. Ruth McParland has been a senior architect with the firm for the past five years and, before that, spent three years as a junior architect.



■ Meda Health Sales has appointed a new country manager for Ireland and Britain. Owen McKeon has been the company's country manager for Ireland for ten years. Before that, he was country manager for Provalis for four years.

Working Week

Lizzie Gore-Grimes is chairperson of the Irish Food Writers' Guild, which will host its annual Irish Food Awards at l'Ecrivain on Wednesday. Now in its 20th year, the event recognises Ireland's finest indigenous food producers.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

As the chair of the Irish Food Writers' Guild, I work very closely with our brilliant secretary, Aoife Carrigy, to organise the guild's regular meetings, visiting guest speakers, foodie outings and, of course, the highlight of our year – the Guild's annual awards, taking place this week. At the awards, we honour three exemplary food products, an individual (or small food business) that has made a notable contribution to Irish food in the last year, and a food business that has had a positive environmental impact. We're also very excited this



Lizzie Gore-Grimes, chairperson of the Irish Food Writers' Guild

year to be introducing a new award for best Irish drink. Apart from my association with the guild, I work as a food writer, lecturer and cookbook and magazine editor.

What motivates you in your job?

I love food – cooking it, eating and writing about it. Getting to work with great chefs is a real highlight. I have just finished working with Paul Flynn on his new Family Food book in association with Lidl. I love the diversity my career allows me. Being a member of the

Irish Food Writers' Guild is immensely rewarding, giving me the opportunity to share ideas and network with fellow food writers, each of whom has their own area of expertise.

How would you describe your work style?

By necessity, I am a multi-tasker. I work in an industry governed by deadlines, so efficiency and time management are crucial.

What is the most valuable professional lesson you have learned?

It is vital that you learn to value yourself and your experience. You have to be very careful not to undersell yourself and it is important to learn to say 'No'.

You need to set out clear goals in terms of the kind of work you want to take on, and the work you don't, and then be pro-active in following through.

In Ireland, whose career do you most admire and why?

I admire Darina Allen for her dynamism, and restaurateur John Farrell of Dillinger's, The Butcher Grill, 777 and Super Miss Sue, for his indefatigable entrepreneurial spirit. I also admire my husband Nicholas, who took a chance and added a cool new café to his art gallery on Francis Street. John and Francis Brennan of The Park Hotel Kenmare are among the dedicated owner-operators out there who battle every day to keep standards in Irish hospitality as high as they should be.

What is the most valuable career advice you can offer others?

For anyone working for themselves, by themselves, I think joining an industry association or guild is a vital step. Particularly if you work from home, you need to make an extra effort to get out there and network

to make sure you're keeping up to speed with news and developments in your area.

In terms of doing business in Ireland, what do you think is the biggest challenge we face?

I would love to see more support for young entrepreneurs. Ireland has so much to offer on the food front, and we need to provide as much encouragement as we can. Each one of us can help, we just need to make the effort to support small, local Irish business wherever we can. It could be as simple as ordering an Irish craft beer when you're next in the pub, or picking up an Irish farmhouse cheese when you're next in the supermarket.

What is your ultimate professional goal?

To maintain the diversity in my working life, while holding on to a decent work-family balance, and to remember to enjoy it.

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