



Defining your Professional Identity

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Your Professional Identity

“Tell me about yourself?”

- Unique skills & assets
- Your Professional Identity is your *COMPASS*
- It directs you along your professional path
- It guides your professional purpose
- It helps you make smart decisions!
- Your talents/strengths/natural gifts



Definition: Professional Identity

The set of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences by which you define yourself in your professional life.

- WHAT DO YOU MAKE HAPPEN?



Are you Defining? or Redefining Yourself Professionally?

- Millennial or Gen Y: Ages 26-31 *DEFINING*
- Gen X: 32-48 years *DEFINE/REDEFINE*
- Baby Boomers: 49-67 years *REDEFINE*



The Formula remains the *Same*

STEP 1: WHAT *SKILLS* DO YOU POSSESS? *Product*

STEP 2: WHO *NEEDS* THOSE SKILLS? *Market*

STEP 3: SOLVE A *PROBLEM*: *Launch!*



Define Your Professional Identity

- Product (Skills) + Market (Need) =
Professional Fulfillment (Solve a Problem!)



How to Figure it out

- What are your strongest skills?
- What common victories run through your life?
- Accomplishments List
- What work makes you flow?
- Clues: what do you “work on” during free time?



Step 1: Let's Define You!

- Tell me about yourself?
- I am a _____?
- *What brought you to Columbia?*
- What will you accomplish after graduating?



- “I am a consultant who helps women struggling to re-enter the workforce”
- “I am a salesman who brings my clients products they need to prosper”
- “I am a financial advisor who helps clients find business solutions”
- “I am an artist who paints recovered victims of domestic violence”
- “I am a teacher who shows students how to solve problems”
- “I am a financial advisor who helps clients make smart decisions”
- “I am an entrepreneur who matches capital with social impact businesses”

Professional Identities

- A young MBA graduate has an affinity for math
 - She also loves art and design
 - She realizes many design companies have financial problems
 - She markets herself to the top design houses as a Financial Analyst who can increase revenues
 - Eventually she becomes CFO
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- A senior Investment Banker suffers a health crisis due to over work and excessive travel
 - He excels at helping clients raise capital and grow their companies
 - He establishes his own firm close to his home
 - He gains work-life balance, personal time and works for a smaller number of clients
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- A female attorney leaves her career in order to raise her children
 - She longs to re-enter the work world but her skills are outdated
 - Her skills are reframed to highlight planning & organizational roles
 - She becomes CAO for a start-up company where she's responsible for HR & legal.

Professional Identity + Market = Fulfillment



- In 1980 computers were cumbersome & *SLOW*
- Steve Jobs' had deep understanding of/love for technology (*Professional Identity*)
- He saw a consumer market in need of access to technology and INFORMATION (*Market*) and envisioned a solution:
- Large networks of small powerful computers to revolutionize the world!
- He connected the disconnected! (Professional Purpose/Fulfillment)

Align Your Professional Identity with your Values

- What are your *VALUES*?
- It is simply not possible to split yourself in two: personal versus professional
- What legacy can you begin to create?
- *Why* do you work?
- Your values take center stage in your work
- *“Do what you love & it never feels like work”*

Professionally Define Yourself!

- Analyze your top accomplishments
- Look for threads/common themes
- What are you MOST proud of?
- What do you gravitate toward naturally?

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle." – Steve Jobs

Define/Redefine Your *Identity*

- Craft your Identity Statement: Who? What?/for Whom?:
 - “I am an Executive Coach who helps professionals navigate career transitions”
 - “I am a quantitative expert who loves to help companies become cost efficient”
 - “I am a relationship banker who enjoys helping clients grow their businesses”
 - “I am a senior organizational administrator who helps maximize human capital”

Your Identity needs to run through your professional descriptions:

- Resume/CV
- LinkedIn profile
- Elevator Pitch



Step 2: Define Your *Market: Who Needs You?*

- Research your market: trends
- Associations/Speakers/Professional Seminars
- Identify the High Impact Spots
- Learn new things
- Where are you *most* needed?
- *WHY* do they need you?
- What problem will you solve?

Define Your Market

- This is the stage where most get stuck
- They lack a thorough knowledge of their market, its challenges & where they can effect change
- The result: resumes that aren't read; interviews that don't happen.
- Understand where you are needed & the problems you're solving
- Create solutions!
- The result: interviews & offers

Market Yourself to the Market

- You have a clear identity (product)
- You know where you're needed (market)
- Be *solution focused* versus process focused!
- Resume/Linkedin reinforce ID
- Interview Feedback from professionals
- Move your resume from bottom of pile to top
- Your professional identity runs through ALL your material

Professional Identity + Market = Launch!

- 1) Interviewers hire people they enjoy speaking with
- 2) *Don't* interview the interviewer
- 3) *Do* ask smart questions
- 4) Be genuine; Be authentic! *Do not* stretch your accomplishments
- 5) Most applicants are qualified
- 6) *The winning candidate is genuine and offers solutions to problems*

Step 3: LAUNCH

- Product/Professional Identity Definition
- Value alignment
- Solutions Focused!
- Immerse yourself in your market
- Interview well
- Smart follow up
- Leverage contacts
- Learn from feedback
- Nail it!



Support Systems

- Executive Career Coaches
- Professional Assessments
- Professional Resume Writers
- Interview/Public speaking experts
- Personal Marketing Plan
- Recruiters/Job Boards
- Network Associations
- Ask for help from those who know you!



Avoid De-railing

- Chances are you will have more than one career during your 40+ year professional life
- Those who transition effectively *align their identity with the agenda of the organization*



Challenges: pushing through

- Problems = Challenges
- Expect & Prepare for them
- Professionals who exemplify *positive behaviors* (versus recreational complaining) are promoted to leadership roles
- Hard work + professional behavior + positive attitude are the strongest buffers
- Ask yourself: “Am I running away from a conflict I should be resolving?”
- *Most lessons are gained from failure.*
- What are you meant to be learning?



Challenges = Opportunities



"Failure happens all the time. It happens every day in practice. What makes you better is how you react to it." — Mia Hamm

Professional Identity = Purpose

- *“Over the past five years, there’s been an explosion of interest in purpose-driven leadership. Business experts make the case that purpose is a key to exceptional performance, while psychologists describe it as the pathway to greater well being.” Harvard Business Review 5.14*



Product + Market = Close

- *“To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day to make you everybody else, means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.” E.E. Cummings*



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