

AIM for Your Coaching Brand

Identifying your brand is the first step towards success

by Sally Seppanen, CLC, ACC

Knowing your brand is the first step to managing it and living to it. Think of your brand as your unique gifts and talents, synthesized into the credible offer you present to clients. Those gifts and talents are essential to your place in this world and your contributions to it. If you coach professionals, you have probably helped a client build his/her leadership brand. You can provide that same clarity to bring more success to your work as well.

Some confuse brand with niche. Your niche, a.k.a. your ‘sweet spot client,’ is a component of your brand that also includes your offer and your promise. Your brand cre-

“An AIM in life is the only fortune worth finding.”

—Robert Louis Stevenson

ates an essential emotional bridge with your clients. It can guide you in the decisions you make and the actions you take, keeping the enthusiastic coach from trying to be all things to all people.



Look at your current brand. If you have not actively established one for yourself, one has been established for you. How? Your website, business card, programs, emails, services and any social media in which you engage, have created an image or branding in the marketplace. The question is, does your *de facto* brand serve you? Do you speak with one clear voice?

Build your business and set a path to your door by being intentional and active in establishing your brand. Knowing your brand can guide you as you make decisions,

approach and select ideal clients, identify the ideal training opportunities and help you deepen your offer. I offer a guide as you AIM for a brand that serves you and your work in the world.

Assess

Check the notes, performance reports, awards you have received. What are the words you most frequently see? Use your talent of finding themes. Look at the articles you've written, the workshops you've presented and your welcome letter to clients to see if your work

AIM With the How in mind

As you set your AIM and identify your brand, you probably have more data available to you than you realize. Here are some of a coach's favorite tools – questions, to get you started on your brand statement. These questions lead you to how you will deliver the promise of your brand.

- What are the qualities that you have admired in leaders you've known or read about?
- What qualities would you like to embody as a leader?
- What would you like your leadership to bring out in others?
- What are five words that describe the leader you are and strive to be?
- How does your presence affect those around you?
- What would you want a client to say in recommending you to others?
- What compliments have you received from those you work and interact with?

These qualities could be helpful in designing your brand and informing the coach you want to be.

reinforces these external themes. (See sidebar for helpful questions.)

Identify

What are the themes you have collected? Write them down, ideally on a white board, as you categorize and see the themes that might not be obvious at first glance. Collect those themes. State them in words, phrases, pictures or in any form that speaks to you.

Consider creating a branding statement, a self-informing declaration to help you look at yourself and your company as a valuable resource for your target market. While this statement is not intended for public consumption, it is akin to what you'd like to hear a client claim about your services.



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Here are two branding statement examples:

Imagine “John,” the business coach, who by defining his leadership brand shifted his work from working as a career coach for those looking for a job to working with organizations in leadership development programs.

For mid-career business professionals, looking for a clearer sense of direction, [John & Associates] is the coaching firm that provides provocative dialogue in a safe space that delivers clients to their inner wisdom in moving up in their current organization.

Imagine “Catherine,” the wellness coach, who in developing her brand, decided her program worked best for men. Having her brand in place helped Catherine direct her website copy and spurred her to present her Learning, Living and Modeling Wellness for Youth seminar at the Kiwanis Club.

For the man looking for greater energy and better health, [Coach “Catherine”] is the health coach who provides a proven, structured wellness program that delivers the motivation and the plan needed to feel great about his body.

Aspirational AIM

Perhaps your brand is more visionary... some of the qualities you identified are ones you hope to live into. Just as our clients benefit from articulating the meaningful work ahead, so goes the great coach.

- Which characteristics would you like to focus and build on?
- What ideas do you have to practice these behaviors?
- What role models can you observe for the behaviors that support these characteristics?
- Who can support, mentor or coach you to further develop these characteristics?
- What are other people noticing? (If they are not telling you, consider asking a trusted friend or colleague who can provide you with helpful feedback on your progress.)

ATTENTION START UP COACHES

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Use the framework of the popular word game Ad Libs below to help you create your branding statement:

For _____, _____ is the _____
your sweet spot client *Your company name* *Business category*

that/who _____ that delivers _____
your offer *emotional promise to the client*



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Manifest

You will know you are congruent with your brand when you own the statement and acknowledge its inherent qualities with humility and acceptance. You will also know when you are not congruent with your brand when you stray from any of the components of your branding statement. The quickest way to get back into congruence is to realign with the themes and qualities of your brand.

**“Your brand
may resonate
so clearly that
it feels like
your *raison
d’être*.”**

While consistency is key, make no mistake, or better yet, be ready to make a mistake, as mistakes are part of the human experience. Remember, what says more is how a person/brand gets up rather than how a person/brand falls down.

By owning your brand with integrity and congruence, you have likely built your leadership presence as well (particularly in defining the five words in the sidebar exercise). Your brand may resonate so clearly that it feels like your *raison d’être*. Be mindful that your brand will likely change at different points of your career. Include a brand review at least once a year and whenever it seems relevant.