

Transcription - Ben Baker Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're joined by one of our international guests, Ben Baker. Ben came to us as a recommendation from another guest that we talked to earlier in the year, Maura Sweeney and we're delighted that Maura thought so much of us and of Ben that she made the connection and recommended that we talk to him. We have liaised with Ben and got him to talk to us today and I will advise you all that one of the things he is going to talk to us about today is personal branding, but let us first of all welcome Ben. Welcome to Inside Exec and to talking to us here in Australia.

Ladies, good morning, how are you?

Ben, to help our listeners know a little bit more about you and if you think it's appropriate you can talk about your connection with Maura as well, tell us your story.

Where can I start? So, for the last 25 years, I've been in marketing and branding. I started off in direct mail so I've cut down a lot of trees. I really enjoyed that but like everything else, things change. We went in to promotional marketing so we started to put pens and notebooks into envelopes, things that weren't too heavy but added a little bit of value and people said why shouldn't I open up this envelope? Then we got into trade show development and social media marketing, all sorts of different things. What I realised, time and time again over the years was, I kept going back to people and saying what are you really trying to say? Nine times out of ten I would get this blank look. People were really not taking the time to think about what's their brand, what's their strategy, who are they really trying to communicate with?

People would say I need a direct mail programme, I need a marketing campaign, I need to get more clients but the question is who are the clients you want? Why are they going to pick you over someone else? So we would end up going backwards three steps and getting into the brand and trying to figure out who are they really valuable to and why should these people care. I came up with the premise that how do you get the value to the right people directly using the right medium.

To me what it's sounding like is that for us as individuals, or for an organization to determine a personal brand, they've got to take a step before that, in looking at who is their ideal client or customer and identifying that very clearly so that

they know that their personal brand is going to match the ideal client.

Well, your brand is who you are. You need to understand that you don't determine your brand, those you engage with determine your brand. More likely people are going to take you for how you act than what you say.

In that sense, that we did talk previously to a number of our guests about being congruent and for us, congruency we understood there was a difference in the language barrier little bit, but for us congruency means that what you say and what you do are the same thing. Then if you are not congruent, then you run the risk of being frustrated and angry and you look for, you do the blamethrower thing, look for all the things that are wrong with the organisation or wrong with your job or wrong with your clients, when it's really more about that you and matching up that saying and doing.

That tends to be the challenge. What we do mostly is in three steps. It's giving people at leadership level an insight into their personal brands and how they can communicate in a way that people want to listen to them, understand the value and feel that trust because it's all about know, like and trust. If people trust you they're willing to do business with you, they're willing to listen to you, they're willing to follow you, they're willing to believe in you. If they don't trust you, then they're not willing to do any of those things. The other part is, we work with a lot of companies to help them engage, grow and retain their employees and if employees don't believe in the leaders that are leading them, they're all looking elsewhere. So that's what it's all about - it's about gaining trust and that's what things really boil down to.

That leads us into that first question that we sent you which is how early in your corporate career should you identify your own personal brand?

You know, in my career, my personal brand comes down to three things. It comes down to: do people know, like and trust me? That's what my brand really is. So if I say something, I follow up on it. That comes down to when I was a kid. I grew up, my father was an entrepreneur, had a construction company and his viewpoint was whatever it takes to make it right for the customer. I grew up with that. And because I grew up with that, that's always been my brand. If I shake your hand and tell you I'm going to do something, if it costs me money, if it costs me reputation, or costs me whatever in order to make sure that I do what I promised, I going to do it. That's always been the cornerstone of my brand.

Then how do you help someone, a head of an organization, identify what is that

for them? What is their personal brand? How do they want to be seen by the customer?

My book goes into that. I wrote a book called "Powerful Personal Brands - A Hands On Guide To Understanding Yours" and at the end of every chapter, the chapters tell stories and give lessons, and at the end of every chapter I ask a questions and leave a blank page for people to write down their answers. It starts off with things like what are you passionate about? Who are the three most important people in your life and why? By asking those type of questions you get a strong sense of the things that are really important to you and what are the things that aren't. To focus on the things that are important to us, that's our brand.

For our listeners we will put a link to a place where you can purchase the book, the work book, so that you can work your way through that as well. I have read, Ben sent us a chapter to give us a bit of a preview of the book and I have read a chapter and it is very much a workbook, it really does lead you through thinking about those areas. So for those of you listening who are triggered by this information, I would recommend that you have a look at the book and you work your way through it because it is the best way for you to start thinking about who you are and what you want as your brand. You don't need to do anything more than think about it yourself and work through the book.

I tried to make it as simple as possible and relatable as possible for the greatest amount of people.

The next question we kind of have covered a little bit in terms of being in the answers that you've talked about already about being very true to yourself and understanding what you are, but the question we posed to you is how do you stay true to your personal brand in a cut-throat environment and how then do you protect it in an information age?

There's two parts to that. How to stay true to what you are needs you to understand for yourself what are the lines you are not willing to cross. What are the things that are vitally important to you and what are the things that you're not willing to stand for. I had a client that was a \$250,000 a year client that I fired because they broke my moral and ethical code. That's a perfect example of what I mean. That client broke my moral and ethical code, they wanted me to do something I didn't agree with and therefore I fired them. It's tough, it was a lot of money, it was a lot of sleepless nights but you need to sit there and say, what is your morality worth, what is your ethics worth, what's your reputation worth

because in the end that's all I've really got. You have to take me for who I am and that's it.

In the book, in the chapter that I read, there's some very good examples of that. Yes, you would be uncomfortable for a short period of time and yes you had your sleepless nights but had that work continued, you still would have had sleepless nights because you would have been unhappy about that situation that you had allowed yourself to be in, to continue. And yes, it's going to be hard and difficult and unpleasant to take the stand, but in the long-term, it's a bit like cutting your finger, it hurts at the time and it takes a little bit of time to heal, but it heals and you've still got a finger at the end of it.

Exactly. Now, brand reputation on social media is a whole different altogether. I'm a big believer of, if I wouldn't say something to somebody in front of their face, I won't say it online. If I wouldn't let my grandmother read it, I don't post it online. I'm also a big believer of, YouTube is forever.

Someone will find it somewhere.

It's understanding that digital is forever. It may not come out and bite you today, it may not come out and bite you a year from now, but 5 years from now it may. So whenever you're posting something online, it may be a comment or whatever, it may come back and hit you when you least expect it.

It's about the associations as well. So it might not be something that you necessarily post, but it might be something that someone that is associated with you puts up or comments on and by association you cop the flack as well.

Exactly. For instance, there was somebody I was associated with on social media that had 4600 contacts on LinkedIn. They went on a racist rant with reactions all over social media and my clients were looking to see if I was associated with them and sure enough we were connected on Facebook, so I blocked them.

You don't want to spoil your reputation by somebody else's action and thoughts.

Exactly.

And so in terms of branding, because you develop this personal brand, you still have to protect it like everyone protects their brands.

Your brand is who you are. It's not a font, it's not a colour, it's who you are to the core. It's your reputation and it's how people perceive you. If you have anything in the world to protect, that would be the number one thing I would be protecting because it is who you are.

We're going to take a break in our discussion with Ben Baker at this point in time. As you can probably he been is recovering from quite a heavy cold. So we will take a few moments to let him gather his thoughts and his breath again. Join us for part two, but for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we're talking with Ben Baker about personal branding and this is Inside Exec.