MASTER EXPERT

HOW TO USE EXPERTSHIP TO ACHIEVE PEAK PERFORMANCE, SENIORITY AND INFLUENCE IN A TECHNICAL ROLE

ALISTAIR GORDON & DOMINIC JOHNSON

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion."

Dale Carnegie

CHAPTER | 04 |

Exploring Our Personal Brand

How do our colleagues experience us? Should we care?

IN THIS CHAPTER, WE WILL EXPLORE:

- What is a personal brand, and how is it formed? Which information sources are perceived to be the most credible, and why?
- Why should what colleagues think of us matter? What difference does it make to our work as experts? How do we understand how others see us? How do we conduct a personal brand audit?
- How long does it take to change our personal brand?
- How can we shape a brand that will enable us to optimize our impact and influence?

WE SPEND PLENTY OF time later in this book exploring what makes colleagues or stakeholders tick—particularly those who we need to engage with and influence so we can produce more effective outcomes.

In this early chapter, the focus is on *ourselves*. Looking from the inside out, we form opinions about those we work with. Are they "good" to work with (and we'll explore what "good" means more precisely in these pages)? Are they reliable? Do they know what they're talking about? Do they work well with others? Do they have the right connections to get things done? The combination of all of these factors makes up what we think of them. It's their personal brand.

Whether we like it or not, we all have a personal brand. It's what people think of us, not how we think of ourselves. Our personal brand might be something we've intentionally cultivated and designed, but it's more likely to have grown organically from people's experiences of us.

> *"Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room."*
> *– Jeff Bezos –*

In Figure 4.1, we explore the information sources that our colleagues and stakeholders depend on to assess our personal brand. The graphic was compiled using data from hundreds of experts who were asked this question. We asked participants to list and then categorize the information sources that their colleagues use to determine who they are and what they are like (their *personal brand*). We then ask participants to identify and assess the most important sources of information—that is, those they rely on most and perceive as the most credible.

As we can see from the graphic, experts, just like everyone else, assess others based on their interpretation of a variety of things. Like all of us, experts have many sources to choose from, such as others' behavior, interests, perceived motives, capabilities, apparent priorities, and their reputation. We all take into account how those we're assessing speak and dress and *their* interpretation of others' motives and interests. These impressions shape how everyone relates to their colleagues.

Some information sources are far more important than others. In the graphic, the larger the circle, the more important that information source is. You can see that we have described the sources as either firsthand (we have directly experienced the person), secondhand (we have heard from someone who directly experienced that person) or thirdhand (we have heard a report from someone we don't know who experienced that person). By definition, when we hear secondhand or thirdhand experiences, we're getting a filtered version of what happened. It's colored by the preconceptions, values and standards of the person or persons providing that information.

Hearsay is quite influential. Before experts have personally seen their colleagues in action, it's the closest source of information, particularly if the hearsay is coming from a colleague we know to be reliable and to have sensible judgment. But this is still secondhand knowledge. Thirdhand knowledge (typically "media") is reliable only to the extent that we believe the source to be credible. People's direct, firsthand experiences with us are always at the top of the credible and to-be-believed list.
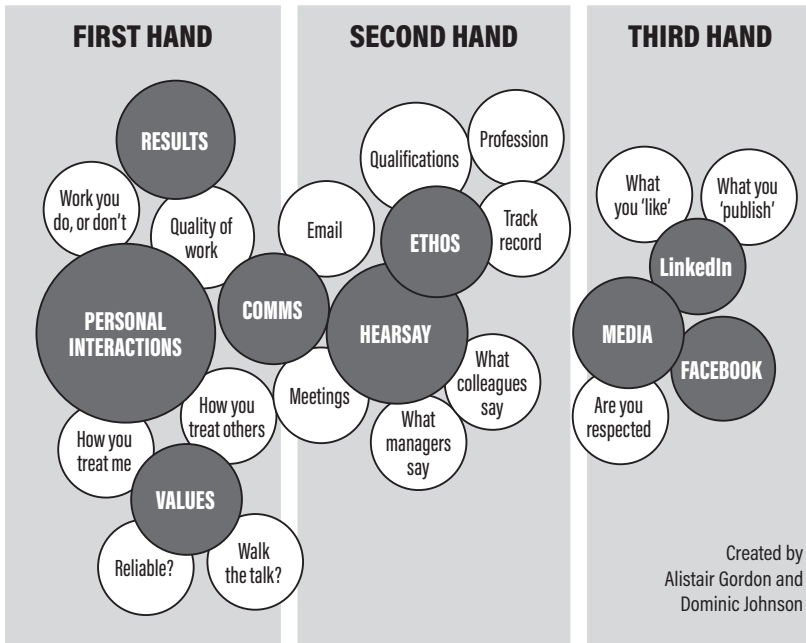
Personal Brand: HOW DO COLLEAGUES JUDGE US?

FIGURE 4.1: Sources of Information for Our Personal Brand

The natural cynicism of experts comes to the fore when we ask them how much of what people write about themselves on LinkedIn, for example, they take at face value (Answer: not much.) If the *Wall Street Journal* wrote an article about us, most of our colleagues would consider this highly credible. On the other hand, if our local paper runs a puff piece about our good work cleaning up a beach nearby, our colleagues might pat us on the back but tell us that it was probably a slow news week.

> *"Email turns out to be a major factor in what we think of someone's personal brand."*

Easily, the most meaningful and convincing source of information is the evidence our colleagues see with their own eyes. It might be a little scary to think about this, but when we're on show, our colleagues are making lasting judgments about us. Were we rude to Judy by putting her and her opinion down aggressively? That's seen as a negative. If someone else was putting

Judy down, did we step in and make sure we discussed the idea, not attack the person who suggested it? That would typically be seen as a positive. When we last promised to deliver something for Jack by Friday afternoon, did we follow through? A positive. Or did we make a list of excuses, which let Jack down and put his project behind schedule? That's a negative, particularly so if Jack was not convinced by the excuses.

When we discussed with participants what they "know" about particular celebrities, this "seen it with our own eyes" phenomenon really comes into focus. People are more inclined to judge someone by what they have seen them do, rather than what magazines and tabloid television are telling us they did. With the popularity of video-based social media platforms and YouTube, it's pretty easy to take a long look at someone in action and make our own mind up about their authenticity and values.

In the workplace, we're constantly on show and our colleagues are judging us by how we treat them and others, the quality of our work, whether we do what we say we're going to do, whether we walk our talk, and how we communicate, both verbally and digitally, with others.

In our Expertship programs, we find that email turns out to be a major factor in how we perceive someone's personal brand, because so much of our communication with colleagues these days is electronic. HP did a study several years ago that proved most people can't interpret the tone of an email correctly. The study showed respondents were wrong as often as they were right, but most people we have worked with believe they can accurately spot whether someone is being rude, direct or dismissive in an email. Whether this is true or not isn't relevant. These judgments, correct or otherwise, contribute positively or negatively to our personal brands.

Auditing Our Personal Brand

A QUESTION FOR US to consider when we think about our personal impact (and the impact we aspire to) is: how are we currently doing? In other words, how self-aware are we of the impact we currently have on others?

In our programs, we ask experts to consider the three boxes described in Figure 4.2, the Personal Brand Audit.

Box 1 in this graphic asks us to consider what we think our personal brand is. This judgment is made based on what we currently know. We always ask participants to complete this exercise (and we invite you to do so now as well) after examining the information sources our colleagues use to determine their view of us. How have we behaved in recent meetings? Were we overly critical of a colleague in public recently? Have we visibly gone out of our way to help someone recently? Did the conflict we had with a project manager get wider airplay than we might have imagined or wanted?

Capability: **PERSONAL IMPACT**
Personal Brand Audit

1

**What I THINK
my current
personal brand is**

2

**What I KNOW
my current
personal brand is**

3

**What I DESIRE
my current
personal brand to be**

FIGURE 4.2: A Personal Brand Audit

Notes made in this box aren't about what we would *like* our personal brand to be. Instead, we have to see ourselves through the eyes and experiences of others. It's a look in the mirror. This exercise in self-reflection is a critical success factor for executives everywhere, but it's particularly important for experts, as we typically believe that our technical excellence is the main contributor to our personal brand. This is only part of the equation, however. Just as important is the impact we have on others. The key question to consider is: how informed am I about the impact I am having? We're constantly reviewing the impact others have on us, but are we putting ourselves under the same spotlight as often?

One way of auditing oneself is to take a look at the traits listed in Figure 4.3. This data is from a range of surveys the authors have conducted over the years to gather feedback from the wider organization about how they experience poor and good experts. The list provides a useful checklist for us to consider how we're likely to be viewed by stakeholders beyond our own technical cohort.

Some of the positive aspects in this list are particularly challenging for experts.

Are we really open-minded, for example, when we're presented with something that challenges what is widely accepted in our domain? Are we open-minded when a colleague offers a "gut feeling" or is such a notion quickly dismissed as not being based on data?

Do we really operate with an organizational focus, or are we too entrenched in our technical bubble? Do we generously give up our time to gently mentor and coach more junior colleagues? Or are we just too busy and senior, so we provide advice in an expedient and grumpy manner because we're irritated by the interruption? Given that we're experts and we know best, do we really demonstrate humility?

> *"Is it true that experts are very poor at receiving and listening to feedback?"*

Succession planning is of particular importance. Many experts assume that their organization values them *only* for their technical capability and experience, so they actively hoard knowledge rather than sharing it in order to maintain their hegemony.

Being seen as a technical guru in our own technical group, but as an arrogant, unhelpful and rude colleague beyond our own department isn't the personal brand we want to have. The opinions of stakeholders for whom we're supposed to be adding value are probably more important than those of our technical peers.

Capability: PERSONAL IMAPCT
How Experts are Experienced

NARROW SPECIALIST	MASTER EXPERT
· Close-minded	· Open-minded
· Grudgingly helpful	· Keen to help
· Knowledge hoarding	· Knowledge sharing
· Superior	· Humility
· Negative about past	· Creating a better future
· Dispersed knowledge	· Centralized knowledge
· Supplier	· Partner
· Technician	· Colleague
· Telling, advising	· Mentoring, coaching
· Tight technical network	· Multi-disciplinary network
· Depowering	· Empowering
· Maintaining dependence	· Building independence
· Forever	· Succession planning
· Technical focus	· Organizational focus
· Defined by knowledge and expertise	· Defined by creating great outcomes
· Technical awareness and thinking	· Commercial awareness and thinking

FIGURE 4.3: How Experts Are Experienced

This runs contrary to the typical but self-serving idea that the views of our technical sisters and brothers are more important than those of the wider organization because they're more informed about what we do. Our technical family is more informed about the technical capabilities we have, but they're usually much less informed than stakeholders in the wider organization about our enterprise capabilities and the value we're actually creating for the organization.

Once we're in an objective state of mind to conduct this task, experts are usually quite self-aware of our own existing personal brand. There are some blind spots, of course (things that others know about us that we don't see), but in general, experts can accurately identify 80 percent of their existing personal brand.

Box 2 in Figure 4.2 is for capturing what our personal brand *actually* is. It isn't possible for us to complete this box independently. We have to depend on feedback from others to populate it. In most of our expert programs, we conduct what is called a 360-degree survey. This is where we (as participants) invite a range of stakeholders and colleagues to provide feedback in a structured manner, based on a series of questions, on how well we're

performing in their eyes. In our particular tool, *Expertship360*, the questions are based on the Expertship model that forms the basis of this book.

There is a myth we hear expressed more often than we would like: that experts don't like and respond negatively to feedback. The authors' experience, and indeed those of the various Expertship coaches we work with, is very much the opposite. We've found experts to be open, analytical, and keen to understand feedback from these tools. Very often, they tell us that this is the first structured feedback they have ever had (most 360-degree surveys measure the effectiveness of people leaders and therefore feel misaligned when used on experts).

Those positing that experts are dismissive of feedback from others are perhaps confusing their reaction to ad-hoc, uninformed commentary, which all experts are sometimes subjected to. Experts' reactions to this type of feedback are typically negative. In the authors' experience, however, experts' responses to properly structured, reliable and comprehensive data are usually very open and proactive. They consider these data to be "news they can use."

Feedback can be much more informal than using a structured tool, of course. Informal feedback can be gained by asking the same few questions to a range of colleagues. "Expertship excellence, it turns out, gets noticed. Master Experts are always in demand."

> *"Expertship excellence, it turns out, gets noticed. Master Experts are always in demand."*

Box 2, when properly populated from valid sources, will show us the gap between what we *think* our personal brand is and what it *actually* is.

In our experience, there is no consistent theme to describe this gap. Sometimes, experts are too hard on themselves and are pleasantly surprised by positive feedback from stakeholders. Other times, they discover that activities they consider themselves very proficient in are being assessed quite differently by their stakeholders. Often, different groups of stakeholders have quite different opinions: the technical cohort report that Jack is tremendously good at solutioning, while the removed stakeholders, those out in the business who are the eventual recipients of the value we create, report that the solutions that are vanilla and lack value. These differences of opinion are always explored carefully and typically provide some very useful insights.

Box 3 in Figure 4.2 is perhaps the most interesting. It describes what we *desire* our brand to be. In our experience, the experts we work with almost always have something new and challenging in this box that isn't contained in Box 1. This, by the way, is true for all of the executives we've worked with, whether they're experts or not. Take a few minutes to think about what you

might add to this box. If you're struggling, think about what your answers to these questions might be:

- What would I desire my colleagues to say about me at my leaving party? Which colleagues and stakeholders would I want to be keen to stand up and say something positive about me?
- What legacy would I like to leave for my colleagues, team and department? What would I want people to remember about me when I am no longer in the picture?

By way of an example, the authors have asked themselves the same question about readers at the conclusion of reading this book.

What would we like you to take away as a consequence of investing your valuable time into reading this text? How will you remember the experience? How long will you remember the experience? By getting clarity about what the "end game" is for us personally, we can check whether we're on track as we write each chapter. We can also step back and look at this text holistically and ask "Is this good enough to ensure we achieve our objective?"

As experts going about our day-to-day work for our organization, we can ask similar questions. Did that meeting create lasting value? Did I mentor that junior associate in such a way that the lesson will stay with them for a long time and help them with their career? Did that stakeholder hugely benefit from my interaction with them, and consequently, will his/her memory of me be positive and enduring?

Our questions here relate to the long game: what do I want my brand to be at some undefined stage in the future? You might wish to choose a shorter horizon. By the end of the year, or even the end of the quarter, what do I want people to say about me? Regardless of the time horizon you choose, you can begin to work on building a positive personal brand immediately.

Remember that your "leaving party" might be to move to a new role within the same organization, and that event might not be as far away as you think. This will be particularly true if you can make the transformation to Master Expert, as everyone wants a Master Expert on their team or project. A large proportion of those who have attended our Expertship programs have ended up working in new areas, or on larger projects, or have taken on new responsibilities. Expertship excellence gets noticed.

Building Our Self-Awareness

RICHARD FEELS READY FOR a promotion. He feels he's a natural choice for the role of technical team leader. He's the most experienced technician, with the most significant depth and breadth of expertise.

What he's not aware of is that he's viewed by his manager and stakeholders as being excessively negative. Consequently, he's the last person they would

ever think of appointing to a team leadership role. Additionally, they were also sure, given his attitude toward existing managers, that Richard wouldn't want such a role. How did Richard end up with such a reputation?

Richard's reputation has developed over a number of years as a direct result of his behavior. His nickname is "Mr Negative." Richard expresses negativity on a consistent basis, constantly worrying about impossible deadlines, technical complications no one else has voiced, future issues that might be created if we take a short-term view of the solution, and so on. He's extremely bright, so he's highly skilled at destroying others' ideas and suggestions with rapier-like clinical, rational arguments.

Richard considers his own opinion so obviously correct that he, without really realizing it, tends to be extremely dismissive of others' ideas and suggestions. This comes across to colleagues as plain arrogance. People who work with him have learned that if they don't want to have their ideas dismissed and criticized, then it's better to avoid him.

As far as project managers and Richard's own manager are concerned, he has generated a lack of trust. They couldn't confidently entrust him with the responsibility to execute a key responsibility because Richard is likely to focus on telling them about all the implementation challenges they're bound to encounter.

They don't think Richard believes he can deliver, so they worry that he won't. On occasions when Richard hasn't delivered, he tells people loudly that "the deadline was impossible, and he told them so." This is a further concern for the team leaders he works with because he's not taking ownership of issues and is quick to lay blame elsewhere.

> *"What do colleagues know about us that*
> *we don't know about ourselves?"*

Richard is the victim of his own lack of self-awareness. He fails to appreciate the links between his behavior and his reputation, which ultimately form his personal brand. While he might see himself as being a respected authority in his particular technical field, the rest of the ecosystem he works within doesn't place the same premium on his specialist knowledge. Instead, they identify him as being difficult to deal with based on their experience of Richard's attitudes and behaviors.

What should Richard do?

Richard, devastated to hear from his manager that he wouldn't be considered for the team leadership role, confided in a friend, Margot, who also did some part-time coaching.

Margot suggested they use a self-awareness tool called the Johari Window, which was created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in the early 1960s. We describe the Johari Window in Figure 4.4

The Johari Window consists of four quadrants. Quadrant 1, the area of open activity, refers to behavior and motivations known to both the self and others. It's the area that is open for all to see. In Richard's case, both Richard and those he works with can see his technical expertise and problem-solving skills.

Quadrant 2 is the blind area, where others can see things in us of which we're unaware. In Richard's case, others can see the impact his direct and challenging behaviors have on those he works with, while he cannot (he is blind to this).

Quadrant 3, the avoided or hidden area, represents things that we know about ourselves but which we don't reveal to others. Examples of this are hidden agendas, or perhaps matters about which we have sensitive feelings. In Richard's case, he's inwardly devastated to learn he isn't being considered for promotion, but he doesn't show these feelings to anyone (except Margot). To others, he comes across as not really caring one way or the other. Richard doesn't share his paralyzing fear of failure either, which accounts for quite a lot of his negative positioning around getting things done.

Quadrant 4 is the area of unknown activity—a mystery. Neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviors and motives.

Richard might have, for example, a deep-seated distrust of salespeople, but neither he nor others have realized this. Sometimes, there are strongly ingrained beliefs that underpin our behaviors, and these are just as surprising to us as they are to those who know us. One belief the authors identify in many experts is a lack of awareness about their self-confidence. For example, although wildly confident when talking about their technical domain, they can lack confidence when talking about themselves. In particular, they often dread discussing subjects where they might lack distinguished expertise, as if others will discover this and conclude that they're an imposter. Understanding why this is the case is often a breakthrough moment for experts on the journey to Master Expert.

Margot and Richard discussed how to populate quadrant 2. They agreed Richard would need to get some feedback. For quadrant 3, he would also need to explore what he knew about himself that others didn't, and whether or not that might be useful to disclose.

Over the course of a few weeks and many informal discussions, where Richard found he had to work hard to get people to provide him with open and honest feedback, he learned about the way in which his colleagues typically experienced him. As he did so, quadrant 2 shrank and quadrant 1 expanded (see Figure 4.4).

With Margot's help, Richard began to realize that he was ambitious and wanted to progress from a career perspective, but this was something other people didn't know about him. One reason identified was that Richard was constantly so dismissive of people in authority that everyone assumed he didn't aspire to such a role.

Now significantly more self-aware, Richard began to think about how to learn to curb his more negative behaviors. He taught himself to find something positive to say, something genuine, about a colleague's point of view or suggested action before being critical or countering their idea. He worked hard to action many more questions about others' ideas before judging their idea and found, unexpectedly, that these ideas, once explored, had much more validity than he had previously believed.

In the past, he had been unaware of how often he interrupted people in order to make his own point, so he successfully stopped doing this. He asked some of his closest colleagues to point out to him when he did so, in public if necessary, and he found that he was able to change the habit more quickly than he might have imagined.
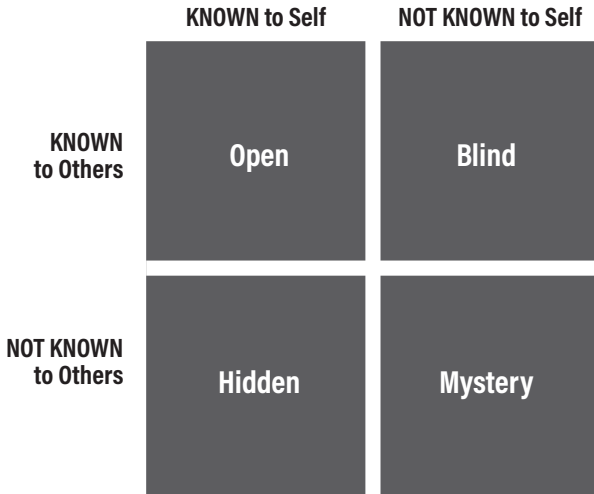
On the suggestion of his manager, Richard began mentoring and training some of the junior team members—something he would never have made time for in the past. His manager had positioned the suggestion as being an audition for whether, at some stage in the future, Richard could train and inspire a team. Knowing what was at stake, Richard threw himself into doing the best mentoring job he could.

As weeks turned into months, Richard's colleagues' perception of him slowly changed. They took a much more positive view of him for two reasons. Firstly, he was much more pleasant to be around and to work with as he was also showing real interest in what his colleagues were doing, as well as their opinions and ideas. And he was helping more junior people to develop. This was a positive change.

Secondly, his colleagues were impressed by the commitment, energy and determination that Richard was demonstrating by trying to make these changes. They saw him as someone who had asked for feedback and was then attempting to do something about the negative feedback he had received. Richard won their respect for the vigor he was deploying to be a more positive colleague. This is a phenomenon the authors see on a regular basis. It's not only the actual changes experts make to their behavior but the effort they put in that is respected by those around them.

The example of Richard leads us to several significant questions. Is our personal brand, whether consciously or unconsciously produced, delivering us the results we desire? Do people react favorably to our personal brand? Does our brand give us access to key people or privileged information that we need to excel in our role and create value? Does our personal brand bring us opportunities—or does it forever consign us to the role of technical specialist?

Capability: PERSONAL IMPACT

Johari Window: How well do we know ourselves?

	KNOWN to Self	NOT KNOWN to Self
KNOWN to Others	Open	Blind
NOT KNOWN to Others	Hidden	Mystery

Created by Joe Luff and Harry Ingham

NOT SELF-AWARE

Open	Blind
Hidden	Mystery

SELF-AWARE

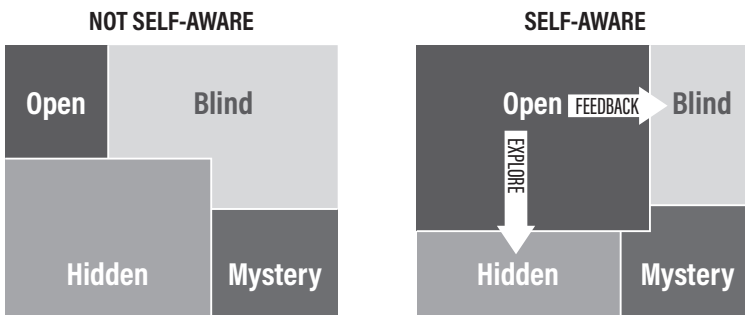| Open FEEDBACK →	Blind
EXPLORE	
Hidden	Mystery

FIGURE 4.4: Johari Window—How Well Do We Know Ourselves?

And furthermore, is our desired personal brand genuine? If, for example, we want to be known as a helpful colleague, are we naturally helpful?

Brand Stereotypes

SOME PROFESSIONS OR ROLES come with their own brand associations. In the world of experts, these are often unhelpful stereotypes, like "all accountants are boring bean counters" or "all IT people are propeller heads with no people skills." Even if we're an expert in one of these stereotyped roles and we're not thought of in such ways, we still need to consciously work on fostering a more positive brand.

Many of these stereotypes are subconscious. Our colleagues won't realize they're assuming, for example, to quote one common myth, that because we're in IT, we're not good with people. Or because we're in IT, we can immediately fix any technical problem our colleagues may have with any other type of technology.

We can contribute to these stereotypes, reinforcing others' existing perceptions, by using impenetrable technical jargon. Or, instead of wearing typical business attire, we might wear T-shirts and jeans, clothing that aligns us with our craft rather than our organization. The lack of business attire may convey a disinterest in being business-like or customer-focused. We might inadvertently convey that we're rebellious and more interested in being casual (or perhaps even slovenly) than focused.

Some of these clues also predispose our colleagues to a certain judgment of our importance and whether we're worth investing time with.

The impressions people form of us are developed unconsciously and organically, but we can help shape them through our actions and behavior. We need to determine the impression we would like to form in others' minds and then align our behaviors accordingly.

As an example, one of the experts we coached was a terrifically gifted coder in the IT department. He had very creative ideas about how to solve identified customer problems by developing some very clever software. Tim was a typical T-shirt, jeans, and very battered sneakers type of guy. And this was the attire he wore when he attended meetings to promote his ideas to more senior leaders in the business. He didn't get traction.

We asked Tim what was getting in the way of him accessing the resources he required, which was time away from his main responsibilities. He developed a good list of the reasons, many being highly subjective ("they are idiots" or "they don't get it" and so on), and some being more measured ("I don't think they take me seriously" or "they don't actually see the value in what I am proposing").

With some re-thinking, Tim shaped his proposal to connect it to executing the new strategic drivers that had recently been introduced—the

organization needed to be more customer-centric. Tim was able to show that his software would achieve this objective by improving the customer experience (speed and access) and also providing the organization with better customer data (which options interested the customers and which ones didn't). This addressed relevance and buy-in.

What wasn't addressed was the extent to which the senior leaders took Tim seriously and trusted him to execute an important business initiative. We asked Tim if he felt that the senior leaders saw him as one of them. Tim quickly identified that the way he dressed to attend these meetings was completely different from everyone else in the room.

Tim strenuously pushed back at changing his dress. He felt that it demonstrated bias and immaturity for senior leaders to "judge the book by its cover" as he put it. We explored why these leaders might not have trusted him, and he concluded that they erroneously didn't feel safe because he looked like he didn't care about how he looked. The senior leaders subconsciously connected this to sloppy work, which was, ironically, the most unlikely thing any of Tim's technical colleagues would ever say about him as his code was meticulous.

Eventually, Tim's commitment to moving his project forward outweighed his irritation at having to conform from a dress perspective. He didn't wear a suit and tie. Instead, he procured a business shirt and smart slacks, then proceeded to present his initiative professionally, connecting his idea to the organization's strategy. And as a final flourish, Tim banished any technical jargon from his presentation and used the language that repeatedly appeared in the organization's strategy documents. After several meetings, he eventually got approval to proceed.

> **"'Your reputation precedes you' has become a cliché."**

Some changes in our personal brand are relatively easy to notice and shift. For instance, if we start asking more high-level and business-oriented questions, people will form an impression that we're more commercially and strategically oriented and not a one-dimensional tech-head. But other changes dig more deeply into our core identity and motives. These require a more thorough level of analysis and possibly a reframing, such as exploring what intentions or motivations are prompting us and others to behave as we do.

Are Brands Personal?

WE USE THE PHRASE "personal brand" rather than "professional brand" for a good reason. It's easy to provide yourself with a glowing reference if you only look at your brand through a professional lens. "I have X years' experience. I am very competent at Y. I earn Z. I have seniority over A. I am on the Q project teams because my skills and knowledge are valuable to the business."

But our qualifications aren't our brand. They're merely a collection of information about us, usually from our perspective, that people may or may not be aware of or regard as significant. Our brand is what people who work with us see and feel. It's how they experience us, both as a colleague and as a human being.

They may or may not know we have a PhD in astrophysics, but they do know that we were considerate (or dismissive) to a colleague in a recent meeting when they disagreed with our point of view.

They may or may not know or care how many years' experience we have, and they may or may not consider this important. But they'll remember when a project team we were on was struggling and whether we offered to help or simply blamed others for the problems.

They may or may not recognize us as senior to them in the organization. They may or may not think this is important. But they'll remember how we responded when they asked us for our advice and whether we adopted a superior manner or guided them to the possible options to solve the problem.

We might assume that others will suspend judgment until they experience us directly, but they often meet us having heard quite a bit about us first. "Your reputation precedes you" has become a cliché.

If an expert has a major meltdown in a meeting and leaves the room yelling and screaming, how long does news of this event take to become widely known in the organization? A couple of minutes. How long does it take for people to forget the meltdown? Years, if ever.

We need to consider this when it comes to our personal brand. There is a saying that we're only as good as our last result. Four great results followed by a disaster means that the disaster is the current view, despite the fact that we've been successful 80 percent of the time. You might think that's not bad, but people remember the most recent 20 percent.

Most of our personal brands aren't consciously designed. They emerge over time based on others' aggregate experiences of us. They're often strongly shaped by certain significant events that take precedence over others. Our behaviors, the language we use, the quality of our work, and even our attire all combine to form a general picture in others' minds about who we are, what we do, what value we add, what we stand for, what they can expect from us, what we care about, and so on.

Personal brands can evolve positively over time as a consequence of a sustained and intentional effort, such as in Richard's case. Experts, like everyone else, are responsible for the impressions that people form about them over time. Master Experts always consciously work on behaving in a way that helps them achieve their ideal personal brand.

Progressing to Master Expert level typically involves giving increased attention to how you relate to others. It also relates to your attitude toward the organization's commercial realities. It involves a shift from being reactive to being proactive. A lot of it has to do with moving up the value chain and partnering with others in the organization.

TAKING ACTION

Growing Our Personal Impact

IF GROWING YOUR PERSONAL impact skills is something you think would benefit you, then here is a suggestion for action you might wish to take to build your Expertship skills:

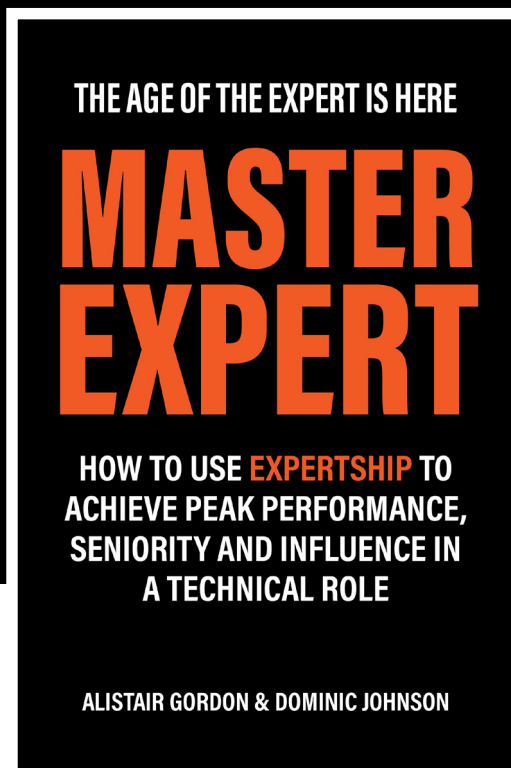## ▶ DELIBERATELY SHAPE A PERSONAL BRAND

As we have established in this chapter, we all have a brand, whether we have consciously fashioned it or it's simply the aggregate sense people have made of us. A positive brand ensures that people will relate to us in ways we would welcome. A negative brand will consistently undermine our optimal involvement and contributions. Questions we might want to ask ourselves:

- Have I assumed that my personal brand revolves solely around my subject matter expertise?
- Am I viewed as unidimensional—only interested in certain things?
- Am I known as arrogant and opinionated or as a pleasure to work with?
- Am I known as a valued and vital strategic contributor or simply a propeller-head with deep knowledge in only a narrow and specialized topic?
- How would I like my stakeholders and colleagues to think of me? What would I like them to say about me?
- To what extent is there a gap between what I want them to say and what they might currently say?

Most experts will discover a gap between their desired brand and current brand. They'll check the validity of their own assumptions by asking for feedback from colleagues. They'll make a short list of the new behaviors, knowledge, mindsets they need and set up a plan to develop these new capabilities in order to enhance their personal brand.

HOW TO BE A MASTER EXPERT

50 Chapters of techniques, ideas and skills to help technical specialists master relationships, business planning, risk and reward, CEOS and thought leadership.

THE AGE OF THE EXPERT IS HERE

MASTER EXPERT

HOW TO USE EXPERTSHIP TO ACHIEVE PEAK PERFORMANCE, SENIORITY AND INFLUENCE IN A TECHNICAL ROLE

ALISTAIR GORDON & DOMINIC JOHNSON

ORDER THE BOOK AT