

Why a great team could be the best place to build your personal brand



By [Donna Rachelson](#)

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Great teams provide an ideal environment in which high performers can excel, and burnish their own personal brands - more so than ever in the post-Covid world of social distancing.



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In today's competitive and overcrowded job markets, cultivating a powerful personal brand is a passport to continued success. Most people accept this as self-evident, but it's less widely recognised that being part of a great team fits well with developing that personal brand – provided that you don't set out to do that. If that sounds a little like a Zen koan that's because there is more than a hint of the paradoxical or counterintuitive in what I want to talk about.

There's good reason for understanding the dynamic between personal and team brands because, after all, apart from the rare lone wolf, most of us will spend our careers working in teams. And yet, one might think that the notions of personal and team brands are antithetical. Isn't there something inherently competitive in the idea of brands – after all, they are a way of distinguishing similar things from each other?

Not really, and here's where the Zen part comes in. After studying what makes great team brands for my book, *Branding & Marketing YOU through teams*, I concluded that great teams are made up of great people, and always have a great leader. But the trick is that those personal brands do not put themselves forward at the expense of the team. Rather, they define themselves as excellent within the context of the team.

Can't you just hear the Zen master saying "To achieve individual greatness, you must become part of the whole" or something similar?

This is the first point to note about how team and personal brands interact: Great teams show you how to be an individual while being part of a group. This apparent contradiction is made possible by the following key characteristics of great team brands, characteristics that support individual high performance while also building the team:

No job boundaries. Great teams are made up individuals who are more than willing to step out of their job description – the focus is always delivering to the customer. In other words, teams can be a great place to expand one's skills base, to take an holistic approach to work based on outcomes rather than inputs.

Emphasis on nurturing and supporting team members. Without exception, all the great teams I have interviewed are committed to the ongoing development, enrichment and fulfilment of individual team members. You'll often hear HR types extolling the training their company offers, and training is certainly part of it what makes a great team a good place to build capabilities and thus one's brand. But run your eye down the other points and you will see how they support this idea of the team as a perfect growth medium in which an individual brand can reach its full potential.

I've also observed that great teams are made up of people who both think and feel; this combination of head and heart, IQ and EQ, contributes to creating an environment that's nurturing and stimulating at the same time.

Great place to work and grow. No, that doesn't mean there are bowls of sweets everywhere and chill rooms, though neither are to be sniffed at. Great teams work hard at eliminating internal politics which makes for a productive working atmosphere. They are also characterised by a high level of alignment between personal, team and organisational values. That may sound bland, but it's not – this alignment creates a highly motivated group whose commonality of purpose makes them highly successful. Such a team stands out in any organisation and in the wider industry, and being a part of it becomes part of each member's personal brand.

Other reasons why great teams are a good place to build a personal brand include the fact that failure is treated as an acceptable part of the learning curve, provided one learns from one's mistakes, and members are genuinely empowered to make significant decisions, particularly when it comes to making/ keeping customers happy. In other words, one can act independently and boldly when necessary, and if the wrong decision is taken it does not necessarily spell disaster.

Great teams tend to promote from within. A great team depends on a common culture and ethos to pull strong and competent individuals into harmony. Bringing in new individuals is thus a risk, so these teams tend to develop their existing members to take on more senior roles when they can. Progression within the team is highly likely, and an upward career path naturally strengthens one's personal brand.

Of course, in the WAC (world after Covid) world that emerges, it's all too possible social distancing might become integrated into the way we live and do business. This in turn will mean that teams could be largely virtual. It's possible that teams might indeed be easier to create and maintain because virtual interaction is limited so the frictions of daily contact would be reduced. Personal and team brands alike might be easier to manage virtually than they are in real life.

Like so much in life, what's obvious is not necessarily the best option. In this instance, working in a team and making it a great one might, on the face of it, seem to mean one's personal brand is sidelined. On the contrary, allowing your personal brand to align with that of the team can ultimately strengthen both – and be a fulfilling and pleasurable experience as well.

Paradoxical? Yes, but it works.

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