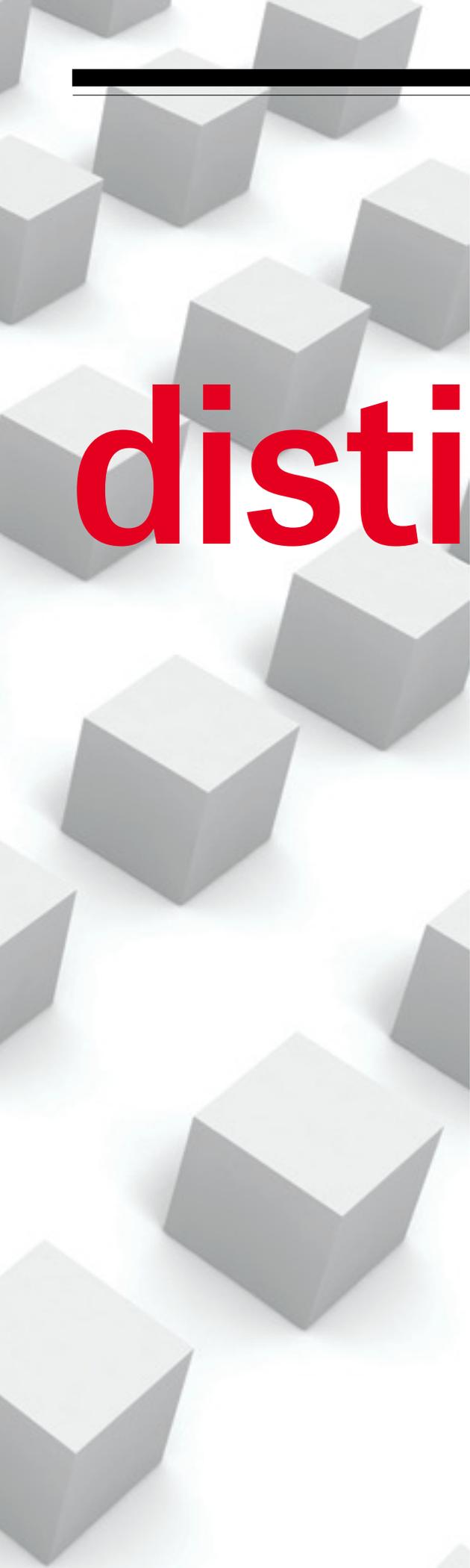




Why and how to set yourself apart as a savvy professional in the training and development field.



distinguish

yourself and

excel

in the profession

BY ANNABELLE REITMAN AND CAITLIN WILLIAMS

It is likely that, as an aspiring or experienced professional, you are serious about making a difference, you understand the need to update your skills and be more aware of the latest workplace trends, and you want to continue to hone your edge to distinguish yourself. And although you value the education, training, and experience you already have, you probably recognize that there always will be a learning curve to master. But because you want to contribute to the field and make a difference, it's likely you see these learning curves as opportunities to grow and contribute rather than as requirements you must adhere to if you want to remain employable.

You offer talent to your boss, your team, or a potential employer. It is your uniqueness and your ability to stand out and make the case for the value you can offer that will get you closer to the position you are applying for or the promotion you seek.

What is your value proposition?

You might think that the term “value proposition” is what marketers need to come up with to help their organizations sell a product or service. The truth is that every employee and job seeker today needs to have a personal value proposition (PVP).

Organizations are looking for workers who add value to their bottom line because it's not enough to show up with the same skills as the 20 (or more) people applying for the same job. If you're already employed, it's not enough to go into work each day thinking that what got you hired is enough to keep you employed.

MindTools.com describes a value proposition as “a short statement that clearly communicates the benefits that your potential client gets by using your product, service, or idea.” A value proposition does the same thing for you—it lets you communicate what it is that you, as a training and development professional, can offer to an employer. Mind Tools notes that “the idea is to help [your prospective employer] see the specific value your offer brings to them.”

Mind Tools offers the following ideas on how to build your own PVP.

Know your customer, potential employer, or project head. Also know the trends in the field so you can relate those trends and your skills to meet the needs of your customer.

Know your products, service, or idea. What specifically do you have to offer? Consider which areas of expertise represent your areas of strength.

Know your competitors. You may not know everyone who is applying for the promotion or position you seek, but you can get an idea of the likely skill level of others who are applying by reviewing the job announcement. Through your social media connections, you may get an idea of who has held the position before, or who excels in the kind of work you're seeking. Use that information to benchmark your own skills.

Distill the customer-oriented proposition. Try looking at the situation from the employer's perspective: What unique combination of skills, competencies, and areas of expertise do you, as a training and development professional, have

Take Your Career to the Next Level

Use these resources to elevate your career. Find them at www.astd.org/Communities-of-Practice/Career-Development.

ASTD Career Development Community. This community is your link to career development experts and practitioners with leading-edge resources and services in the areas of career planning, job searches, personal and organizational career development, and the training and development job market.

ASTD Job Bank. The leading employment source for training professionals.

The ASTD Career Navigator. This tool will help you explore the career roles you can aspire to, the skills necessary to function effectively in each role, and the resources that are available to help build necessary skills. Assess your current skills and invite feedback from another person. After completing the assessment you will receive a report that shows you how you rate against the target proficiencies needed in that position. Resources will then be recommended to close any proficiency gaps.

ASTD Career Coaching. This service matches individuals with a personal coach—a confidant, champion, and challenger who will help you gain personalized guidance through job transitions, prepare and navigate through your annual reviews, and help you leverage your behavioral and professional strengths.

Salary Calculator. A free tool from salary.com that generates a basic report showing national average salaries adjusted by location. Get personalized answers with a Personal Salary Preview.



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that would solve the employer's problem or contribute to that company's growth and success?

Personal branding

At its simplest, your brand represents how you are perceived by others. It is the impression that others get from seeing how you behave and noticing how you present yourself.

It is much more than a style of dress, a particular degree or credential, or the associations to which you belong. Mainly it is the unique "stamp" you put on everything you say or do. Because no one will do things and present themselves in exactly the same way that you do, your uniqueness is what people notice.

If you're one of those people who wonder if branding is just the latest buzzword that will soon fade, consider this: The economy is on its way to recovery and it's likely that more professionals across every field (including ours) will be looking for new opportunities. Even those who aren't looking for new jobs likely will be looking for ways to position themselves for promotions or key assignments inside their organizations. That is what savvy careerists do.

With those workplace realities in mind, and with the high probability that you, too, want to advance your own career in some way, ask yourself if you are doing all you can to distinguish yourself as a forward-thinking (and acting) professional.

Personal branding is a tool that enables you to do just that—distinguish yourself. Personal branding lets others know more about you and more about the way you approach your work. It helps others make a better decision when they are looking for expertise to solve their problems. We buy products and services we trust. We continue to use them because we can count on them—and that is why we choose them over their competitors.

Personal branding is about finding ways to let others know who you are, what you are best at, and how you are unique and different from others with a similar background or experience. Four people may apply for the same position of trainer, but each of the four will approach the role in different ways, offer different strengths, and make an impact in her

own particular way. Your job is to make certain everyone knows in what ways you are outstanding and what distinctive qualities you can contribute to the task or to the organization.

Lean on your strengths

Each of the individuals mentioned in this section are well-known for their perspective on changes in the workplace, the importance of skills, and the value of strengths. Together, they all make a strong case for identifying, honoring, and demonstrating our strengths to make a difference in the workplace.

In *Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?* author Seth Godin makes the important case for making yourself indispensable by choosing to do things differently than those who simply show up for work each day and bring none of their best work or their best selves with them. Godin defines linchpin as "an individual who can walk into chaos and create order, someone who can invent, connect, create, and make things happen. Every worthwhile institution has indispensable people who make differences like these."

How can pursuing the linchpin route benefit you in your career? You may be thinking that the definition of linchpin doesn't describe you. You don't invent new things every day, and you don't necessarily turn workplace chaos into order in the blink of an eye. But that is not what Godin is suggesting.

Instead he is stating that, by bringing to work your finest talents and engagement, you make a difference. And the fastest route to making a difference as a training and development professional is to first master the

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foundational competencies emphasized by The ASTD Competency Model™. Then, go on to identify the areas of expertise that will both meet the requirements for the positions you aspire to and also bring out your finest talents and expertise.

Marcus Buckingham, founder of The Marcus Buckingham Company, has devoted several years to researching and identifying individual and organizational strengths. In *StandOut*, he focuses on helping individuals identify and

leverage their cutting-edge strengths. He also makes the case for innovation—and its necessity—in today’s workplace.

Innovation isn’t just a must-have for organizations; it is essential for your own career as well. Chances are good that if you’re an experienced trainer, you’ve identified the “secret sauce” to keep your participants engaged. If you’re an executive coach, you have particular questions you like to ask that encourage your clients to open up or stretch their limits.

Those actions represent innovation—using your particular strengths and taking them a step further to really make a difference. As a training and development professional, have you taken the time to think through the particular way that you succeed? Do you know what it is that gains you high marks for the work you do—and for how you do it?

Tom Rath, a leader at Gallup and author of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, has spent many years working with his team at Gallup to develop and refine tools to help individuals identify their strengths and put them to use. One of the powerful findings of their studies is that workers who can focus on their strengths are much more engaged in their jobs, and are more likely to experience a higher quality of life overall. That’s fantastic news that you can use in your own career growth.

Why not use information about emerging trends, together with the latest competencies and areas of expertise, to identify your strengths, your skills gaps, and the areas in which you want to excel? You have the tools you need to move your career ahead. May your future be full of opportunities to succeed in the training and development field.

■ **Annabelle Reitman** is a career management strategist specializing in résumé development and short-term coaching for clients in transition and change; anreitman@verizon.net.

■ **Caitlin Williams** is an author, speaker, trainer, and coach. She coaches and speaks on workplace issues and on the value of focusing on strengths in work and in life; Caitlin@DrCaitlinWilliams.com.

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Use Stories to Communicate Your Professional Brand

Stories are the core of establishing your brand. They can be quite powerful in engaging people’s attention to want to listen about you, or your products and services. Give serious thought to selecting the appropriate elements or qualities for your story that will cast the spotlight on you in a highly visible way by asking

- What does this particular story mean to me?
- How can it project my brand or professional image?
- How can I use stories effectively in job search efforts, networking events, or other self-promotional activities?

All brands have carefully composed stories, that project the passion, commitment, and genuineness of what is being marketed and reinforce the bond. This action affects your success in achieving your goals. To ensure that you are telling the right story to the right audience, stockpile a variety of stories from which you can choose. These should be reviewed and updated regularly. Think of yourself as a storyteller; if you lack self-confidence, enroll in a workshop led by a professional storyteller.

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