

Authenticity: The essence of personal branding

 By [Nkgadimeng Ramela](#)

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"To thine own self be true" said Polonius to his son Laertes. Steve Jobs reiterated similar words, though phrased differently, he said, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."



Philosophers explained this phenomenon of authenticity in two ways:

- First, there is our outer authenticity – how well what we say and do matches what is really going on inside us.
- Second, there is our inner authenticity – how well we actually know ourselves and are aware of our inner states.

Authenticity stems from one's core beliefs, value systems, norms and, to some extent, culture which plays a part in creating this identity.

For a long time consumer brands have tried to remain original – as they would like to call it – through the use of registered trademarks, logos and so forth, all in an attempt to provide a clear distinction between counterfeit products and that which is authentic. Besides the fact that authenticity is one of the factors that provides differentiation among products, brands and people, what other benefits does authenticity bring?

Authenticity can become a core of what you are or what a brand stands for. Through authenticity, a set of perceptions are formed about a person or product brand. Since it is assumed that authenticity comes from within (referring to humans), this drives a set of values around a certain behaviour of an individual.

How is this authenticity built? Well, since it is something that comes from within, you can only build it once you have

identified those characteristics that are unique to you and then be able to use them to your advantage. It is about finding out and understanding who you are. This can be done by asking yourself the basic childlike questions: Who am I? What do I value the most? What is my purpose in life? What makes me happy? Once you can honestly answer these questions, try to live up to these ideals and make yourself known for that which you hold close to your heart. Work towards those things that are still lacking in your character, but which you would like to be a part of you. Through this process, you are well on your way to identifying your personal brand and building it.

Just like a consumer brand, a strong personal brand can earn you dividends. However, you would need to know and identify communication channels, which will help you be in touch with those you need to reach and influence. Thanks to social media, that process of allowing your personal brand to have high reach is somewhat easier.

This phenomenon of using authenticity as a differentiator is currently making some of the South African brands thrive in various markets in which they compete. Think of the restaurant in the famous Vilakazi Street in Soweto, called Vuyo restaurant. The famous chillas and eat-out place was even used in one of SAB product brand TV commercials for Hansa Pilsener. Vuyo's restaurant has now become one of the leading authentic African-cuisine restaurants globally.

"To thine own self be true" and you will stand out.

ABOUT NKGADIMENG RAMELA

Nkgadimeng holds a Diploma in Public Relations from Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), and an Advance Diploma in Brand Innovation from Vega School of Brand Leadership. Prior to him starting Nkgadimeng Brand Communication, he has over eight years work experience in various sectors of business such as: NGO, Financial Institution, Department of Labour, Parastatal, Entertainment and FMCG, Media, including Education and Training.

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