How to Lead with Authenticity on LinkedIn: A Personal Branding Blueprint

In 2007, **Gail Mercer-MacKay** googled herself and was shocked by what she found. She expected the search results would return her company website and her LinkedIn profile, but she showed up in other places she never imagined.

She was talked about in content written by other people, she was quoted in articles she was never interviewed for, and her advice was being repackaged and repurposed in ways she never intended. The "Gail" she found on Google didn't match the way she wanted to be recognized.

As a storyteller and an entrepreneur, Gail realized she needed to take control of the narrative for herself and her company. Very quickly, Gail learned the following lessons about building her personal brand, which turned into her blueprint to help others get there too.

> "If you don't turn your life into a story, you just become a part of someone else's story."
>
> Terry Pratchett

Own your personal brand
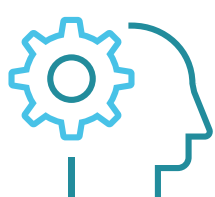
The foundation of a great personal brand starts with identifying who you are and what you stand for. To help identify that you need to ditch the imposter syndrome (most of us suffer from it) and confidently build a personal brand that allows you to control your story. When Gail took control of her own narrative, she consciously decided to ignore what was out there and move forward with a personal brand of her own design, one that matched her personal values and ethics but was also aligned to her career goals.

Define what you stand for

What traits do you want as the foundation of your personal brand? How do you want people to see you? These traits should represent characteristics that speak to who you are as a person and how you show up in your professional network. Are you creative? Innovative? Collaborative? Focus on traits that connect or overlap with the interests of people you want to connect with on LinkedIn, but make sure they resonate with you first and foremost. For Gail, these were creativity, community, and collaboration.

Identify your goals

What pillars will define your brand? What topics and subject areas do you want to be known for? How do you want to show up as an expert or a leader? These pillars will help you shape the content you will share via posts and articles, as well as the commentary you add on social media. These themes should be deep and narrow, not broad and wide. We recommend choosing four themes: three with a business focus and one personal. For Gail, these pillars included digital marketing, entrepreneurship, mentoring, and diversity.

Start with a Personal Brand Statement – It Will Become Your Blueprint

Your personal brand statement is for you and only you. It's a succinct description you can return to time and again to help you re-focus your activities. Here's how to build one.

Without overthinking it, choose five words from the list below. These words are meant to represent the way you want your community to see you. If there is a word you want to be known for that is not on the list, go ahead and use it.

Use the 5 words you chose to craft your statement

Example:
As a leader, I want to be known as an appreciative and confident professional in the world of digital marketing who motivates, and collaborates with others to help them achieve more.
When others work with me they can expect an enthusiastic interaction from someone who cares about their success.

Build your brand statement:
As a leader, I want to be known as _____ in
the world of _____ who _____ others to become/achieve
_____ through _____.
When others work with me they can expect _____.

• Achiever	• Competent	• Excellence	• Respectful
• Acknowledger	• Confident	• Great Attitude	• Successful
• Adventurous	• Collaborative	• Honest	• Supporter
• Ambitious	• Contributor	• Integrity	• Educator
• Appreciative	• Courageous	• Knowledgeable	• Team Player
• Authentic	• Dependable	• Loyal	• Tolerant
• Brave	• Determined	• Motivating	• Trusted
• Career Focused	• Effective	• Organized	• Unique
• Caring	• Energetic	• Purposeful	• Versatile
		• Quality Driven	

Once you build your own personal brand statement, keep it close by.

Action Your Personal Brand on LinkedIn

Here are six opportunities you have to use your personal brand statement to personalize your professional brand on LinkedIn.

1 Unique banner
Select an image or collection of images inspired by your personal brand.

2 Highly rated profile picture
Use a high-quality photo that conveys the traits you want to be known for. Experiment with a scanning tool to assess the attributes of your photo.

3 Meaningful headline
Showcase who you are and what you bring to the table, not your job title. Your LinkedIn headline should tell your story in 15 words.

4 First-person about section
Take advantage of this space to describe yourself in your own words so people can see what you're all about as a human being, not as a two-dimensional resume, and focus on what you can do for others — how do you as a brand solve problems in today's world.

5 Thought leadership articles
Be generous in sharing your expert knowledge and perspective.

6 Third-party validation
Have you been featured in a profile or article that captures the essence of who you are? Include it on your profile to demonstrate that other people see you the way you want to be seen.

Engage with Your Community

Once you have defined your personal brand, you are on the road to nirvana. Once you're clear about who you are and what you stand for, it's easier to engage authentically with people and contribute to conversations in a meaningful way. After she identified who she was, and what she stood for, Gail set about building a community, online and off that aligned with her brand.

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