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UNIQUE BRANDING PROPOSITION ✓

BRAND TONE & TEMPERAMENT ✓

SIGNATURE STORY ✓

SIGNATURE SERVICES ✓

From the Book
***“The Brand Mapping Strategy:
Design, Build and Accelerate Your Brand”***

by Karen Leland

Personal Branding is a Business Imperative



Karen Leland is CEO of Sterling Marketing Group, a branding and marketing strategy and implementation firm helping CEOs, businesses and teams develop stronger personal and business brands.

Story by Stef Schwalb

The 2016 election has divided the U.S. in some surprising ways. Many citizens never realized how divergent opinions are — for better or worse — and what the outcome will mean as the country moves forward. There is much to delve into and dissect, but one of the upsides to this history-making event is that it’s a stellar example in the art of personal branding for businesses. All working professionals can learn a lot from Clinton’s and Trump’s hits and misses on the campaign trail, and that’s the basis for best-selling author Karen Leland’s book, “The Brand Mapping Strategy: Design, Build, and Accelerate Your Brand.”

Leland is CEO of Sterling Marketing Group, a branding and marketing strategy and implementation firm helping CEOs, businesses and teams develop stronger personal and business brands. Her clients include AT&T, American Express, Marriott Hotels, Apple Computer, LinkedIn and Twitter.

In her book, Leland examines the candidates’ personal branding successes, challenges, and resulting lessons for us all in six specific areas. According to Leland’s predictive Brand Mapping Matrix, which was culminated from her work over the past 10 years, the success of any brand — in business, politics or otherwise — boils down to how the brand performs across these key dimensions.

“Over the past decade of working with CEO’s, small business owners and C-Suite in Fortune 500

companies, I began to see a trend. It was that they all tended to define their personal and business brands in terms of a short tagline or at most an elevator pitch,” Leland says. “The elevator pitch was always oriented around the practice aspect of what they did. In working with people, I came to believe that there was a deeper brand story. One that is more about the unique contribution each person or company makes, their brand energy and more. The Brand Mapping Matrix grew out of that.”

Many companies and business professionals tend to be unaware of how they perform as a brand and how important a brand is. “Most companies and individuals are so focused on the functions of their job that they forget about the essence of the job, which is communicating, servicing and creating,”

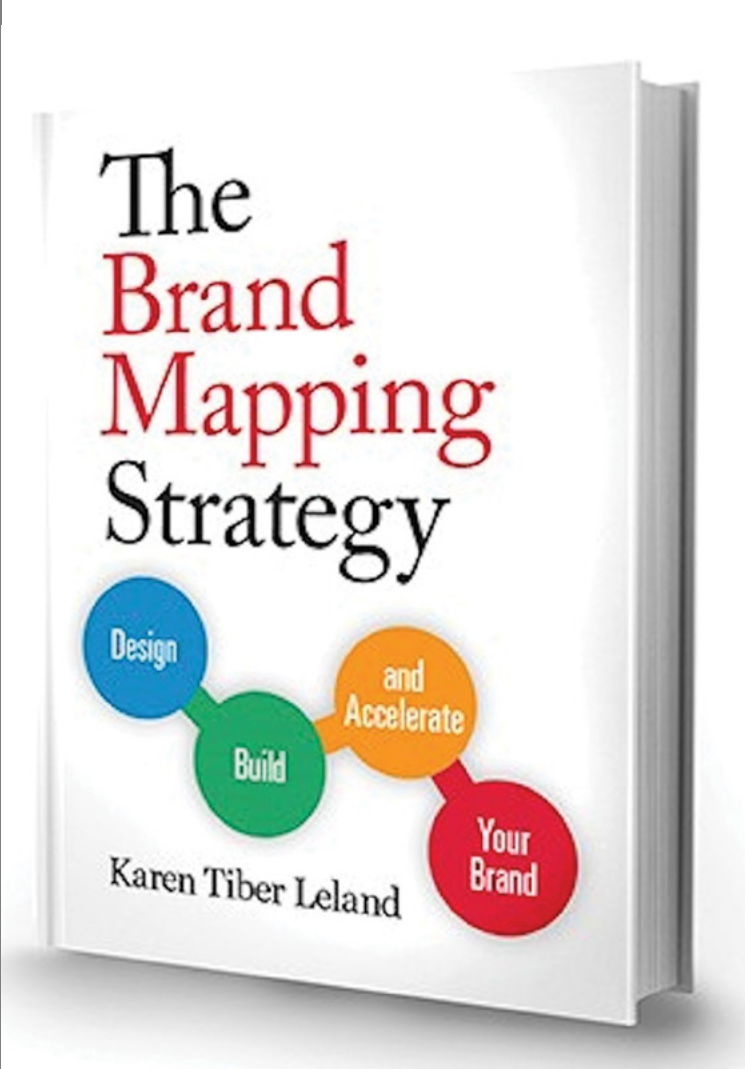
[Six Brand Mapping Strategy Points]

Leland says. “In addition, many have a shallow notion of what a brand is — a tagline, a logo, etc. While these elements are an important part of a brand, they are not even close to the whole story. To really live your brand is a commitment and a company-wide cultural process.”

Leland’s book is based on real-life, brand-building successes. It also includes examples of companies that have been particularly challenging to develop for brand success. “I was called into work with one company who had spent over a million dollars on creating a system for customer purchase and delivery of items,” Leland says. “The problem was that their customer scores were still terrible, and their brand was suffering as a result. It took me only about a day’s worth of customer and company interviews to figure out that they never asked the customers what they wanted before making the changes to their purchasing and delivery system. As it turned out, the changes they put in place were the exact opposite of what the customers wanted. They had to overcome a bad brand reputation and create a new brand.”

Given the current state of the election, insights on how to successfully balance a brand from external threats can’t be easy. The constant stream of negative forces — including rumors, voter apathy, reports of past indiscretions, etc. — seem to be accumulating in weekly crises. It’s something that could just as likely happen to a company or individual embroiled in scandal. Leland says it can be managed (mostly).

“There are situations under which it is almost impossible to repair a brand — consider Bill Cosby,” Leland says. “However, most brands can be revived, reinvented, or refreshed — even when damage has occurred. I think the stronger and more consistent over time your core brand is, the less of an issue this becomes. Although there are always external threats, building up brand equity is a counterbalance. That having been said, it is critical to practice crisis management when these things happen. The key is to respond quickly, honestly, and to take action for correction.”



While many brands still have a long way to go to ensure success, there are several that Leland thinks are doing it right. “I really admire the way Apple has consistently been a leader in innovation and creativity. Even when they have faltered, they quickly pivot, recover, and present something new that enforces their brand as innovative.”

A standout style (be it a brash Trump or competent Clinton) is a plus, but it will only take you so far. At some point, going beyond taking a stand for what you believe in and specifically letting people know how you plan to get there becomes a central issue. Think about one area where your personal brand is being expressed more in talk than displayed in action and focus on aligning the two.

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Develop a brand by design, not default. Know precisely where you are so you can discern where you need to go. Every businessperson, from secretary to CEO, needs to start by assessing the personal brand they currently have and be truthful about the degree to which it exists by design — or default. Then they need to take stock of the impact that current brand is having. Is it producing the reputation they desire? Is it creating the environment and responses they are looking for? If not, a pivot to a more powerful personal brand may be needed.

Anchor statement: What is the go-to description of who you are and what you do? This is sometimes referred to as an “elevator pitch.” All business people need to be able to present their brand in less than a minute. For example: When asked the standard, “What do you do?” at a party, can you answer in a few short sentences that pique the listener’s interest? If not, your anchor statement needs some work. In addition, it’s important to pay attention to how your anchor statement is resonating and landing with your desired audience.

Unique branding proposition: What is it about what you do or how you do it, that makes you unique, distinct and special? What sets you apart? Positioning yourself by specifically articulating how your brand speaks to the needs of your audience, and the unique way you address those needs, is critical to creating an effective personal brand. The more specific you can be, the better.

Brand tone and temperament: What is the consistent mood, tenor, quality, character and manner you bring to all your interactions? What you say has power, but the way you say it — your tone — has just as much impact. Every businessperson needs to be aware of how their brand tone is coming across (online and off) and adjust where necessary. In addition, taking any tone to an extreme will always backfire: Too serious or too snarky both harm a brand in the long run.

Signature story: Why do you do what you do? What’s the essential story that brought you to this place? Never underestimate the power of a good story. A strong (and truthful) narrative about where you came from and what has influenced you to do the work you now do can connect you with your customers, employees and colleagues at a deeper level. Your brand needs to be more than a single sound bite or pithy elevator pitch. Otherwise, you run the risk of damaging your brand when things don’t go exactly as you planned. The best brands feature multiple, complementary messages that weave together to form an accessibly complex and in-depth communication.

Signature services: What are your core competencies? Know exactly what your brand brings to the table and how it stacks up against your competitors, and craft a powerful way to talk about it that inspires confidence in others. The fulcrum of your brand needs to rest on the material ingredients of your values and commitments.