

Personal Branding for Technology Professionals

Distinguish Yourself and Thrive!

Rajesh Setty



Acknowledgements

I realized long back that you need significant help to accomplish significant things. This eBook is no different. While this work has my name on it, I have either been influenced or received direct help to get this to its current form. While I can't acknowledge all the people, I do want to acknowledge a few people. Here they are:

- ♦ [Tom Peters](#) for being my hero and providing the initial inspiration.
- ♦ Bill Sherman, partner at [Intulogy](#), for weaving his magic to bring the eBook to where it is today. Without him, I don't know whether this project would have been possible.
- ♦ Allen Bernard, editor of [CIOUpdate](#), who first published parts of this eBook in CIOUpdate
- ♦ Ravi Char of [Musings on Information Security](#) for his critical comments.
- ♦ [Naveen Lakkur](#) of [Compassites](#) for his critical comments.
- ♦ Photo credit for Tom's photo: Allison Shirreffs
- ♦ Renée Hawthorne of [Intulogy](#) for the design and execution of this e-book.

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Personal Branding for Technology Professionals

Winning the Boxing Game

When you meet someone for the first time, you will spend your first few minutes forming an initial opinion of the person. Does the person capture your interest in some way? Does the person provide a clear and compelling elevator pitch? Often, people have less than two minutes to say something memorable before they are boxed.

Let's follow Jack and Janet, two technology professionals attending an IT conference. Jack and Janet meet each other at the event's networking session. While they're standing in line for the hors d'oeuvre table, Jack and Janet start talking. They smile, shake hands, and introduce themselves. Jack explains who he is and what he does for a living, and then Janet does the same.

Jack introduces himself first. Janet listens for keywords—such as Software Engineer, Technical Architect, Project Manager, or Senior Consultant—terms that identify Jack's role and make it easier for her to remember him. Jack introduces himself as a Software Engineer from Santa Clara, California. Janet cues in on "Software Engineer" and creates this mental tagline for him. Janet has "boxed" Jack.

When it's Janet's turn to introduce herself, Jack will try to "box" Janet. However, Janet knows how to distinguish herself. When Jack asks what Janet does, she confidently smiles and quickly tells how last week her client called her a "Senior Sleep Consultant and Career Accelerator." Last quarter, the client's implementation project went so smoothly that he was able to sleep easily at night. Her client had

"Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

Tom Peters in *Fast Company*, 1997

even received a promotion because the project had gone so successfully. In just two minutes, Janet skillfully tells a story that reveals her passion, skills, and clever sense of humor.

By the time Janet and Jack fill their plates with hors d'oeuvres, both of them will have been through two quick "boxing" rounds with each other. Let's not blame either Jack or Janet. We all use this boxing technique to some degree. When we meet people, we need simple ways to remember them and describe them to others.

The next day at the conference, Janet sees her friend, Paul, at an early-morning panel session. After these two long-time friends catch up with each other's lives, Paul asks, "have you met anyone interesting here so far?" Janet replies, "Well, I met Jack, a software engineer from Santa Clara last night." That's all that Janet says about him. She doesn't want to repeat Jack's whole spiel, and Paul really won't be interested in him. The conversation between Janet and Paul

quickly moves on to other topics. Jack has missed an opportunity.

When Jack sees his boss after the conference, he retells one of Janet's stories—how she transformed a client's crisis into a resounding success. Jack's boss recognizes talent behind the story and asks, "Did you get Janet's card? I'd love to meet her."

In competitive boxing, there can only be one winner. However, whenever two people meet, they can both differentiate themselves and have successful boxing rounds. Jack needs a compelling elevator speech—something that will be memorable and remarkable.

But really, Jack needs more than just communication skills. Jack needs to develop his personal brand. When Jack can present himself, his experience, and his capabilities in a compelling way, people won't place him into unremarkable boxes. Instead, people will want to know more about Jack, and they will also tell their friends about him.



What is Your Personal Brand?

Your personal brand defines who you are in the eyes of the external world.

Whether you like it or not, you have a personal brand.

However, your brand may not be what you think it is. It may not even match the ways you describe yourself. If you want to uncover your personal brand, then answer these questions:

How do your close friends describe you to their friends?

How do your colleagues describe you to their friends?

How do your clients describe you to their colleagues?



When you live your life, you live your brand! Each day, what you choose to say and what you choose not to say affects your brand. What you stand for and what you choose to ignore will add to your brand. In other words, your brand is who you **REALLY** are!

The Marketplace Hungers for Strong Brands

The Need:

Personal Branding is No Longer a Luxury

Technology professionals are always busy. Some people study the current hot skills, so that they can be in-demand and earn top dollars in the marketplace. However, the people who already possess these hot skills are already busy searching for the future hot skills. This technology skill set rat-race happens because today's hot skills rapidly become commoditized and even irrelevant. Unfortunately, all the participants (including the winners) will lose in the long run, unless they develop other critical, non-technical skills.

A few years ago, only people who aspired to become celebrities thought about issues of "personal branding." Now, technology professionals should consider personal branding a critical skill for their careers.



Skills Follow the Laws of Supply and Demand

The Pain:

Commoditization Erodes Value

A large majority of IT professionals who lose in the “boxing game” are also typically the victims of commoditization. When you join the commodity crowd, your value quickly erodes. Employers and clients will not want to pay premium rates for common skills.

It will take you a few years to develop an expertise in a particular skill set. If those skills are really in-demand, then you will experience an up-tick for some period of time, until others learn the skills. At some point in time, things will quickly change. The marketplace becomes flooded by people with the same skill. This oversupply erodes everyone’s value.

If you’re a technology professional experiencing this oversupply, you’re going to feel pain. You’ll find yourself working harder just to win and retain clients. At this point, you have three options:

1. Deny

ignore reality
and continue
to live in a
fantasy world.

2. Defy

build deeper
expertise in
the same
skill set.

3. Flee

look for
newer and
greener
pastures.

In the first case, you will only deceive yourself. You can’t fool the entire marketplace. In the second case, you will try to become the premiere expert in your subject. However, as soon as people realize your new mastery allows you to command premium rates, they will follow your lead. You will repeat the cycle all over again. In the third case, you’re committing yourself to starting the technology skills rat-race anew. You’ll have to start again from the beginning.

Please understand that I am not against building your knowledge and expertise in technology areas. Without competence in certain domains, you are not even in the game. However, if you want to thrive in the marketplace for the long-term, you will need more than just technological skills.

Distinguish Yourself and Increase Your Value

The Pleasure:

Personal Branding Earns a Premium

If commoditization erodes value, then the opposite is also true. Personal branding establishes premium value. Because building a personal brand takes a long while, very few people do it. Currently, it remains the road less-traveled. So, if you start on this journey, you will be in the minority and also in the company of the most savvy technology professionals.

Here are three of the major benefits of a powerful personal brand:

1.

Higher value: Strong brands are always associated with greater value. Think back to the opening story about Jack and Janet. Janet's customer called her a "Senior Sleep Consultant" because she handled the project so well that he could sleep comfortably at night, and the project's success even led to his promotion.

In the client's mind, there may be many skilled technology consultants, but there will only be one Janet. This uniqueness will allow Janet to command premium rates.

2.

Lower cost of sale: We all have something to sell to others. Many technology professionals think they are not salespeople, but every time you try to persuade someone you're engaged in the sales process. Your offering may be as simple as an idea or a complex as a long-term engagement. If you have a strong personal brand, you will find it easier to convince others.

When Janet's client has another project, who will he contact for help? He could interview dozens of IT professionals, and then he could spend late nights reviewing proposals and bids. However, he could just reach out to Janet and ask for help. Janet's success in past projects means that her clients will tell her about new projects. Even if she has to bid on a project, she's going to be one of the first ones to hear about the opportunity.

3.

Implied assurance: Brands usually have an advantage in terms of customer satisfaction, as there is an implied level of trust on quality of the deliverables.

Janet's clients know that she will do whatever it takes to make sure that each project's go-live occurs smoothly. She anticipates problems and prevents unwelcome surprises. Janet's reputation spreads because her clients tell their friends and colleagues about her.

Don't Wait for Tomorrow!

The Start:

Put it on Your Agenda

If you want to develop your personal brand, you should first begin with some planning and strategic thought. Half-hearted efforts in personal branding will yield, at best, mediocre results. Your first step will be to put your personal brand on your **agenda**.

Everything starts with an idea. You must first accept that this personal branding effort will be useful for you in the long run. That means you will need to think beyond just today and tomorrow. When you build a personal brand, you need to focus on longer time horizons. What reputation do you want to develop in five years, ten years, or even your entire lifetime? This long-term mindset allows you to invest the time and effort you will need to build your personal brand.

When you put your personal brand onto your agenda, you will be taking the first step on a long road. Some people never take this first step, and other people who begin this process soon discover that the project requires both significant time and effort. So, before we explore personal branding strategies, let's look carefully at some of the reasons why people neglect their personal brands.



Twelve Personal Branding Challenges

A brand is a promise of what you bring to this world.

You already have a personal brand.

People measure you by your behaviors every day. They not only measure you by your results but also by how you produce those results. So, whether your personal brand will become effective or will wither depends on you and the choices you make each day.

- How much time and energy will you put in your own growth?
- How much effort will you invest in shaping your personal brand?

I have observed that very few people invest in themselves and in their personal brands. At the outset, it seems like it's a "no-brainer" to invest in yourself and in your personal brand. However, as I looked at my own actions and talked with other technology professionals, I realized that there are many challenges that make it difficult for us to invest in our own personal brands.

In this section, we'll look at twelve common obstacles that I have seen within myself and other technology professionals. If you are very lucky, then none of these challenges will fit you. However, as you read this section, you may discover one or more obstacles where you recognize yourself. You may even recognize all twelve obstacles within yourself.

No matter what obstacles you see within yourself, here's my challenge to you. Become aware of them, but do not let the obstacles prevent you from developing your personal brand. Remember, you already have a personal brand. It's time for you to actively grow and distinguish yourself as an exceptional technology professional.

Your Culture

Your Employer has a Strong Brand

You Don't Want to Show Off

1.

I was born and brought up in India, and I was trained to be humble. My parents didn't want me to get excited by anything that I thought was an achievement. They would always tell me that bigger challenges were still ahead. So, I should continue to work hard. All of my achievements became stepping-stones towards larger challenges.

When each success becomes just another interim success, there's no reason to celebrate any of them. As child, I developed the habits that shaped me as an adult. I learned from my parents not to make a big deal about any of my achievements. I don't blame anyone, but that's the way life was. So, my personal branding efforts took a back seat for many years.

My family's choices were embedded in the culture itself. I have seen many other parents teach this lesson to their kids. I have lived and worked in India, the United States, and five other countries. I have seen that this cultural mindset is not unique in India alone. There are many other places where humility is taken to such an extreme that it actually hurts.

Depending on your cultural heritage and childhood, you may wrestle with humility like I do. However, you may also face different cultural challenges that will affect your ability to build a strong personal brand. You will need to identify these issues within yourself and determine how you will respond to them.

2.

In early 2006, I was in India for several speaking engagements. After these talks, I spoke with many people one-on-one. When I asked these young professionals simple questions—such as “what do you do?”—many gave surprisingly similar responses. They said “I work for **IBM**” or “I work for **Infosys**”.

These young professionals didn't go into the details of their roles at their companies. Instead, they seemed quite proud that they were working for a respectable company like IBM or Infosys. From their tone of voice, I knew some of them even expected me to be impressed when they mentioned the names of their employers. Hats off to those companies for making their employees feel that way. It takes a lot of hard work to build a brand that carries that level of cachet among your employees.

While I agree that employees should be proud of their employers' brands, this mindset can become a set of golden handcuffs. When you draw on your company's brand, you draw upon its reputation for past success and its skills. However, if you permanently borrow your company's brand, you will get used to it and neglect your personal brand.

The question here should not be “Are you proud of working for your company?” It has to be “Is your company proud that you are working for them?” When you can answer the second question positively, you will have the beginnings of your own personal brand.

3.

Personal branding and “showing off” are quite different from each other. For now, think of “showing off” as being the lowest (or even the negative) aspect of the “Personal Branding” scale.

When I talk to people, many of them don't know the difference. Since most people don't want to “show off”, they put off building their personal brand building exercise. You don't have to be a braggart or a self-promoter to build your own positive personal brand.



You Don't Know Where to Start

4.

I have not seen many schools and colleges that actively teach “Personal Branding” as a subject. Even in the professional world, there are still very few classes that cover this topic.

If you want to build a personal brand, it may seem that you have to figure everything out on your own. However, you have many options available to you. You can find help by reading books, blogs, talking to mentors, etc. You'll find a list of resources later in this e-Book. I've included my suggestions on what you can read and where you can look.

Sometimes formal training definitely would help. However, don't let your lack of training become a barrier for you. If you have the desire and discipline to come up with a personal branding plan, do so. Then, stick with it until you see results.

You Can Succeed Without a Personal Brand

5.

Take a look at any job application form; you will see that they don't typically ask you to provide details about the strength of your personal brand. You don't even need a strong personal brand to get through life. As a technology professional, you can achieve basic success on just the strength of your skills.

However, if you want to thrive as a person and a technology professional, then the game is different. Personal branding can accelerate your journey and lead you to heights you never thought possible. Many times we look at things that are required to succeed and not focus on things that are required to thrive. Remember that “Good is the enemy of the Best.”

You Will See Few Short-Term Benefits

6.

Everyone accepts that it takes nine months for a baby to grow from concept to completion. Similarly, people accept that a fruit tree must grow for years before it can bear fruit. However, when I say that it can take years before you see benefits from a personal branding program, some people don't like my answer. Technology professionals often focus their efforts on projects that produce short-term results. They may not want to spend time on anything that won't yield measurable short-term results.

When you learn a new technological skill, it can create an instant impact on your career. Imagine that you invest a whole year learning AJAX. At the end of that year, you've expanded your skillset. You can now apply for jobs and projects that require these skills. However, you may not ever see a job listing that states “the ideal candidate will have spent at least one year developing his/her personal brand.” You can make many choices, such as learning new skills, that will yield short-term benefits. However, personal branding is almost always a long-term effort.



You're Uncomfortable With Attention

You Feel You Have No Time

You Fear That You Will Lose Friends

I have met many people who are extremely successful, but they don't want the attention that comes with personal branding. They don't want to talk to the press, give interviews, or share their stories. They just want to lead a good life.

When you build a strong personal brand, you will get noticed by other people. People may seek you out for your opinions and ideas. They will invite you to share your time with them. If you want to build a great personal brand, you will thrive when you distinguish yourself. However, if you just want to be left alone, then the personal branding journey is not for you.



If you are like many IT professionals, you are already swamped with work. You may feel that you currently have no time to devote to this personal branding exercise. You may already be working nights and weekends in your job. You may ask yourself, "If I begin the personal branding journey, what strain will I put on myself, my family, and my friends?" This question is perfectly understandable.

I have heard many people tell me that when they are done with their current projects, they will look at their personal brands in detail. While sometimes it's true that specific projects consume all of your time and energy, that's also a warning sign. You've likely become caught up in the technology rat race, and you're scrambling to stay current.

If you focus solely on day-to-day projects, you will continue to scamper on the wheel. You will make incremental progress and may even see some small successes; however, you will find it difficult to thrive. Although, I have to say that personal branding is not hard work if you establish the right configurations. You have to learn to get high leverage on everything that you do. Leverage is such a key concept that it's worth its own discussion in a separate document. Here, I'll just say that leverage goes far beyond simple concepts of time management. Leverage means you must change your mindset and behaviors to focus on the highest value opportunities.

I have heard IT professionals say that they are afraid that they will lose their friends during the personal branding journey. These professionals fear that people will disappear from their lives if they are no longer like them and among them. Once you start building your personal brand, you will have no option but to grow.

If your friends are not growing as fast as you are growing, some of them may feel uncomfortable around you. You and your friends may be perfectly OK to continue your friendship, but you might also drift apart.

Some people may decide that they want to avoid suffering and loss. So, they delay their personal-branding journeys. Maybe they fear that if they lose their current friends they will be lonely. Who will share their joys and help celebrate their successes? When you build your personal brand, you will have many opportunities to create new friendships. You won't be alone—unless you choose to be.

You Feel You Lack Accomplishments

You're Not Willing to Pay the Price

It May Not Seem Important

10. Sometimes people think that they should wait to build their personal brand until they have a few more lines on their resume. However, you can start building a personal brand wherever you are in life. You may be a college student, a young professional, a long-time technology specialist, or even an entrepreneur.

You can delay your journey to build a personal brand, but be aware that people will still be forming opinions about you each day. It is important for you to grow and become someone who will offer a personal brand experience that's valuable to other people.

Some people try to build a brand that is out of sync with the speed at which they are growing. It is almost similar to trying to build a super structure on a foundation that can hold only a single-family home. Personal branding will be of no use to you if you don't have the "stuff" to support your promise.

11. Some people want the benefits of personal branding, but they don't want to pay the price—the time and energy required to build a personal brand. Unfortunately, you can't have one without the other. This is more of an attitude issue where people "just want a sweet deal."

12. Despite all of the reasons I've listed, some people still don't see personal brands as important to their lives. These people are often very smart people who have heard about personal brands from different sources but have never become sold on the idea.



The How of Personal Branding

Now that we've looked at the reasons why some people neglect their personal brands, let's explore how you can build your personal brand. You will learn how to de-commoditize yourself and become known as a thriving, distinguished technology professional.

The Elevator Pitch: Positioning Yourself

When Venture Capitalists (VCs) meet with entrepreneurs, they expect to hear short elevator pitches that describe the businesses' core ideas. Often, these pitches only last two or three minutes. Many entrepreneurs rehearse their elevator pitches for weeks or months, because they know that VCs hear about thousands of business ideas but only fund a precious few. The elevator pitch serves as a great filter. Busy VCs can hear about many different business ideas and choose which ones they want to explore further. Most VCs will want to hear a compelling elevator pitch before they will even agree to invest their time reading a business plan.

When you go to a networking meeting, remember that the people you meet there are similar to venture capitalists. VCs have money to invest. That's their currency. At a networking event, people have attention to invest. Both money and time come in limited quantities. People will want to get the highest return for their investment. When you meet someone, you should try to catch his or her interest in the first forty-five to sixty seconds. If your initial pitch isn't compelling, your new-found acquaintances may soon decide to invest their assets (attention) somewhere that offers a higher Return on Investment (ROI).

So, before you go to your next networking event, think about your elevator pitch. What are one or two things that you want someone who meets you to remember about you? When I ask "What do you do?" or say "Tell me about yourself," I want you to catch my attention with something interesting. However, people often reply with bland responses. They say "I am a project manager" or "I am a software engineer." These people have almost no passion in their voices when they give these replies.

How do you expect me to remember another "project manager" or another "software engineer"? So many people offer the same skills. Why should I remember you? What could you do or say to "stand out" from the crowd in a short time? What can you do to catch my attention and encourage me to want to know more about you?

In a nutshell, you are your biggest asset. Take time to craft a compelling elevator pitch for yourself. You will see people take greater interest, and your effort will pay back big-time.



The Mix: Experience, Thought Leadership and Passion



Experience:

Many people express their seniority by stating how many years of experience they have. However, it's not the number of years of experience that counts.

What really matters is what you became through those years of experience. During our busy workdays, we typically forget to check whether we are leveraging all those years of experience into our present jobs and projects. So, when you design your personal brand, leverage your entire lifetime's experiences.



Thought-Leadership:

The next component in the personal-brand design process is to think about thought-leadership. What original ideas or knowledge do you bring to your job, your company, your clients, or your industry?



Passion:

Of course, we can't ignore passion in this equation. You need to love what you are doing. When you build a personal brand, people will frequently call on you to perform your unique capabilities. Position yourself so that you can do things that you're passionate about.

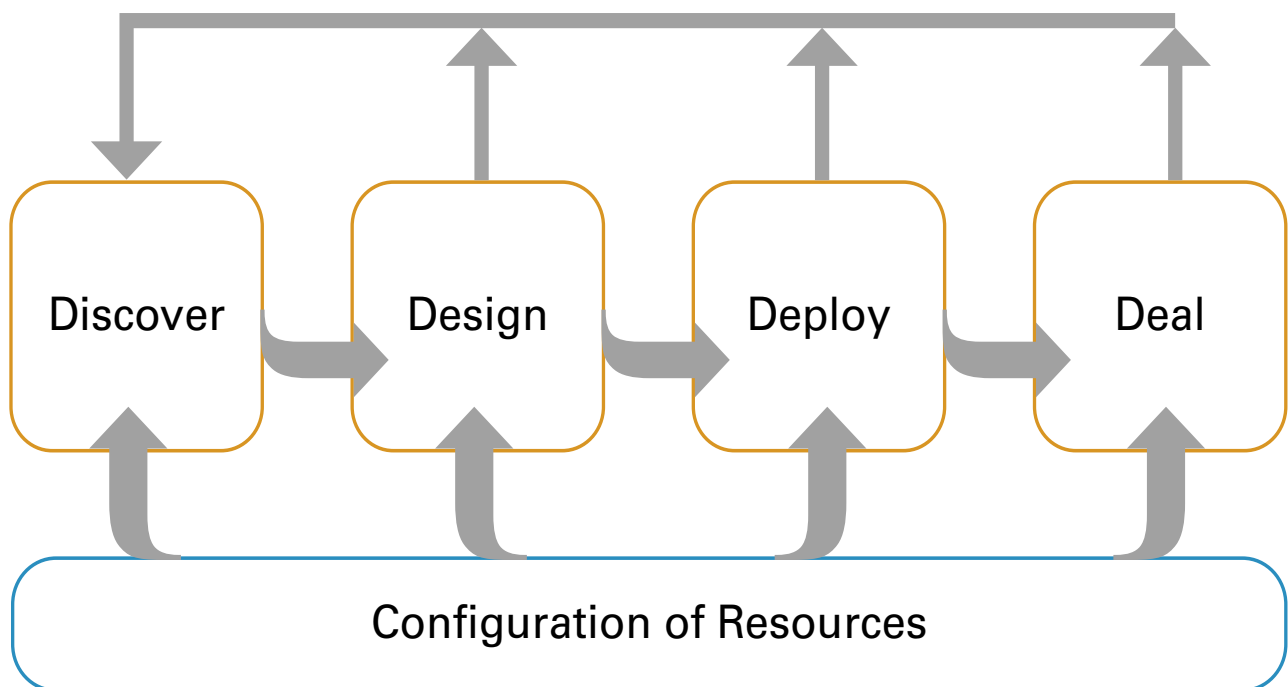
You should be able to create a compelling "who you are statement" around your experience, thought leadership, and passion. This statement should be unique to you. Once you ensure that your brand is relevant to the marketplace, you will attract substantially more attention than people in the commodity crowd.

4D Framework: Execution is Everything

Building a personal brand is always a journey and not just a destination. So, treat it like a “work in progress.” You are either growing or shrinking. There is no middle ground.

What could you do on a weekly basis to contribute towards your brand? What investments can you make to yourself so that you can see measurable progress in reasonable time? As a technology professional, there are many areas where you can focus on to start this journey.

Here is a four-part model for the personal brand journey:



4D Framework: Execution is Everything

Now, let's go over each of these four stages in a bit more detail:

Discover	Design	Deploy	Deal
The two questions to ask here are “How do you want to be remembered long after you are gone?” and “are you willing to give everything to make this vision a reality?”	A personal brand needs to be thoughtfully designed. The first thing to remember is that your lifetime is the time horizon for this exercise. Think how your past experience and your current strengths could be leveraged to build a powerful persona over the coming years. What could you be known for? How could each of your accomplishments during the next year contribute to this personality?	Personal brand building is not a solo sport! How can others see, touch and feel your brand? Could you publish articles in the relevant industry journals? Can you speak at conferences? Can you start a blog on your topic of expertise and draw attention? At which “exclusive clubs” can you play a prominent role to get your name out?	In this part of the journey, you must “walk the talk” and live up to your brand promise. Nothing is worse than making a promise and not living up to it.

While it appears that these stages are sequential, we often experience the process differently in real life. We sometimes return to earlier stages, refine our personal brands, and then proceed forward again. As you can see clearly from the framework, building your personal brand will be a significant project. It's a project that you won't be able to complete alone. You will need help from others.

Here are a few important things to remember about help:

- It's easier to get help when you don't need it than when you need it immediately.
- It's also easy to get help from people whom you have already helped before than get help from strangers and casual acquaintances.
- It's easy to get help when people know that you need help and are open to receive help from them.

We all (hopefully) have people around us who can help us, just like we can help people around us. Imagine you and the people around you are each pieces in a giant set of Lego blocks. You can configure these pieces (your resources) into many different shapes. Just like you will have a set of Lego blocks (resources) at your disposal, you yourself will be a Lego block (resource) in many other people's lives. Here's your challenge. During each stage of your personal-branding journey, configure all your available resources in the most optimum fashion. Help others configure their resources effectively too.

The Catalyst: Relevance at Every Interaction

You are always communicating, even when you are silent. Think about it. Let's say that you lock yourself away in a room far from everyone that you know. Even then, you are still communicating. You've signaled to people that you don't want to be around anyone. So, if you want build connections with people, you should develop your communication skills.

Relevance plays a key role in making your communications powerful. If you strive, in every interaction, to be relevant to the people that you are communicating with, then people will be eager to continue their conversations with you. Relevance acts as a true catalyst. Once people are open to receive communication with you, it will become easier for you to build your personal brand!



Stage One: Discover

When it comes to personal branding, no discussion is complete without talking about authenticity. If your brand does not represent who you really are, then you will have a tough time wearing masks for the rest of your life. On the other hand, if your personal brand is a true representation of “who you really are” it simplifies your life. It is therefore important to discover your true self, your strengths, and your passion.

Here are a few questions to consider:

What do you want your legacy to be? What do you want to be remembered for?

□

What are you passionate about?

□

What experience do you think will be valuable to the marketplace?

□

Where can you establish thought leadership?

□

Would you behave differently if you treated yourself like a business—“You Inc.”?

□

Thinking as if you were a company “You Inc.” will help you during the design phase. In order to be successful, a company needs positioning, marketing, sales, delivery and service (just to name a few functions). Your design should ensure that you are taking care of all these items for yourself.

Stage Two: Design

Once you discover who you are and what your brand should portray, the next step is to design an execution plan to make it a reality. If you are starting out on your personal branding journey, my suggestion would be to find your distinctive space. In other words, determine your ideal audience.

Your Audience:

Who will find you and your unique strengths valuable in the marketplace?

How much do you know about your audience?

What is your audience reading?

What clubs do they belong to?

Where do they live?

What are they worried about?

Who influences them?

Stage Two: Design

Other Resources:

How would you approach this personal branding project if you were executing it for one of your clients?

What kind of preparation would you make before you begin the client's project?

What kind of resources would you need?

What team would you have during each stage of the project?

What are the key milestones?

How would you measure your success?

Very few large-scale software projects can be executed by just one person. Often, these projects require a whole team with a diverse set of skills and experience. It is the same case here for the personal branding project. Try to partner with a team of people on your personal branding project. Approach this as if it is one of the biggest projects of your lifetime. It will be!

Stage Three: Deploy

Silicon Valley, where I live, is a very interesting place. It is filled with people who constantly generate fresh ideas. Sometimes, when I meet young entrepreneurs, they offer fascinating insights into recent announcements made by leading companies. Here are some examples of comments I have heard from young and aspiring entrepreneurs:

- ♦ “I knew this was coming. It was an obvious thing to do.”
- ♦ “I had the same idea a few years ago. I just didn’t act on it.”
- ♦ “I have a better idea than that. I don’t know why they don’t see it. If given a chance I can do better than that.”
- ♦ “I know what they are going to do next. I have been right the last few times, and I know I will be right this time, too.”

We all have plans. Ideas, on their own, have no great value unless you act on them. Personal branding is really no different. The grandest plans will make no difference if you don’t take actions to make them a reality.

You will spend a great deal of time in the Deploy phase, but you will never truly complete it. You will always be deploying your personal brand. This is where the biggest difference between a traditional project and a personal-branding project. You must continue to find a venue for your voice and express yourself.

Here are a few venues for you to consider:

Whitepapers	Blogs (your own and others)	Magazines and newspapers
Websites	Clubs	Professional organizations in your “space”
Networking groups like SIGs (special interest groups)	Conferences—where you can be speaking or on a panel	Non-profit organizations
Books— traditional books or e-books	Newsletters	Squidoo lenses

Whatever venue you choose, be sure to add value by offering new insights and providing thought leadership.

Stage: Deal

Last but not least, you need to deal with the consequences of building your brand. Usually the consequences are quite positive. However, you also have a responsibility to your brand. You must live up to the promise made by your brand.

At first, it might seem simple to live up to the promise of your brand. However, you will face difficulties in the following situations:

1. You made the wrong promise in the first place.
2. You don't have the capacity to fulfill the promise.
3. You don't have the capacity to build on your success—leading to eventual failure.

You will quickly lose credibility if your brand is not authentic to whom you really are. If you succeed with some marketing gimmicks to establish a brand that is not authentic, it will be hard to live up to the promise, and people will see through it quickly. That, in turn, will cause you to lose credibility. If you can't live up to your brand promise a few times, your brand will start to disintegrate.

"It is not stickiness, polish, uniqueness, or cleverness that makes a brand a brand. It is truth."

- Harry Beckwith

If you have had difficulties with authenticity and follow-through, start thinking about how you hold yourself accountable for small promises that you make. Do you keep promises that you make to yourself? Do you keep promises to people around you—family members and friends? Once you develop consistency in this part of your life, you can improve your ability to keep the promises that you make to the world.

Once again, here are the four stages of brand building:

Discover: Determine who you are and what your strengths are so you know what promises you can make

Design: Determine who your audience are so that you know to whom you will make the promise to

Deploy: Where you will make the promise

Deal: You will live up to the promise you made

And then of course, you repeat and fine-tune as necessary.

My Personal Journey: Trials and Tribulations

I have been living in the technology world for more than fifteen years now.

Before I started my entrepreneurial journey, I was mostly involved in customer-facing implementations in the areas of Wholesale Banking, Customer Relationship Management, and eBusiness.

My work took me places. I lived and worked in five different countries. While I had a number of success stories in this world and people around me recognized and respected me for what I brought to the table, my circle of influence and my brand was limited to friends, past and present colleagues, vendors and clients. The impact I could create was also fleeting— meaning I was moving between engagements and technologies so fast that it was hard for people to “box” me with something that had a longer life.

At that point in my life, I knew the value of personal brands. I read about one book a week, and I had followed my hero [Tom Peters](#)' work on personal branding for a long time. I just hadn't done anything in my life to build my personal brand. I knew the lessons, but I hadn't applied them.

In late 2000, I co-founded [CIGNEX](#), an open-source company. As I tried to raise money for the company, the value of a personal brand became very evident to me. It was clear that I had to take action. Thus, I started my journey of building a personal brand. Although, I hadn't created the 4D model then, I can fit some of my actions into those categories to put some structure into this story.



My Personal Journey: Discover

Like many people, I had put my personal brand project on the back-burner for a long time.

I had several false starts and made marginal progress in the early 2000s. However, during these years, I had discovered four areas (or roles) where I found flow in my life.

The four roles that got me excited when I engaged in them were:

Entrepreneur: I love to build companies. I think startups are a place where all people involved have no choice but to be highly creative and innovative. These situations are where the best parts of me come out.

Author: I love to write about my entrepreneurial journeys and experiences. I had written and published six books before I was sixteen, but then I almost stopped writing. I fed myself the standard excuse. I told myself that I had “no time.” When I wrote a couple of articles for magazines, I realized that I loved writing and wanted to get back into writing as a hobby.

Student: I love reading and have been reading business and management book for more than a decade. On average, I read about one book a week. I am also fortunate to have three mentors, connections to thought leaders, and also friends who are an inspiration to the people around them. I learn from all of them almost every day.

Teacher: My first job was in the teaching world. I realized that I still loved teaching. However, I now wanted to teach different topics. My teaching experiences in the recent past were ad-hoc at best. I wanted to structure this aspect of my life.

That completed my discovery exercise. While it might sound like I discovered my passions one afternoon while casually sipping a venti coffee at Starbucks, this journey really took me a few months of soul searching. As I thought about my life, I zeroed in on these four areas as the ones that made the most sense in my life.

My Personal Journey: Design

I then spent a significant amount of time in the design phase. However, for most of the time that I was there, I didn't even realize that I was there.

The outcome of this was not a project plan or a formal design document. Everything was sketchy for me. My whole focus was to get more leverage in my life. I wanted to get and give more value out of my time.

Here are the four key elements of my high-level design:

1. Writing a book:

My earlier writings were all fiction. Since I was not interested in either reading or writing fiction anymore, I decided to focus on non-fiction. That decision was also in line with the identity that I wanted to build for myself.

2. Start blogging:

At the time, my thought was to start a blog that will help in my book publicity. I had never imagined the kind of welcome that my blog would receive.

3. Helping other entrepreneurs succeed:

Having successfully bootstrapped a company, I thought that it was time for me to help a few other entrepreneurs in their startup journeys. But I had no clue what and how I would do anything.

4. Teaching:

All I had envisioned at that time was that I would start speaking more at conferences and industry events.

My Personal Journey: Deploy

Laying the Ground-Work for the Book

The real implementation of the plan began somewhere around August of 2004. I had a rough idea for a book for technology professionals. Outsourcing was becoming commonplace, and knowledge workers were getting commoditized at a rapid rate. The only ones who had a chance of succeeding and thriving in this environment were the ones that were able to distinguish themselves. Of course, there were no tools to help these technology professionals in that journey. Here was an opportunity for me. I had lived and worked in multiple countries, and I had keenly observed the careers of hundreds of technology professionals. Some people had created remarkable careers for themselves while others watched their successes wither away. Many professionals struggled and moved sideways for a long time.

I had about twenty notebooks that were filled with many lists and notes:

- ◆ Practices of people who had distinguished themselves
- ◆ Tips for life, productivity, and relationship building
- ◆ Techniques to get more value out of your time
- ◆ Other observations that I had collected in the last ten years

September 2004 was a busy month for me. I would write about four to six hours every week-night and about ten hours each weekend. I went through all of my twenty notebooks to identify the best ideas for the book. At the end of the month I had the rough draft ready. Since I literally write by hand instead of type, Kavitha (my wife) helped me to transfer everything that I wrote into a Word document. That makes her my first collaborator for the project. I felt that I now had the makings of a book. I was wrong.

They say that planning and design are hard. I agree. However, even the best plans are of no use if they are not executed well.

“A good plan violently executed today, is far and away better than a perfect plan tomorrow”

- General George S. Patton

Collaborating with my Editor

In November 2004, I met with my friend Karthik Sundaram. I soon realized how far away I was from the final draft. Karthik gladly accepted to work with me on the project. I had known him for a few years but had not worked on an editing project with him. So, I didn't know what to expect. To start the whole process, Karthik edited the first chapter and sent it back to me. When I opened the document, I felt as if the document had taken a bloodbath. Karthik had edited the document with the tracking option enabled. The many changes made the document look red from beginning to end. My self-esteem dipped, but I realized that these changes were for the better. I learned a lot from that first editing exercise. This became a joint project for both of us. We collaborated, argued, fought and finally came up with a version that we both were happy with.

I have to say that the book is not what it looks like now. Karthik had woven his magic throughout the book. I was fortunate to have found Karthik. He was just like a Swiss-army knife—always helpful. He aided me with almost everything with the book—including identifying the models for the cover, photo shoot, and layout design of the book and the cover page.

My Personal Journey: Deploy

The Jackpot: Foreword by Tom Peters

When I started on the book project, I had a dream (not literally) that I would get the foreword written by [Tom Peters](#). Throughout the journey, I shared this dream with people around me only to hear many reasons why it wouldn't happen.

I won't go into the details of how it all happened, but it did. In February of 2005, Tom Peters agreed to write the foreword for the book. That did not change the rules of the game—it changed the game itself.

Searching for the Publisher

When I started the book, I had not thought of going with a traditional publisher. Self-publishing seemed the only available option. Maybe I was lazy, maybe I didn't think that I had a chance with a traditional publisher, or maybe I felt it would take too long to locate a traditional publisher.

One afternoon in February 2005, I met with [Tim Sanders](#) for lunch. Tim casually mentioned to me that I should forget about the self-publishing route and locate an agent and a publisher quickly. Tim offered to help, but he said he would only help after I tried first on my own. That made sense. I was convinced that I should get a publisher, but I didn't have a clue how to go about getting one.

My network came to my rescue again. Through a mutual friend, I met my agent [Bill Gladstone](#) in early March. Bill really liked my book, and he soon facilitated a deal for me with a boutique publisher in New York called [Select Books](#).

Starting my blog: Life Beyond Code

February 2005 was significant in one more respect. I still remember that date. On February 14th, I started blogging at Life Beyond Code. John Keegan at [Blogharbor](#) helped set up the blog, and he continues to provide me with all the support on the technology-front related to the blog, so that I can just focus on my writing.

For several months, my blog received just a few visitors here and there. I followed the advice of my mentors and teachers and focused my writing on how technology professionals can get the most out of their work and life. That discipline and focus has rewarded me well. Within a year, my blog had grown. It now receives more than 200,000 page views per month from visitors across the world.



Tom Peters

My Personal Journey: Deploy

More Help from Thought Leaders and Friends

I am fortunate again to receive endorsements (and advance praise) from a number of extremely successful corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, thought leaders, investors and authors.

My friends continued to help. While I won't repeat my book's acknowledgement section, I have to mention the generosity of two of my friends—who walked the extra mile to help me complete the book.

1. Bill Sherman of [Intulogy](#) went through every chapter and provided great inputs to make every chapter sparkle. Bill continues to help me with most of my projects. In addition, he serves as my writing coach.
2. Don Moyer of [Thought Form Design](#) for donating one of his masterpieces to be used in the book. I am sure that Don and I will work on another project soon.

The Book is published (Finally)

In September 2005, exactly a year after I started writing, my book Beyond Code was published in the United States. The next month, I was featured as [Tom's Cool Friend](#) on his website.

The Magic of the Publicist: Maryglenn McCombs

The work of an author does not end when the book is published. In fact, a new chapter begins. As an author, I could do my bit to get the publicity, but my publicist Maryglenn McCombs added the much needed boost.

A partial list of reviews and sightings on the book is published on a Squidoo lens at [Squidoo Lens: Beyond Code](#).

My Personal Journey: Key Points to Note

Every one of us has a story in us. I have just scratched the surface on building my personal brand. I've shared these details to show you how many people have helped me build my personal brand and achieve this success. It is very clear to me that acting alone, I could never have achieved even 10% of what I have been able to achieve in the last couple of years.

Lastly, I am thankful to GOD for giving me the wisdom to not try to do everything on my own. I have competence in certain domains. I can guarantee that I don't have competence in all the domains that are involved in the journey from writing a book to getting it published and beyond.

Lessons Learned

Here are a few lessons that I learned during this two-year period. Some of these lessons I had to learn the hard way. I hope you won't make the same mistakes that I made.

They say experience is a great teacher—it's true. But you don't have to experience everything personally. You can also learn from experiences of others. So, here are some lessons that I can share with you:

Lesson One:

Build Your Personal Brand Before You Need It

It is easier and less stressful to build a personal brand when you don't immediately need one. Also, if you are embarking on a personal brand building journey because your current ambitions and workplace needs it, you may already be too late. If your life and work need the power of your personal brand, you are probably already running short of time to get something done. At that time, it would seem odd to invest in building your personal brand.

Unfortunately, none of us can create more time just because we need it. We have to make the most out of whatever time we have. When I look back, I know that a solid personal brand would have greatly helped me when I co-founded CIGNEX. If you don't see a need to build your personal brand today, think about tomorrow or the day after. You may need one in the future, and you may not have time to build it as quickly as you need it.

Lesson Two:

Give and Get a lot of Help

Whatever I have become, it is because of the help provided by a number of people. It is ridiculous for me to even think that I could have reached anywhere close to where I am without getting a lot of help. Also, help is not a one-way street. You have to give help first before you get it. From my personal experience, I can confidently say that the more I helped people, the more help I received, maybe not always from the same people but maybe somewhere else.

It will be unfair if I don't mention the role played by my mentors during these two years. My mentors have always asked me insightful questions, held me accountable for results, made me think through the design of my plans, and provided much needed encouragement and boost during times when there was nothing but despair.

Help is available from outside. The question is: Are you willing to pay the price to get that help? The price may sometimes be money, but that's not always the case. It can be as simple as providing enough help to other people before you need it yourself.

Lesson Three:

Leverage All Your Projects

If all your projects are not connected in some meaningful way, it will hurt you rather than help you. If there is one word that you should be obsessed with for the rest of your life it should be LEVERAGE.

When you connect all your projects, you get more out of your time. When you get more out of your time, you will reach your goals (including building your personal brand) sooner.

You might need to re-organize your current projects, change your role, or even realign your job. You should be ready for these changes and welcome them.

Lesson Four:

Practice Patience

Things don't always work out the ways you expect. You can plan, design and execute perfectly but still fail at some of your initiatives. How you treat your failures and setbacks will have more significance than the actual failures and setbacks themselves. While I don't talk openly about all my failures, you can be sure that I have had my fair share.

Some goals will take time to achieve. Just because you are in a hurry, the world does not move fast to meet your needs. If you have unreasonable expectations about how soon you will see results, you will only become frustrated.

However, don't let yourself become so patient that you become complacent. Don't wait indefinitely for results or situations to change. You should develop the wisdom you will need to recognize when to wait and when to change tracks.

Lesson Five:

Be Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

If I look back at the last two years, there was change written all over the place. I don't think I was prepared for all the change that was coming my way. If I were to do this all over again, I think that I would do many things differently, because I now have an idea of the degree of change that I should expect. This time I would be more comfortable with the uncomfortable moments that come with change.

You will never be completely ready for all the change that will come our way. But by just being aware of the amount of change that you will face, you will take the first step to adapting to these changes.



Lesson Six:

Who You Are Determines What Opportunities Open Up

As I made progress in my personal brand building journey, several new opportunities opened up. I met a number of interesting people who were willing to transact with me in some form or fashion. Looking back, I can confidently say that some of these new opportunities are only opening up because of "who I was becoming." In fact, if I had not invested in the personal branding journey, I would have not felt any loss—because I would not have been presented with these opportunities anyway. You can't lose what you would not have deserved in the first place.

Lesson Seven:

Balance is Critical

Anything taken to an extreme is not good. Brand building is no exception. When you start building some momentum, you tend to get sucked into this and spend more time to get more success which in turn will require you to put in more time. This is a vicious cycle that can have unintended and negative side-effects of losing balance in life. Someone else could pay a big price, and it may be your family or close friends.

When is a Good Time to Start?

When I speak on the topic of personal branding, one or two people in the crowd always ask me when would be a good time for them to start building their personal brands. If I can give a one-word answer for this question, it would be— **YESTERDAY!**

Personally, I feel your brand building exercise should start as early possible. Ideally, you should start it during your student life. Of course, brands evolve over time and you can make course corrections as you grow.

If you wait for a good time to “look into” this personal branding exercise, I can assure you that it won’t happen in the near future. Here’s the simple reason. There is no immediate, short-term benefit that you will receive through personal brand building. There will always be several projects that will yield short-term results that will compete for your attention and most often, these other projects **WIN!**

Here is a quick comparison:

Factor	Short-term projects	Brand-building initiatives
Time to results	Short-term	Long-term
Attractiveness	High	Low
Accountability	High	Low
Long-term benefit	Suspect	High
ROI	Varies	High
Outside Support	High	Low

As you can see, the odds are against you. The only person who has the capability to charge-ahead against all these will be **YOU.**

Good luck!

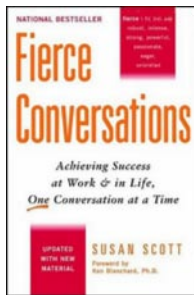
Personal Branding Reading List

Here is a reading list that will help you in your “de-commoditization” journey. This list is by no means complete. I provide it as a starter set to encourage you to think in the right directions.

	Book	Why you should read it?
	<p><i>Brand You 50</i> by Tom Peters</p>	<p>Tom was the first one to write about “Brand You” more than a decade ago. This book has fifty gems from the Guru on the topic of personal branding.</p>
	<p><i>Purple Cow</i> by Seth Godin</p>	<p>Purple Cow talks about creating remarkable companies. This book aims to transform you to be remarkable. Many concepts that Godin teaches in <i>Purple Cow</i> can be applied (with some changes) to yourself as a person.</p>
	<p><i>Soar with Your Strengths</i> by Donald O. Clifton</p>	<p>A masterpiece urging us to spend more time on our strengths than fiddling with our weaknesses. When you want to build a personal brand, you definitely want to build it based on your strengths.</p>
	<p><i>Influence</i> by Robert Cialdini</p>	<p>Great leaders are also great influencers. You can learn the art of influencing if you read and apply the principles outlined in this book. The insights that I got from this book changed the way I deal with people—especially in sales situations.</p>

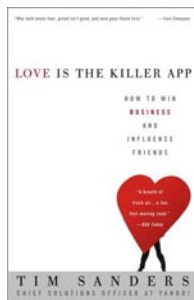
Book

Why you should read it?



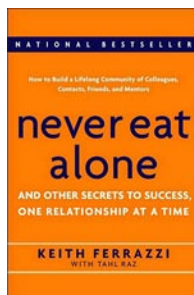
Fierce Conversations by Susan Scott

Don't be misled by the title. This book is all about learning to have authentic conversations with people that matter to you. It is targeted at CEOs but the principles outlined are really applicable to anyone.



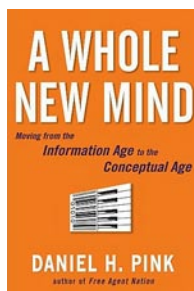
Love is the Killer App by Tim Sanders

Sanders clearly explains the importance of knowledge (why you should read more), network (how you should leverage your network) and compassion (dealing with people). Since I read that book I have made more than a hundred new connections between the people in my network without expecting a personal gain. It has worked great so far!



Never Eat Alone by Keith Ferrazzi

This is a great book on networking. Keith practices what he preaches, and he has applied the same principles to become one of the most networked individuals in the world today



A Whole New Mind by Daniel Pink

What got you here may not get you there. This great book highlights that it may be time to sharpen our right-brain skills.

Additional Resources

1. Finding Inspiration

Over the last fifteen years or so I have read more than a thousand books. More than a hundred books have provided me the inspiration and knowledge to get where I am today. I have compiled a partial list of such books on [Squidoo](http://www.squidoo.com/inspire).

Here is the link: <http://www.squidoo.com/inspire>

2. Distinguish Yourself

In this age of outsourcing and commoditization, the rules have changed. If you are among the average people who just barely produce the results that are expected of you, then you will fast lose your competitive advantage. You have no choice but to distinguish yourself. I have more than a hundred articles on the same topic on my blog.

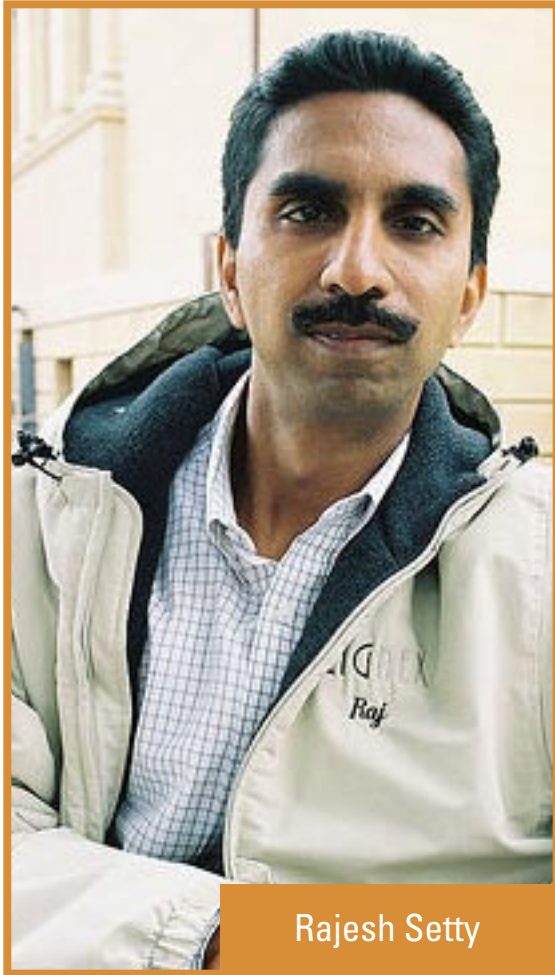
Here is the Squidoo page that has all these links: <http://www.squidoo.com/distinguishyourself>

3. Blogging Starter Checklist

One way to announce to the world about your existence is to create a high-quality blog on one or more topics of your strengths. If you intend to create one or you want to make your blog a better one, you may find some tips on my blogging starter checklist.

Here is the link: <http://www.squidoo.com/blogstarter>

About the Author



Rajesh Setty is an Entrepreneur, Author, Student and a Teacher.

He currently serves as the chairman of **CIGNEX** Technologies, Inc, which he co-founded in late 2000. Setty's latest book '*Beyond Code*' (Foreword by Tom Peters) was published late 2005. Setty speaks and writes frequently on topics that include Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Open Source. Rajesh maintains a blog called Life Beyond Code.

Praise for “Beyond Code”

“The theory and practice described in BEYOND CODE are right on. Read it as if your life depends on it. It DOES!”

- From the Foreword by [Tom Peters](#)

“Rajesh understands what makes the biggest difference in project and technology management: People. This book will give any reader a tool kit to avoid “thing thinking” and manage way beyond simple code. Read it and grow.”

- [Tim Sanders](#), Author of *Love is the Killer App*

“Beyond Code is a little powerhouse of a book – an explosive mix of inspiration and instruction, exercises and enthusiasm.”

- [Dan Pink](#), author of *A Whole New Mind*

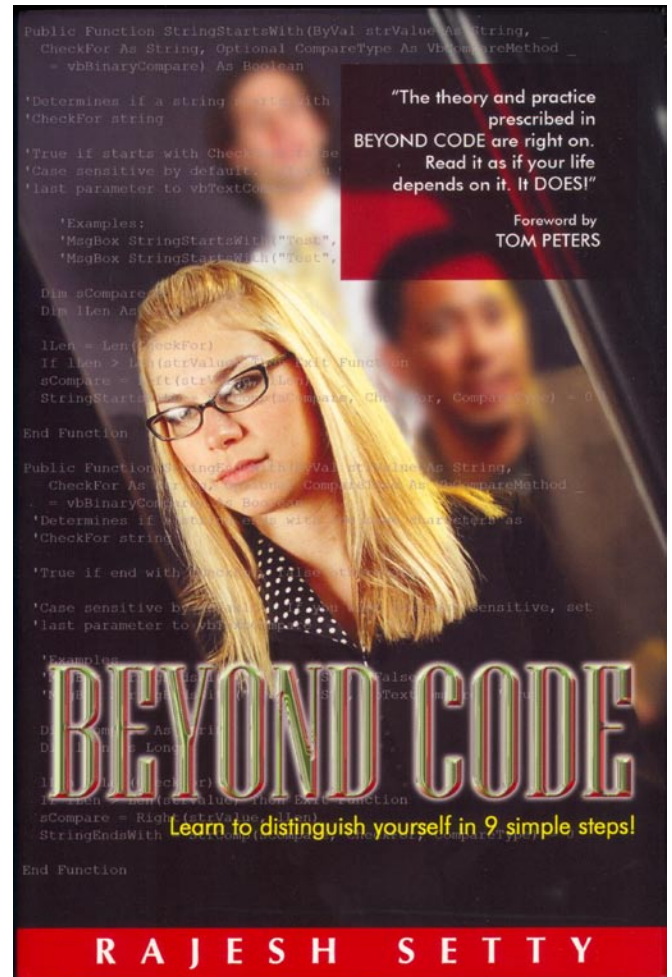
“Beyond Code is not just great for software consultants – It’s great for ALL consultants.”

- [Marshall Goldsmith](#), author of *The Leader of the Future*

“Beyond Code is packed with wisdom. It should be required reading for every young professional, and remedial reading for many further along in their careers.”

- [David Maister](#), Author and Consultant

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Visit www.intulogy.com or contact [Jon Campbell](#) at 877.566.9835.

Moving from coding to leading

You've seen the pressure that coding puts on people and companies. Cutting-edge skills quickly decay into low-value commoditized services. Every few years, there's a huge scramble to learn new skills and avoid code obsolescence.

Rajesh Setty, author of *Beyond Code* with foreword by Tom Peters, says that there's a way to escape this race to the bottom. When you shift your mindset from coding to leading, you distinguish yourself and de-commoditize your company's services. You produce high-value experiences that command premium rates from clients.

If you're weary of the skills race, then the **Delta P Delta T** workshop will show you nine ways to distinguish yourself and your company. Instead of burning the midnight oil learning new code, you'll learn how to achieve your career goals (ΔP) and reduce the time it takes to get there (ΔT).

During the one-day **Delta P Delta T** workshop, you'll discover how to restore balance to your life without having to sacrifice your career ambitions. You'll practice the internal attitudes and the external behaviors that produce memorable, branded experiences for your clients—internal and external.

You'll head back to work with the **Delta P Delta T** toolkit. These multimedia resources will expand your leadership capabilities and prepare you for larger challenges. You will be able to help your company grow and move past its competitors.

As an IT professional, you can do what everyone else does—learn new coding skills that quickly depreciate in value. However, if you want to distinguish yourself and accelerate your career, then join us for the **Delta P Delta T** workshop.



"Your life will be constantly re-shaped by the people you meet along the way—if you are open to it."

Rajesh Setty

The Delta P Delta T Workshop

- Full-day, interactive workshop
- Led by Intulogy's training specialists

The Delta P Delta T Toolkit

- A copy of *Beyond Code*
- A 30 minute **Delta P Delta T** DVD
- Self-study articles and worksheets
- 52 weekly podcasts on "How to Distinguish Yourself"

Your Investment

- \$497 per learner
- Includes the **Delta P Delta T** workshop and toolkit

More Info

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