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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 194: DAWN EDMISTON – TAKING STOCK OF YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Dawn Edmiston

Individuals should think about their personal brand as what people say about you when you walk out of the room.

Female Speaker

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Ken White

Welcome to Leadership & Business, the podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. Sharing strategies, information, and insight that help you become a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, now that we're settled into 2023, it's a good time of the year to take stock of your personal brand. The way you're perceived by others is important, yet many professionals rarely take the time to ensure their brand is up-to-date, relevant, and visible. For example, when was the last time you carefully reviewed your LinkedIn profile? Well, your brand and the tools you use to promote it require your attention. Dawn Edmiston is a professor of marketing at the William & Mary School of Business. She's an author, researcher, and personal branding expert. She joins us on the podcast today to discuss your personal brand, how you can be sure it's relevant, and why this time of the year is a good time for a personal brand update. Here's our conversation with Dawn Edmiston.

Ken White

Dawn, thank you for joining us. It's great to see you. Thanks for being on the podcast.

Dawn Edmiston

It's always so good to see you, too.

Ken White

And you are pretty special. We should lay this right out for our listeners. You have now appeared on the podcast more than any other guest. How about that?

Dawn Edmiston

I will take that. That is a great compliment. I appreciate it. There's no place I'd rather be.

Ken White

Well, thank you. We're almost at 200 episodes, and this is the fourth time you've been on, partly because it's you and partly because of your expertise. And this is something that really resonates with the listeners of the podcast is your personal brand. For newcomers to that term, what is a personal brand?

Dawn Edmiston

I like to share that individuals should think about their personal brand as what people say about you when you walk out of the room. And I think it's important to understand how it is that you're perceived. It's somewhat ironic that we even refer to it as a personal brand because it really is about how others perceive us. So it's not about you. It's about your audience.

Ken White

But you have some control over the audience.

Dawn Edmiston

And you should take control of your personal brand. In this era of online environments and digital technologies, if you do not choose to explicitly develop your personal brand, it will be implicitly developed for you.

Ken White

Great. Yeah. Just like a business, if you don't have your brand, your competitors will be more than happy to create one for you.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

Yeah. Wow. How do you suggest people create their personal brand? Are there some steps? What do you recommend?

Dawn Edmiston

A personal brand should have two elements to it. You should have an introspective element where you've thought about your why. Why is it that I do what I do? What is it that I want to do? Why is it that I contribute the value that I do? And then you should always have that external perspective. So once you have an understanding of what you believe that you do and the value that you contribute, you should confirm that valuation with others. So individuals that know you well, whether it's family, friends, coworkers, ask them to share three adjectives to describe you. Ask them to share if you can talk about one experience that I made an impact on you. What was that experience, and why? And then, you need to determine what I thought I was representing. Is that truly what's being understood? And then refine your personal brand as needed.

Ken White

So you create it, and then you have to live it, of course, and demonstrate it. And then promotion then is a piece of that as well.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes. It's even hard at this point to refer to it as a personal brand because that seems to be a tactic, where a personal brand is actually a journey. And it evolves as you evolve. Which is one of the reasons I think you're able to continue to invite me back because we're never having the same conversation twice. Because as the market evolves, we evolve or we should evolve.

Ken White

Some say it's good every once in a while, whether it's annually or some period of time to sort of take stock of the personal brand. Do you agree?

Dawn Edmiston

Yes. Yes, I do agree. And I think sometimes that individuals are hesitant to pursue personal branding because they think it will take significant time. And, you know, we live in a world where 24/7 just doesn't even seem to be enough time to do what we need to do. But I reassure individuals for a few minutes every week, even a few minutes every month if that's all you have to give it. If you're intentional about your personal brand. Meaning, let's use LinkedIn as an example since that is a platform for expressing and networking, expressing our personal brand, and networking through professional development if you can just spend a few minutes every month making a connection, engaging with other individuals, sharing an article that you found of value that month, that's what you need to do. And it doesn't have to be that you're engaged in social media 2 hours a day, 4 hours a week. It literally if you can dedicate a few minutes to it, intentional minutes, that can be very helpful to ensuring that you continue to have a personal brand that evolves with you.

Ken White

LinkedIn, is that number one?

Dawn Edmiston

LinkedIn still does tend to be the professional development platform. That has not changed. In fact, when Microsoft purchased LinkedIn a few years ago, that somewhat cemented LinkedIn's position as a platform because Microsoft has continued to invest in them. They don't want LinkedIn just to be seen as the place that you go to when you need a job. They want you to view LinkedIn as a place for professional development, where you network, where you now have LinkedIn learning, where you can learn how to build your skills and promote your skills and connect with others. So it's really become a very powerful community. And yes, if you only have a few minutes to dedicate to your social media efforts for personal branding, LinkedIn is the place to start.

Ken White

Yeah, it really has changed, hasn't it? When it launched, it was a Rolodex.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, in fact, yes, it was very simple. But when we think about Facebook, when Facebook launched, it really was a yearbook, the days when Facebook and Yearbook. And now it's become a community. And really that's how social media has gained value and it's all about building community. So it's not enough about simply please do not think of LinkedIn or when you're personal branding, it's about what you're posting. It's about how you're engaging with others. And it's not about the quantity, it truly is about the quality. Yes, you do have to have a certain quantity. You do have to be involved. You do have to be there. But I don't want you, or don't need you, or don't even recommend that you post six times a day, six times a month. That would be just fine. And again, if it takes a minute each post, that's that six minutes that you've dedicated to it.

Ken White

So if a listener is saying, I really haven't looked at my personal brand for a while, I'll go, I'll check on LinkedIn, what should they look for? What are some of the things they need to clean up?

Dawn Edmiston

The first thing that you need to think about is where you are from a professional perspective. Your personal brand should be reflective not only of who you are but who you want to be and what you want to become. So, for example, in 2023, you know, as we move from, you know, the great resignation into, you know, all of these new opportunities that individuals are starting to pursue. I often talked about the importance of being able to

reframe our experience. So, for example, you might be an accountant who is looking to move in an entirely different field. And there are some real skills, transferable skills that accountants can use in a multitude of fields. The keen attention to detail, being able to work with diverse clientele, project management, those are all skills that could also be transferred into arts management. I mean, something so very different but very valuable and transferable skills. So if you haven't taken the time to look at your LinkedIn profile or really thought about how your personal brand is perceived, now is the time to do that. And again, audit not only where you are but where you want to be. And be certain that it's congruent. Be certain that your LinkedIn profile is reflective of that individual and that value that you want to contribute moving forward.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Dawn Edmiston in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. The world is changing like we've never seen before, and that means change for business and your role in it. You can sit on the sidelines and watch things evolve, or you can be a part of creating the future. If you want the tools and education needed to succeed in the years ahead, we invite you to consider the MBA program at William & Mary. Wherever you happen to be in your career, William & Mary has an MBA program for you. The full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA all taught by the number one-ranked MBA faculty in America. Take charge of your future. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary at wm.edu. Now back to our conversation with Dawn Edmiston.

Ken White

How much do employers go to LinkedIn to look for new employees?

Dawn Edmiston

Nearly 100%. I don't, I don't know, and even if an organization is telling you that they do not, the likelihood is that they are. And their HR department perhaps told them that they should not have stated that publicly. And that is the truth. And individuals will search for you. It's part of our daily lives. And so, again, if you do not choose to have a presence, your presence will be built by others. So and LinkedIn, for it being one of the most reputable, well-known platforms, also means that if you're on that platform, you tend to rank high naturally in the Google organic searches. And Google still owns 92% of the search market. So if you have a LinkedIn profile, there is a very good chance, and a personalized LinkedIn profile, a personalized URL, there is a very good chance that when your name is searched, that will be one of the first responses that's returned in the search.

Ken White

You do some interesting things and have your students do a very interesting project regarding video and LinkedIn. Can you tell us about that?

Dawn Edmiston

I do. In fact, we call it the perfect pitch. So it leverages actually YouTube and LinkedIn to your comment earlier about how marketing has evolved, how personal branding has evolved, and LinkedIn has evolved. So LinkedIn now encourages you to embed video, embed media, have featured media within the LinkedIn platform, and in many ways, is serving that you no longer have to have your own website. For example, you can have your own LinkedIn profile, and it can really serve to be a portfolio of you and your work. So The Perfect Pitch video is a 60-second video in which I challenge students to think about how they would convey their value to others in a very creative manner. And of course, William & Mary's students constantly serve as a source of inspiration for me. These videos have now received more than 100,000 views. And I like to think that it's because not just about the content, but about how the content is delivered in a very engaging environment. So in many aspects, individuals would rather engage with you on video than on a one-page static resume. And so if we can create that experiential element of it, it really elevates your brand to the next level.

Ken White

Some of these videos are fantastic, right? Wow. You look at that and say. I'd hire that individual.

Dawn Edmiston

And that is the point.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

And it really becomes a distinct competitive advantage for our students because they can use these videos not only in their LinkedIn profiles but if they happen to have networked at a professional event. They can follow up with a recruiter and include a link to that video and share with them. Use it as an opportunity for another touch point and another chance to tell their story.

Ken White

Yeah, great differentiation.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, yes, yes.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

And it also emphasizes the value of storytelling. Individuals can share with you their credentials their titles, but what you're truly going to recall about individuals are their life stories, and what matters to them and, what is it that they did that mattered to others, and how could they potentially bring that value to your organization.

Ken White

As our listeners are doing, they're taking stock of their personal brand and their social media presence, taking a look at LinkedIn, making sure that looks great. What else? Any other channels? Where do you recommend people go next and do next?

Dawn Edmiston

You need to know your audience, and you cannot be all things to all people. I get exhausted just thinking about that proposition. And it's really important that you know your audience. Who is it that you want to reach? And there can be instances where it might not make sense for you to be on Twitter, for example, because your audience is just not there. But if they're on Instagram, then that's where you need to be. So if you're very visual, if you're working in a world where visual and video and those elements are important, then you need to be on Instagram. If you're working in an environment where you want to be able to share resources and insights, and quick thoughts, then Twitter is a good channel for you to be there. I think it's just so critical that we understand who our audience is because we all have limited resources, and that could just simply be the number of hours in a day. And so we want to be really focused upon making the most with what we have.

Ken White

I don't know that people do that very often. Think of the audience first. They tend to think of, at least in my experience, they think of the channel, the outlet first.

Dawn Edmiston

Sure. And again, I think that as a marketer, it's always audience-customer-driven. And I recall having read many years ago how Oprah Winfrey, perhaps one of the most famous, if not one of the most famous personal brands in the world, really did not want to be associated with that term. She did not want to be known as a personal brand because it really commercialized her intent, her soul, her spirit, her the impact that she could have in the world. But when she realized that her personal brand was a tool to reach her audience,

that became a different way of thinking about it. And so I hope that our listeners hear that and understand that as well.

Ken White

A great point because some people just roll their eyes, oh, this is promotion. I don't want to do this. But if you put the audience first, makes a great deal of sense.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes. I know that many of my students often find it hard to believe that I am a true introvert. I'm a true introvert at heart. I prefer to be in the library. And what I recognized that if I am not putting myself out there, if I am not developing my own personal brand and sharing that with others, then I'm losing really special opportunities to share value. And once you start to appreciate it, not from the promotional aspect, but from the exchange of value aspect, I think it really does make an impact. And I think it really does allow you to see personal branding as a very different and perhaps even valuable concept.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Dawn Edmiston, and that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business, home of the MBA program, offered in four formats the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. If you're ready to take charge of your future, check out the William & Mary MBA program at wm.edu. Thanks to our guest, Professor Dawn Edmiston, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White, wishing you safe, happy, and productive week ahead.

Female Voice

We'd like to hear from you regarding the podcast. We invite you to share your ideas, questions, and thoughts with us by emailing us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks for listening to Leadership & Business.