

Building a 'Work Brand' that People Will Brag About

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Jaden Sanders, 14, and an incoming freshman at Cristo Rey High School in West Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has joined a group of his classmates this July for what can best be called business boot camp. Sanders and about 125 other freshmen at Cristo Rey will participate in a unique work-study program throughout the upcoming school year in which students from low-income families share full-time, entry-level positions at local corporations, working five days a month while also attending high school.

Sanders and his Cristo Rey classmates need to be ready for the real world of work. That's why this month they have been learning skills to prepare them for corporate America — and for whatever position in which they land at one of the 23 companies that has signed on to hire high school freshmen as employees.

Manpower Group, a Milwaukee-based business that provides workforce solutions to companies around the world, is a Cristo Rey corporate work-study partner. Pamela Brown, a community investment specialist with Manpower Group, has been helping to train the Cristo Rey students for their professional jobs, addressing everything from integrity and motivation to communication skills and personal hygiene.

According to Brown, your ability to function well as a corporate employee begins with your personal brand, or more specifically, the characteristics that you become known for in the workplace. Your personal brand is a work in progress, not something you create overnight. “A lot of kids in high school say they don't think their personal brand is important,” says Brown. “

[“They think that by the time they go to work, they will flip a switch and have an amazing personal brand.”?](#)

The fact is laying the foundation today for your personal brand is very important. You need to begin to build those characteristics that you see as good for you, so that the day you go out to get that position, you already have a well-developed brand.”

You ultimately want the kind of brand at work that gets people talking and praising, notes Brown, who adds that an exceptional brand will give you a competitive advantage in the corporate arena. “In today's very competitive world of work, the worst workers have already been let go. The exceptional and the average workers are left. Who will be downsized when the company needs to let people go? The average workers. Who will be considered for promotions?

The exceptional workers.”

Brown recommends that high school students focus on three key areas to help develop their exceptional employee brands. They are:

- **Attitude.** Even if your technical skills are not great, a good attitude will go a long way, suggests Brown. “[“There will be days when you go into work after having a fight with your mom or a fight with your best friend. You need to ... leave it outside the door before you go in”?](#),” she notes. “You need to have an attitude that says you are ready to work and take on the day.”
- **Initiative.** Taking initiative means that you have a willingness to try new things. “A lot of high school kids might be worried that they won’t do something right, so they tend not to try it. [“If you’re not trying something that makes your palms sweaty and your heart beat faster, then you’re not growing.”?](#)” says Brown. “Take a risk; step out and try something new. If you see an opportunity — a work group forming or a new team — raise your hand and say, ‘This is something I’m really interested in.’”
- **The Dazzle Effect.** You need to make sure that your manager knows he or she can depend on you at all times for high-quality work, notes Brown. “[“When my manager comes to me for a new project, I need to define expectations. How is he or she defining 100%? I don’t want to just meet that expectation, I want to give back more.”?](#)” How can I dazzle them? It’s not just meeting expectations, it’s consciously thinking about how I can exceed expectations. That will truly help your brand at work be something that people brag about.”

Conversation Starters

Building your personal brand is an important practice whatever path you choose after high school. What qualities make up your personal brand? Team up with a partner and interview them about their brand. Check out the activity in this [KWHS brand lesson plan](#) to get creative with your personal brand image. Not yet a registered KWHS user? Take a minute to [sign up!](#)

Some of the employability skills that Pamela Brown discusses are often called “soft skills” in the workplace. What are some other soft skills that you should understand before you get a job? Research the linked articles below for guidance.

What does it mean to “define expectations?” Why is it so important to do this if you want to be able to build an outstanding personal brand?

Related Links

- [Manpower Group](#)
- [The NYT Learning Network: Developing Soft Skills for Job Success](#)
- [Rediff News: Soft Skills](#)
- [AOL Jobs: Top 10 Soft Skills for Job Hunters](#)
- [Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel: Cristo Rey High School Gears Up for Opening](#)