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Tamara Jacobs As you're considering your goals for the new year, it's worth looking at improving your communication skills. BFTV recently had the chance to talk to communications expert Tamara Jacobs, president of Tamara Jacobs Communications, about how branding is important not just to companies, but individuals - and how you can figure out what your brand is.



Tamara is a unique voice, because she came to corporate communications through a varied career that includes experience in multiple facets of the industry. "I tried a lot of things in the communications arena and it's interesting," she told us. "I was very driven. I wanted to be an actress. [Then] I went back to get my graduate degree, because I decided television news is a way of communicating. While I was busy trying to get my Masters degree, I got an on-air job, and then I got another on-air job." She's not just talking about what you should do; she's done what she's talking about.

She eventually moved from on-camera talent to corporate communications, as a job with a public relations firm led her to becoming a successful senior executive with global brand Johnson & Johnson. Fifteen years ago, she founded Tamara Jacobs Communications, and now she's lending her experience to everyone from major corporations like Revlon to individual folks just like you or me.

And the concept of branding is as important to individuals as it is to those big companies. "I don't think it's fully understood," Tamara told us. "It occurred to me that a human is a brand. A brand is three things: a brand is known, a brand is trusted, and a brand is used. If you are known, trusted and used, you are a human brand. And that's the kind of equity people can develop."

So how do you go about establishing your human brand? It begins with looking inside. "I think you have to know yourself before you can try to figure out how others should know you," she explained. "One of the things I ask people to do is define yourself in three words. And then, what would be your benefit to others? And that's how I start every single workshop."

"It's a progressive sequence. If you're developing a brand, you're developing an expectation and a reputation," Tamara continued. "First, you have to figure out, who are you? And then you go about crafting an entity - how you look, how you sound. And then ultimately, who's the audience?"

Once you've figured out what your brand is, just like any successful company, you then have to maintain it - and as the saying goes, if it's not broke, don't fix it. "Everyone talks about how you have to keep reinventing yourself. No, you don't," she said. "What you want to do is remind and refresh. You don't lose your values, you don't lose what you stand for, but you need to constantly apply it to what's going on in the world now, so you have contemporary experiences."

You should also know what makes your brand worthwhile. "A brand has to provide benefits to others. Do I get happier, do I get richer, do I get smarter? When people invest in you as a person, they spend time with you, they want something big back, because they just gave you their time, and they can't make more of that," she added. "I always tell people, when it comes to personal brand benefits, you always have to think about why the other person would hear what you have to say."

And this advice doesn't change whether you're just starting out or well established. Already having written one book and dishing out commentary via her Huffington Post blog, Tamara is still working to expand her own brand. "I am going to try to reach larger audiences, because I think what I have to say resonates," she told us. "I really love promoting all things to do with women and leadership."

She's equally driven outside of her business. Tamara has many other causes and projects close to her heart. She's at work on a second book, participates in volunteer musical theatre, is passionate about homeless animals, and enjoys watching her daughter Avery in musical theatre shows at Syracuse University. "I love to go watch her in shows, I really do," she enthused. "She's amazing and it's fun."

Amazing could equally describe Tamara herself. She's been a lot of things over her career, but it's clear that what was underlying the whole time was her passion for communicating with people, and helping them communicate with each other. "I thought my goal was to perform," she told us, "but ultimately my real goal was to connect."

Tamara delves further into the concept of branding in her first book, *Be The Brand*. You can find out more about Tamara, and get more advice on how to improve your communications skills, by visiting her company's website (tamarajacobs.com).

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