

Personal branding: What we can learn from Lance Armstrong

Lance Armstrong has been an icon of cycling, the hero of countless sportspeople and an ambassador for cancer awareness, and yet over the past week his powerful personal brand has come crashing down. There are personal branding lessons we can take from his fall from grace as well as from other sportspeople whose careers have been affected by controversy.

 By Donna Rachelson ^{29 Oct 2012}

I think of Michael Phelps and South Africa's own Hansie Cronje as examples of sportsmen who have made career-threatening mistakes, but found ways to salvage their brands, despite the damage done.

Honesty is the best policy

Phelps proved the old adage, "Honesty is the best policy" when he admitted recently that he'd smoked marijuana and apologised for his behaviour. He came clean upfront and he has been forgiven by the majority of people. His career has continued to soar and he's gone on to become the most decorated Olympian of time, with a total of 22 medals.

When it comes to personal branding, everything counts. Unfortunately, however, it's harder to build trust than it is to break it down. That's why it's important to take action as soon as your personal brand may be compromised. It can take years to build a powerful brand, but even longer to rebuild a brand that has suffered trust damage.

Reputation is the balance between who you say you are; how people experience you and what other people say about you. Any gaps in these elements will result in issues when it comes to managing your personal reputation. Reputation has to be nurtured and protected with your life.

Here are a few things I think we can all learn from sporting stars who get it right, and those who get it very wrong:

- **Honesty is critical.** Although telling the truth can be hard, having your career fall apart like a house of cards if lies come to light is harder.
- **If you make a mistake, come clean upfront.** Deal with the issue as soon as possible rather than leaving a problem to grow. Apologise for what you have done as soon as you can.
- **Do your best to rectify the situation.** Look for ways to make up for your error and reverse your mistake.
- **Remember: we all mess up from time to time.** It's important to manage our mistakes as best we can.

ABOUT DONNA RACHELSON

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