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Mike Mooney — whose career (it could be said) has been going in circles for the last 25 years in the motorsports industry — delivers practical and ready-to-use personal branding and reputation-building strategies in his book *Reputation Shift - 5 High Performance Truths for Success*.

Mooney has launched and led award-winning marketing and communications campaigns for companies that include Mercedes-Benz, 3M, Tylenol and Walmart. He is also recognized for his work in crisis and reputation management, having led dozens of crisis recovery efforts over his career.

He now works with leaders, entrepreneurs and business owners to help them proactively shift the way they value, manage and build their brands and reputations. mikemooney.com

Personal Reputation Audit

We never grow in the status quo

by Mike Mooney



▶ I speak with leaders and entrepreneurs on a regular basis about the power, value and need to proactively manage our reputations. In those discussions, I've heard responses like, "Reputations are important, and it seems like something I should keep an eye on, but it's not very tangible to me." In other words, it seems like a soft skill.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Suppose we ask the leaders at Marriott, Papa John's Pizza, Facebook or Michigan State University if what people think of their brand is a soft skill. Perhaps we'd learn more of the tangible nature of personal reputations if we had the opportunity to ask Matt Lauer, Lance Armstrong, Brian Williams or Harvey Weinstein.

They would all tell us that our reputation is gold and that they wished they had done a better job of protecting theirs. It's not easy, but it's doable.

It doesn't just happen. We have to be proactive. There's a perfect storm rolling over us right now! We have a values gap in behavior among leaders that litters the headlines. Combine that with the fact that we are all now citizen journalists carrying smartphones to capture events, and we have a hyper-connected and shareable world that social media channels have created. The end result is, our reputations are now more fragile than at any other time in human history.

With the stakes so high, doing nothing is not an option. Below, I outline the key steps to perform a Personal Reputation Audit that will help you get a reputation baseline to weather this perfect storm by learning where you are today and then building on what you learn.

There are several ways of conducting a Personal Reputation Audit. The first is doing an online search to see what surfaces about you. The second requires courage and you will, more than likely, get uncomfortable. This is where most people stop and don't move forward. But what new heights could you reach if you did?

1. Identify a core group of people and explain what you are trying to do. These are people whom you know well and trust or whose insight you respect. We are multidimensional people, so we need to gain a multidimensional perspective on our reputations. In a way, our reputations are like mosaics instead of one crisp image. That is why it's important to identify a wide range of colleagues,

clients, friends or family who know you and have seen you in different areas of your life.

2. Listen to what is being said; don't react or try to defend yourself. If your helpers begin to sense that you're getting defensive, they will naturally begin dialing back the feedback being shared. After all, they didn't accept your invitation to coffee or lunch to get into an argument or have to defend what they've heard or experienced. Be respectful of what you say in response to their comments. In fact, try not to say anything other than, "Thank you for being honest and helping me." Also, be mindful of your body language. Our body language will speak more honestly and clearly than any words we can push out of our mouths!

3. Take notes so you can reflect. Please don't rely on memory for this exercise! Consider organizing your notes by the different people in your life and the ways you interact with them. For example, the categories could be "work," "family," "friends" and "community." By looking at your notes and the trends or themes that emerge, you will see what behaviors or perceptions appear more consistently. This will allow you to focus your energy and attention in specific areas of your life or recognize where your actions and decisions weren't holistically congruent.

4. Digest the feedback and develop an action plan. Now, take a moment and pause! Don't dwell on your reputation of yesterday and today, rather focus on your future. Also, don't try to change or develop everything at once. Prioritize the areas that need your attention before moving on to other audit points. For example, in your "work" category, are there consistent themes of unresponsiveness? Perhaps, not actively participating in meetings? Those would be two immediate areas where you could have impact with daily and deliberate actions. As your progress continues, you can then move on to other audit points.

Remember, the intent of this audit is not for it to be a personal beat down; rather, it should serve as a source of empowerment to help you harness your potential. Find that balance to improve your strengths and strengthen your weaknesses. Consistently put your actions into play and you will realize how, over time, your (and your organization's) reputation will improve and you will reap the benefits in all aspects of your life. ■

