Developing Your Personal Brand

“As a performer, you can’t just go on a stage and play any more; it’s not about that ... You can’t be narrow minded and just focus on your discipline, that’s not what employers want any more in any field.”

SUE’S STORY

Sue* graduated with an honours degree in music performance in 2006. Her main instrument is clarinet* but she also plays a number of other instruments. Sue is currently the manager of a regional orchestra, a position she has held for several years. She also performs both in the orchestra and in a number of ensembles.

In her management role she manages all activities of the orchestra from arranging the logistics of performances, recruiting guest artists, carrying out marketing and communication activities, and coordinating events. She acknowledges:

“I was never expecting to be in a management role of an orchestra, I think I was expecting to do a lot more teaching and a lot more playing, but I guess it was a personal situation that took me away from that and then I had to find other work just by chance.”

After graduation, and before starting her current job, Sue spent several years in a number of teaching roles both in metropolitan and regional areas. She completed a Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning once it became a formal requirement for music teachers, and taught in a number of different schools as well as taking on private pupils. In addition to teaching, she was actively involved in accompanying choirs and established an ensemble with friends from her course, giving regular performances.

The Narrow Experience Of A Music Degree

Thinking back to her degree, Sue feels that educators had very narrow assumptions about what a graduate could do. She suggests that educators did not consider the range of professions which those with a performance background could go into, from arts management, to music administration, to music therapy. Because the focus of educators was so narrow, students didn’t know that these were options and weren’t able to gain the skills required. She recalls:

“It was communicated ... if you were good enough you would be a performer, if you weren’t good enough you would be a teacher ... but you could be one of the top people and you won’t get an orchestral job and therefore if you haven’t had any experience in teaching, or if teaching has been made to seem like it’s a second option, then what do you do?”

* Details changed to protect anonymity of research participant
**Learning From Life**

Because Sue’s course included no information on careers beyond music or teaching, she had to learn the skills and knowledge to do what she is doing now through informal channels. She comments on her learning as coming from:

“Life experience ... talking to other people and learning and reading ... what I’ve done within my job ... I’ve had to fly by the seat of my pants and take on board ... meetings and networking, reading – a lot of reading about other organisations and their models and structures, contact with board members, some professional development workshops - mostly around conflict management and dealing with people.”

**Good At Performance, Bad At Communication**

Now Sue is in a position where she is involved in appointing other music graduates, both to performance roles and also to other roles, including education and outreach. She finds that many music graduates lack the broad range of skills that are required.

She also reports that some people who are great performers have very poor communications skills, and this can mean that they are not considered for jobs beyond performance alone. As she recalls from a recent interview:

“The best candidate in terms of playing did the worst interview because they just spend their lives playing and then when it comes to having to have a change of career, or looking for a different option, because they don’t want to just play anymore, they don’t have the skills ... we can assist her but not all workplaces are going to be that accommodating.”

**Developing Your Own Brand**

Looking back at how her career has evolved, Sue feels that it is essential that graduates from performance degrees develop their own brand. She thinks there is a perception that you just perform and that is enough. As she suggests:

“It’s not just about being able to play the instrument; in fact it’s even not about that anymore, because there’s so many people who can play the instrument ...”

Instead, Sue suggests that all performers need to be able to market themselves, sell their skill sets, network, and communicate well. Most of all, she encourages all performers to develop a presence on social media.
DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

There are now numerous resources available to help people build their own brand. They all tend to highlight the same key steps. As you read through each one, try to work out what your personal brand is:

Identify Your Unique Selling Proposition
What is it about you that makes you stand out from others? What do you want to be known for? What do you want to achieve?

Identify Your Target Market
Who are you trying to communicate with? Which groups of people will be critical to you in developing your career?

Identify Your Communication Mediums
Think about your target market and identify which communication mediums are most likely to reach them. Be specific e.g. not just social media but which forms?

Get Attention
Lots of people communicate with others. What can you do to make yourself stand out and get noticed?

Find Mentors
Most of us need people who will give us advice as we launch or develop our careers. What kind of mentors do you need? Who could you approach?

Creative Approaches
What are some other ways that you could develop your personal brand? Think of approaches that would be particularly appropriate in your desired career.