

A Model of Leadership Branding

Author : Shana Lynch

Date : July 27, 2016



Eight Leadership Lessons from Beauty Magnate Tyra Banks

*Thinking of reinventing your career? Consider **Tyra Banks** your paragon. Banks began modeling at 17 and rocketed to supermodel stardom (becoming one of the top-paid models in the world). She hosted her own talk show, then created and hosted America's Next Top Model, the CW Network's longest-running reality TV show. She wrote a novel about models, appeared in movies, and launched a nonprofit to help coach young girls on self-esteem. More recently, she completed an executive education program at Harvard Business School and launched her own beauty company, called Tyra Beauty.*

*Banks, the **CEO** and chairman of **Tyra Banks** Co. and founder of Fierce Capital LLC, spoke to Stanford Graduate School of Business students about her numerous pivots, the importance of **brand**, and the value of a cold call as part of a [Stanford Women in Business discussion](#) moderated by GSB student Kara Hollis.*

Know When to Pivot

"My mother taught me this: to leave before they leave you," Banks told a packed crowd at CEMEX Auditorium. Her mother reminded her that as a model, she was a product. And products have their run — then they must be tweaked for a new audience. Because of that, Banks left her modeling career to create and star in her own television shows and now runs a beauty products company.

But before you move on, she advised, get as much out of the job as you can. Use each experience to build up your resume and earn strong recommendations to help propel you forward.

Look for Your Opportunities

Banks started her modeling career as a teenager, but over time, she began gaining weight and heard from her modeling agency that **designers** didn't want to hire a model with a bust and hips.

She turned to her mother, who was also her manager: “I was like, ‘Mom, what should we do? Should I start eating salads? Should I work out every time?’ And she said, ‘No. You know what you need to do? Eat some pizza.’”

Over a high-carb dinner, the two hatched a new plan: to focus on clients that prefer curvier models. That list included Victoria’s Secret, where Banks eventually spent eight years as a model, and Sports Illustrated, where she was the first African-American woman to land the cover of the swimsuit issue.

Pick up the Phone

“I’m a cold caller,” Banks said. Several years ago, she read **Zappos CEO** Tony Hsieh’s book, *Delivering Happiness*, and connected with what he had to say. “I hadn’t had a company yet that had a product, but I knew that I did want to do a business in a couple of years. And I cold-called him.”

Now, Hsieh is a mentor. “I reach out to him about even employee benefits,” she said.

Banks also met another mentor, author and Wharton professor Adam Grant, through a cold call. She had read about his book *Originals* and reached out via his publishing company. The two began corresponding, and just recently he gave a two-hour presentation to the staff at Tyra Beauty.

“So just that cold call has done really well for me.”

Hire Right

Banks admits to being something of a micromanager. As a talk show host, she would come into work two hours early to recut the promos because they didn’t meet her standards.

But business school taught her to hire people who are smarter than she is and to move into a visionary role. “I know where I want Tyra Beauty to go,” she said, “but I realize that I don’t have to be the person to execute that.”

Find People Who Have the Courage to Disagree With You

Before she hires someone, Banks tells them: “You will not stay in this position if you continue to say yes to me for every single thing. I need you to change my mind 70% of the time. There will be 30% of the time that I will say, ‘No, we’re going to do it this way because this is what I want to do,’ but I need you to be more clever than me 70% of the time.”

Build Your Brand

When you solidify your **brand**, investors and clients trust you. Even if you have a setback, she said, the **brand** can outshine the failure. In business parlance, think of it as goodwill.

I know where I want Tyra Beauty to go, but I realize that I don't have to be the person to execute that.**Tyra Banks**

She pointed out how Rihanna smokes marijuana on Instagram, and that's her **brand** — it's pure and authentic. Donald Trump also has a very defined **brand**.

"I'm not saying that **Rihanna** and **Donald Trump** are the same at all. What I'm saying is they can do no wrong in order to upset their following and their **brand**."

Banks said at one point her **brand** was a little too clean-cut and didn't resonate across enough audiences, so she strategically started cursing more often on her talk show.

Align Profit With Social Goals

Banks founded Tzone, an organization that works to improve self-esteem and leadership among young girls by teaching entrepreneurship, presentation skills, health, and wellness. Her **social** message and her business are directly related. "If you can find something that you're passionate about that is in some way aligned to your profit side, it makes your message so much easier."

Women Must Work Harder

Banks said that for young women — especially women of color — to succeed in their careers, they have to be exceptionally good. "We have to be better than that guy that's right next to us. And I take this from me being a black model. I had to be better. I had to sell more magazine covers than the white girl for me to get a fifth of what she got."

Women also must reach out more to find mentors, both inside and outside their organizations. People will pay attention if you make yourself heard and seen, she advised.

"If you sit there and go, 'I'm just going to work really hard and they're just going to notice,' they ain't thinking about you."

This article first appeared in www.gsb.stanford.edu