

marie claire

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MWAH!

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CAREERS

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN PR

Want to get ahead at work? You need a personal brand – that magic something that makes you stand out from the crowd. Writer Jo Waters gets the once-over from brand consultant Lesley Everett

What is personal branding?

According to Lesley Everett, it's 'What people say about you behind your back'. She says potential employers form an impression of your brand within seven minutes of meeting you and it can be very hard to get them to change their mind. 'The most important thing in establishing your personal brand is finding the "real you". This will help you stand out from the crowd,' says Everett.

What happens?

I book a two-hour session, expecting a Gillian McKeith/Trinny and Susannah-type mauling. But Everett's a pussycat (albeit with claws). She tells me to ask three colleagues to sum me up. What they say is interesting – I'm a safe pair of hands, a nice person, talented even, but I lack confidence.

Everett agrees: my handshake is weak, I don't make enough eye contact and I come across as too serious. My purple spotty shirt-dress is a winner, but my open-toed sandals are unprofessional, as is my denim jacket. She suggests I switch to structured jackets and heels and if I wear a suit it should be grey not black, because it will make me appear less stern. I'm feeling a bit crushed when



she asks me to write down 20 words describing my personal qualities and what I would like to be known for. I think I'm hard-working, honest, reliable, fast and have good ideas, but I lack confidence. As for my brand, we decide on: 'Fast and reliable writer with topical and original ideas'.

It's almost like a personality stocktake – figuring out what you have and what you need to get more of. I realise that I do have good qualities, but I need to project them more.

Everett says that, like most women, I tend to focus on weaknesses, unlike men, who just think of their strengths. She suggests I write a list of my achievements this year, ask my clients for testimonials and keep them in a scrapbook of things I've done recently that I feel proud of.

Did it work?

Yes. While the scrapbook idea sounded a bit head-girl-like, I've found it works as a quick ego boost. I've also resolved not to be embarrassed when negotiating my pay. Following

the session with Everett, I asked one of my bosses for more money and she agreed to it, proving that unless you ask, you don't often get.

I went shopping a few days after the meeting and one editor has already commented on how professional I look, and dressing the part has made me more confident about meetings and interviews. I have made an effort to make more eye contact when I'm speaking, and to shake hands firmly when meeting someone new (even if I do feel a bit silly about it). *A one-day workshop with Lesley Everett costs £350. The book Walking Tall: Key Steps to Total Image Impact (£10.99, Lesley Everett) is out now.*

400,000

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO EMIGRATED FROM THE UK IN 2006, THE HIGHEST FIGURE SINCE 1991 AND AN 11.2 PER CENT INCREASE ON 2005.