



## Managing Yourself: Build Your Personal Value Proposition

By Bill Barnett

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Executives set value propositions for their products — the target market segments, the benefits they provide, and their prices. It's why a target customer should buy the product.

But value propositions go beyond just products. Your personal value proposition (PVP) is at the heart of your career strategy. It's the foundation for everything in a job search and career progression — targeting potential employers, attracting the help of others, and explaining why you're the one to pick. It's why to hire you, not someone else.

The question is this: How do you develop a powerful PVP?

Take a look at Steve (name has been changed). Steve is a tall, 54-year-old manufacturing executive. Steve's interest and skill at manufacturing operations is the cornerstone of his PVP.

It's hard to know what you're really good at. You need more than the ordinary, convenient categories. I seek the kinds of things where I fit naturally, what I enjoy. That's not consumer products, not hard science, not financial institutions, and not an enterprise that's pursuing something other than long-term financial objectives. I look for operations-intensive companies who can benefit from significant performance improvement. I take floundering institutions and go build things. It's not quite turnaround, not slash and burn; but it's a far way from peaceful stewardship of assets. I'm a go-build guy.

Steve targets companies from \$150 million sales up to \$1 billion. He doesn't want start ups, where everything would need to be set up, or a company so large that he couldn't know people down the line. He prefers private companies. With no experience with the special duties of a public corporation's CEO, he feels it doesn't make sense to have to learn all that on the job at this point in his work life.

Steve also emphasizes his view of the right atmosphere: "I'm not at all into sleazy places, nor into industries like tobacco, alcohol, or casinos. Ethically-challenged places are no fun." We could debate whether those industries pose ethical issues, but that's not the point. They aren't right for him.

Steve's leaving out the great majority of corporations, but that doesn't limit him. He gets three or four calls a year asking him to consider a corporate CEO position. Those calls come both because he's a strong candidate for jobs where he fits and because the people who call know that. They don't call about everything. They call about positions that connect to Steve's PVP. It's easy to understand where he's strong and what he wants to do. His PVP is distinctive, unlike what similarly qualified executives might say about themselves.

Here are four steps to develop a strong PVP:

- . Set a clear target. The PVP begins with a target, one that needs what you have to offer. You'll prefer some directions, not others. Targeting will make you most effective. . Identify your strengths. It may sound obvious, but what you know and what you can do are the foundation of your PVP. Hone in on what those are.
- . Tie your strengths to your target position. Don't leave it up to the employer to figure out how your strengths relate to what she needs. Let your PVP tightly connect you to the position. Connect the dots for her. Consider her perspective and know why she should hire you or promote you.
- . Provide evidence and success stories. Your strengths may be what an employer is "buying," but your achievements are the evidence you have those strengths. They make your case convincing. Some people prepare a non-confidential portfolio to showcase that evidence in a vivid way. They collect reports they wrote that had impact. They pull together facts on measurable achievements such as sales growth or cost reduction.

Steve's target — mid-sized, privately-held industrial companies that need significant operations improvement to enable growth — is an excellent example of the first of these steps. He's setting himself up in his distinct target area, where his network knows him well. His past success demonstrates that he has the capability and emphasizes his strengths. In all of this, Steve's intrinsic quality is critical to his success, but it's not the whole story. It's through his PVP that Steve's making the most of his talents.

As you think about your own career strategy, think about Steve and his narrowly defined and distinctive PVP. What's your value proposition?

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