

S2: E193: The 4 Layers Every High-Level Authority Brand Needs

Hey there, and welcome back to the Make Your Message a Movement podcast. This is your host, Tiffany Neuman, and welcome in. If you're new here, this podcast is a little bit different. I do not have an intro because frankly, I always scrub through them and find them annoying. And second, I do not edit the podcast because I'm human and humans are not perfect.

So settle in. This is gonna be a really juicy episode today. And over the last few episodes, if you've been listening along, we've spent a lot of time talking about the person behind the brand, which if you're listening to the podcast is most likely you as a founder. We've talked about what it feels like to carry an idea before other people fully understand it, because we as entrepreneurs. Really birth ideas into life.

We've talked about what happens when you stop softening your strongest beliefs and how your identity sometimes has to expand to meet the opportunities your business is beginning to create, especially once you have an authority brand, which is what I help clients build. So if you haven't heard any of these episodes, they were all leading up to this one. They're all part of a series, so feel free to go back and listen to those. Today I want to bring this conversation very intentionally back to branding because I never want us to lose sight of something important, which is the brand is where all of this— the identity, what's happening in the background with us personally The brand is where all of this becomes visible. So this is where your ideas become language, where your authority becomes your positioning, where your experience becomes a message that someone else can understand.

It's also where the depth of your work becomes a visual experience, a website, a body of IP, intellectual property, and ultimately a reason for the right person to choose you. And I think there's this mistake we make when we talk about creating an authority brand, because that's what I specialize in. We tend to think about a brand as a collection of these external assets, right? The messaging, the logo, the visuals, website, the content. And of course, all of those are important.

In fact, they're a huge part of what myself and my team do with our clients. But I've come to understand over the years, which is why I'm doing this series of episodes that isn't talking about those things, is that there's this other layer underneath all of the external assets. Because you can create magnetic messaging that clearly articulates what you believe, you can build a stunning visual identity that communicates the caliber of your work, and you can have a beautifully designed website that positions you for what you want to call in. But then there's still one more question, which is, are you willing to inhabit the brand you just built? And that is

the invisible ceiling that I want to talk about today, because an authority brand is not only what the world sees when they look at you, it's also the level of authority you are willing to occupy once they do.

And when those two things are out of alignment, you can feel it, they can feel it. And I see this happen in different ways all of the time. Sometimes someone comes to us, comes to me to do the branding work, and they, they've already done years of internal work. They know who they are, they know what they believe, they have tremendous expertise, and they're really ready for a larger stage, higher caliber clients. And maybe bigger stages or the best-selling book, but often their external brand has not caught up.

Maybe the messaging still sounds like everyone else in their category. Their visual identity feels like it's 5 or 10 years ago, or their website is not communicating their depth of expertise or making it obvious why someone should hire them. Or book them. So that creates one kind of ceiling, and I've talked about that ceiling quite a bit, right? When your brand doesn't match where you're heading next, the person is ready, but the brand is not.

And we fix that all the time. It's very, very common because we grow as humans, we evolve, and then our brand needs to catch up with us. But the opposite can happen too. We can do the work to clarify the positioning, create the message, elevate the visuals, build the website. And suddenly the brand is communicating a much bigger version of what's possible for us or possible in general.

And so sometimes people at this point will start responding differently. The inquiries change. Maybe someone wants to introduce you to a higher level client. A podcast host invites you into a larger conversation, an event organizer sees your website and thinks, this person belongs on our stage. That's— and these are all the goals that we have when we uplevel people's brands and really help them step into authority.

But now the external brand might be ready, but you have to be willing to meet it. And that is where good branding becomes much more interesting to me than simply making something just look good. Because a truly powerful authority brand also requires congruence. What you believe, what you say, how you're perceived, what the experience feels like, how the customer journey is created and how you show up once those opportunities start arriving. All of those pieces need to support one another.

And when I think about the strongest authority brands that we've developed for clients, and we look at these 4 layers for all clients, there really is 4 layers working together. So I want to explain

those today so you have a context of what it really takes, and I have some exercises for you to go through at the end after I explain what these 4 layers do and how they work. So the first layer is magnetic messaging. This is the language, of course, that makes the right person feel like, oh my gosh, finally someone understands me. Someone understands what I've been trying to articulate.

Or like, how did they know me better than I know myself? So it's not simply clever copy, it's clear positioning. This means you have a compelling point of view, language people can remember and repeat. And the most important in my eyes is an understanding of your audience that goes far beyond demographics into psychographics— what they're actually thinking, worrying about, desiring, and trying to become. It's not knowing only what you do, but also what you want to be known for.

And I do talk about this all the time. So if you've been listening for any port amount of time, you're like, okay, yes, I've heard you say this before, but it's foundational. And we can't forget how important the message is, because if your messaging is generic, everything else has to work harder, right? You can have the most incredible expertise, but if the message sounds like everyone else, especially with AI in play now, the market really has no reason to recognize your expertise as anything different, right? So this is where we see a lot of people like throwing money at ads, posting more content, getting new photos, all of these things, but no new results. So if the central idea, your intellectual property, your IP, your frameworks, your voice is still unclear, you are simply increasing the volume around something that people don't even have a reason to remember. You're actually creating more confusion. So this is why messaging is always the first place we begin with our clients. Before I decide how a brand should look, we really need to understand what it's communicating, right? And specifically, what should someone immediately understand about you that they would not understand from looking at 10 other people in your category?

And that is where magnetism begins. And I can tell you when you have a magnetic message, it is so incredible. This is when I experience it myself. I get people on quote-unquote sales calls, which I don't even call them that. I call them invitations or right fit calls, and I really don't have to say anything.

Yes, they have questions, but they already know because the message is clear, my differentiation is clear, they know they want to work with me. And that is the goal that we take in with all of our clients. Now, the second layer is just as important, but it's— is second because I believe you really have to get that message down, like I said, before we move into the visual expression of authority.

Now, I've spent all of my career in creative direction, first with big brands and now with entrepreneurs and thought leaders. So I will never be the person who tells you that visuals do not matter, because I know some people say that, especially with AI. It's like, okay, you know, anybody can make things look good. Yes, and they matter tremendously because we are visual creatures, right? We make decisions incredibly quickly about whether something feels credible, relevant.

Let's see, sophisticated, approachable, premium, innovative, established, right? All of those words. We're constantly judging, even if you believe you don't judge a book by its cover. It just happens. Our brain does it, right?

So your visual brand is communicating, communicating before anyone even reads your copy. But the question is whether it is communicating the right thing. So if you want to be hired, say, by sophisticated organizations or invited onto larger stages, really attack like higher-level clients, your brand needs to visually support that position. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean everything has to look really expensive or overly polished, right? But it does need to look intentional and modern, and it needs to look like the level of work you actually provide. And ideally, it should feel distinctly yours, because there's nothing more frustrating than watching someone with 20 years experience or even more powerful intellectual property and really great client results show up with a brand that visually communicates they have no expertise or they're not up to date, like their website still looks like it's 20 years ago, right? Yes, it may show that you have that length of work, but you gotta update it and make it feel modern, right? So the expertise may be there, But perception is always what matters. So branding is in part the work of closing the gap between the value that exists and the value that people are perceiving.

Okay, so let's move on to the third layer, and this is your conversion-based platform. And for most of my clients, that means the website, right? And we sometimes swing too far in one direction when we talk about websites. Some people treat the website as everything, and there's others who say nobody cares about websites anymore. And I actually disagree with both of those statements because your website does not create authority from nothing.

Right? So like, yes, people can make money without a website, say on Insta or whatever. However, when you get to a certain stage, when you wanna attract those higher level clients, when you wanna get booked on better stages, when you want to have a bestselling book, it is almost always where someone goes to decide whether the authority they have either heard about or seen from you on stage is real. They're gonna stalk you, right? Like, that's what happens.

They're not just gonna hire you without looking you up. So say someone hears you on a podcast, they see you speak, or a colleague refers you. Maybe they read a LinkedIn post. What do they do next? They're gonna Google you nowadays.

Maybe they'll put your name into ChatGPT or Claude. But the other thing they're always going to do is visit the website, right?

Social media isn't enough because there's so much that people can pretend to do. There's so many scammers out there, and so people always want to make sure that you are fully legit and also see if you have your shit together, basically. So, and that moment, that moment where people are looking you up, they're landing on your website. Your website has an incredibly important job. It needs to confirm the impression that brought them there.

And it needs to help them understand your work quickly. It needs to show them evidence. It needs to give them a sense of your perspective. And most of all, it needs to help them see themselves in the problem you solve and understand what becomes possible through your work, right? And so basically, the main thing we want it to do is It needs to show them the next obvious step and convert, right?

So this is why I care so much specifically about conversion-focused websites. And it's why so many people are using AI to create a website in 10 clicks, and it's killing people's authority because those sites don't have the foundation of magnetic messaging and they don't have a unique visual identity. Most AI websites look all the same, and it's not meant for conversion. Claude is not properly trained. Lovable is not properly trained.

Yes, you can prompt it, but it's not going to be the same as a proper conversion-focused website. I could do a whole podcast episode about that. So we'll save that for another time. But ultimately, a website should not be a beautiful digital brochure. It should create a movement so the right client knows how to work with you.

Maybe the event organizer knows what you speak about and is so brought in by your speaker reel that they want to book you. Or maybe the potential partner that's been scoping you out understands your larger body of work.

So that is what a strategically built authority brand and website is meant to do. It really reduces the friction between interest of someone and them taking action. And when the messaging, visuals, and website are all working together, those first 3 layers, something incredibly powerful happens. People will begin perceiving you at the level you have been trying to reach. And this is why I say time and time again that we brand our clients for where they're going.

If you're looking 3, 5, 10 years out into the future, We want to create a brand for then. We reverse engineer it. So it's a brand that you are evolving into, right? And that perception becomes reality 10 times faster. It's really cool, actually.

So this is now where we arrive at the 4th layer, the one that most traditional branding conversations completely ignore. In my humble opinion. Most people don't even talk or think about this, and I call it energetic congruence. So I know the word energetics can mean a lot of different things to different people, so I'm going to first tell you exactly what I mean. In this case, it's not all woo necessarily, it's the ability to stand inside the position your brand is communicating without shrinking away from it.

So sometimes we'll create this incredible brand for someone, and then they freeze and they don't want to launch it. Now, this isn't everyone. It doesn't happen often, and when it does, I help guide people through that. But it's so interesting how our ego will sometimes take it as a threat, even though we've been saying we want this thing for a very long time. So maybe your website says you're the authority.

Can you speak one like one when you're in a room? Your positioning says you work with higher-level clients. Can you quote the investment on a call with someone without apologizing for it? Your speaker page says you're ready for larger stages. Can you walk onto one without deciding everyone else there knows more than you?

Your messaging says you have a distinct perspective. Can you continue saying it when you get a hater and someone disagrees? Or maybe your brand says you're a leader. Can you actually allow your team to support you rather than trying to prove your value by doing everything yourself? Now, I know these are all different examples, and most likely you're not saying yes to all of them or no to all of them.

But all of these are where that quote-unquote invisible ceiling lies or lives.

And the external brand, which we talked about earlier, can create opportunities faster than your internal capacity becomes comfortable receiving them. Right? We've— you've— I'm sure you've heard the term capacity a ton. It's, it's very common these days, but it's common for a reason, right? And it's a reason to understand that branding is not finished when the website launches. Sometimes the launch is where the real expansion begins, because the brand finally starts reflecting the full caliber of your work that you know you could always deliver. Or maybe you've been delivering that and it finally reflects that in a new and different way, and the market starts responding to you accordingly. And that is the goal. I have so many client case studies, you can

check those out on the website. That talk about people actually— like one of my clients, Catherine, making her first \$30K week when we were working on her messaging before we even finished the website.

Or I'm trying to think of another one off the cuff here. Justine, who had 4 clients sign up with her, right? My client Shannon got booked at the UN. So that is the goal, is that these new opportunities just start pouring out for you. But if you are not aware of this internal ceiling that could— I'm not saying it will, some people just blast through and it's totally fine— but it's really important that you understand that oftentimes our ego creates this internal ceiling you may unintentionally, unconsciously recreate the old level of business inside the new brand, right? This is where a lot of people stay plateaued for a very long time.

And so I want to make sure when we're helping clients, not only are we addressing those first 3 layers, but this final layer is just as or more important.

And this can look like maybe you raise the price, but maybe you immediately add twice as much work because receiving more without doing more feels uncomfortable. Or you're finally attracting the perfect dream clients, but you overdeliver so dramatically that the engagement is no longer even that profitable. So you're charging more, but you're not actually making more. Or you're finally putting the more powerful messaging out there, but you overthink it and soften it before you publish because you're worried about what someone might think. Maybe you invest in a new speaker page, but then you never pitch the stage.

Or I've seen this a few times, uh, we built incredible websites for someone around their highest level work. They're super incredible, but then they continued sending people towards their smallest offer or not even mentioning their high-ticket work because it felt easier to sell. Right. And the brand at this level is doing its job. It's inviting you into the next level.

It's getting you results. Now you again have to decide whether you're willing to go for it and go with it. And that is what I meant in the last episode when we talked about identity expansion. But we want to ground it firmly in the brand and business here because it's not personal development for personal development's sake. Right? I think there's this trend, you know, entrepreneurship, we all know, is the biggest form of personal development. And sometimes we lean into personal development just because we get addicted to it. I don't know if that's a thing, but I kind of think it is a thing.

But so again, it's not personal development for the sake of it, because it affects conversion. It affects your pricing. It affects visibility and sales. Right? And so that is why I believe developing an authority brand is both strategic and energetic.

The strategy creates the positioning, the energy determines whether you can hold it, and you absolutely need both. Okay, so what I want to talk about next is the fact that, just to reiterate this a little bit more before we go into some questions that I want you to ask yourself today, is the idea that the strongest brands create alignment between those 4 layers, right? The messaging, the visuals, the conversion-based website. And the whole brand ecosystem, really. And then your energetics.

And the most amazing thing is— and I've seen this happen time and time again with our clients— when that alignment happens, the business will begin to start to feel very different. You're no longer trying to convince the market. Everything signals your next level before they even get on a call with you. You're not trying to talk anyone into seeing you or hiring you as a speaker. Your ideas are actually pulling people in to invite you. You don't have to ask.

So when the opportunity arrives, the goal is not to immediately negotiate yourself back down to where you were before. We— and you've You've probably heard this too, like with lottery winners, right? They don't have the capacity to hold that type of wealth. They haven't worked on expanding their capacity, and so they blow through it and then they just go back to their normal level. It's kind of that similar idea.

Okay, but if you can get all of these 4 layers locked in, that's where your brand becomes a growth engine, not because your logo is magically creating revenue. I can't tell you how many people are like, Tiffany, I just need a new logo. And I was like, no, you don't. Yes, if your logo sucks or you don't have one, absolutely you need one, but that's not gonna fix everything, right? It's because all of the pieces are finally pulling in the same direction.

So if this resonates with you and you're wondering like, okay, I wonder where the ceiling might be in my authority brand right now, or maybe you don't have an authority brand yet. I want you to look at all 4 layers. Okay, so we're gonna walk through these together. You might wanna pause and answer these questions as I go through them, or get out a piece of paper and write them and address them later. But we're gonna start with a message.

Can someone understand what you're known for, and why your perspective is different than anyone else doing what you do? Can the right person hear your message and recognize themselves in it? And can someone refer you using language that actually sounds like you?

Right? That's what I want you to think about. Now, if your answer is yes to all those, awesome. If not, you definitely want to work and start with your message, your intellectual property repositioning, right? A lot of people have been pivoting lately and they've confused their audience of what they're actually wanting to be known for.

So I've had so many people lately coming back and like Okay, let's start from ground zero. Maybe you've been in business for 10 or 20 years, but you can't keep going the same way you've been going with your message if you've shifted into something completely new, or if you've been throwing spaghetti at the wall and trying to see what works. It's time to finally lock it in and stay consistent, because that's what you need to do to have that growth engine. Right? Then look at visuals.

Does your brand experience— so everywhere you show up, including what you're wearing on the stage, how you show up to podcasts, all of the pieces of the brand, not just your website and social media— does it reflect the caliber of work that you're delivering now? Or is it still showing up like the business that you maybe had several years ago? Is it the old you or the current you when you look at the brand visually?

Second, would the client, partner, publisher, or event organizer you most want to attract see a brand that feels aligned with what their offering or what they're doing.

So if you're looking to get a major publisher, is your brand aligned? If you're looking to land the TEDx stage, or any stage for that matter, is it obvious that you're ready for those opportunities? Then we want to look at your website and conversion path. Once someone is interested, do they automatically know what to do next? Can they easily find the right offer on your website? Can they see the evidence of your authority? Can, say, a speaking organizer find what they need if you're wanting to speak on stages? Not everybody does, and that's okay. Or can the potential client understand the transformation that you provide. And basically, the biggest question is, are you making it easy for all opportunities to move forward?

Where someone hits your website and they're like, this is my person. That is the goal. And then finally, to wrap up today, we want to look at yourself, right? And this isn't a sense of judgment or anything. And oftentimes it's the people who are like, oh yeah, I'm good, I'm totally fine— they're sometimes the one that actually need the most support because it's so unconscious. So if you're not sure how to answer these questions, or you're immediately saying yes without even thinking it through, might want to take a little bit of time with it. And I even ask these questions to myself as we expand and evolve the brand. So the first question is here: if all of

those pieces, meaning the first 3 layers, begin working exactly as you wanted them to, are you ready to receive the result? Now most of us consciously would be like, heck yes, absolutely. Now if you sit with it for a moment, maybe there's fear of failure, a fear of success, a fear of what would people think, right? And that's okay. I'm not saying this is bad. It's just you want to have support to work through that. And that's why we actually build support in all of our offers to not only build the brand, but to also layer in the energetics of the brand.

So a couple more questions. If your perfect client started coming into the calls, would you be able to say your new next level price without blinking? If the larger stage appeared would you say yes? Even if it was next week, would you jump at the opportunity, or would you shy down and say, ah, maybe I'm not ready yet?

If a partner arrived that you really used to look up to, or you do look up to, would you enter the room as an equal?

All of these could be where your invisible ceiling lies, and it's not to be frightening or dramatic because every new level creates discomfort, because every next level contains something unfamiliar. It's human nature, right? So the goal is not to eliminate this discomfort, it's to stop allowing it to dictate the size of the brand you're willing to build. One of the other first things that I do with clients— well, actually, this is the first thing I do even before we move into the messaging— is talk about their vision. What do they want to create?

And oftentimes people dream big, but I invite them to dream even bigger. Now, this doesn't mean like, oh, I want a million dollars. Oh no, you should want a \$1 billion because like that just seems like a lot of work. Although we do need more women with billions of dollars, but that's a whole different topic.

Um, anyways, getting really off topic here. Let's get back to it. So basically, can you dream bigger? Yes, that's uncomfortable. But that's where we want to go, because your authority brand should stretch you a little.

It should reflect where you're going, not only where you've been. It should make you proud when you send someone to your website. It should make the right people understand your value immediately, and ultimately it should position you for the client you would be thrilled to work with. The stage you've been dreaming about, the collaboration that expands your reach exponentially, and the opportunities you may not even be able to see where you're standing today. And then you simply have to be willing to meet those opportunities and work through the discomfort when they arrive.

So as we wrap up today, I want you to ask yourself, which part of my authority brand is currently setting the ceiling? The message, the way the brand looks and feels, the website and conversion path, or maybe you've built those external pieces. Most people don't have all of them in place. I'll just say that, but maybe you do. And now is it your turn to fully occupy them?

If you're not sure, this is exactly the conversation I love having. You can reach out to me on LinkedIn and tell me where you feel the disconnect, or book a call with me through the link in the show notes, and my team and I can help you look at the full picture. Now, I take all my calls, so I'm not saying that, but my team does help with all the visual branding, the websites, because I only have so much capacity. So we can look at the full picture from positioning, magnetic, magnetic messaging, the visual brand, website, your authority platforms, and identify what needs to shift so your brand can support the next level of business you are ready to build. Because your next level does not come only from mindset, and it does not come just from beautiful branding.

It comes when the way you're positioned, the way you're perceived, the experience you create, and the authority you are willing to hold all are telling the same story. And that is when your brand stops putting a ceiling on your growth and starts opening doors to the next level. I hope you've enjoyed this episode. I can't wait to hear from you and support you, and we'll talk to you next week.