

I am continuing to read “Habitudes – For Career Ready Students; The Art of Preparing for a Career” by Dr. Tim Elmore. I like to take my time in reviewing the information in each chapter and reflecting on the lessons.

Important aspects of 4-H include belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity and we work toward these by providing engaged learning opportunities with caring and safe mentors. These opportunities provide youth with settings where they are included and build toward their future by developing skills and increasing their confidence.

My family is involved in cattle production and branding is a time-honored and important tool used in our business. The brand on our animal is a permanent mark that identifies to whom it belongs. I am sure that each you know business brands and have a reaction, positive or negative, to that brand. Once a brand develops a negative reputation, it takes a long time to recover. A positive history to a brand helps it to withstand many storms.

Dr. Elmore’s chapter on Brands and Labels speaks to understanding how our personal brand affects how others perceive us and how we need to be intentional in having a genuine brand.

Each of us builds a brand in the words we use, the behaviors we exhibit, the relationships we build. This brand follows us into our education and work worlds and can certainly have an impact, positive or negative, on how we are received. I will never be known as the smartest person in the room but have a reputation for having a positive outlook, being willing to listen and learn, to make decisions and own my mistakes, and to work hard. My brand is evidenced in everything I do!

I really appreciate Dr. Elmore’s information in this chapter when he notes, “It works a little like a toolbox. You carry an imaginary toolbox with you each day. You are filling it with knowledge, experiences, skills, and relationships that will make you more valuable or less valuable to the marketplace. You are either preparing for the future or you are just surviving, living from day to day. Your toolbox is either filling up or remaining empty. When you fail to get ready for

tomorrow, you end up with much more work to compensate for later. My warning is this: if you are not preparing today you will be repairing tomorrow.”

One of my favorite things about the Habitude series of books is that each includes a set of thought-provoking questions and evaluations at the end of each chapter. A couple of thoughts from this chapter are ones that all of us can evaluate: Why do so many people end up building a negative brand for themselves? If building a personal brand is about more than choosing a style – but discovering who you really are – how should a person go about this discovery? What are you doing to build your personal brand and label?

Who has characteristics that you admire? What can you do to practice the skills that support your positive brand? What can you read or do to reinforce your brand – is there a service project that you can take on that ties in with your personal goals and development?

Giving our 4-H members, and all the youth in our world, the opportunity to discover and build their “brand” for their long-term success is one of the best parts of my work!

Keep learning. Keep showing grace and kindness!

*Michelle Beran is the 4-H Youth Development Agent in the Cottonwood Extension District. For more information on this article or other 4-H Youth Development resources, email Michelle at [mberan@ksu.edu](mailto:mberan@ksu.edu) or call 620-793-1910.*

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