

“Read this book. You’ll quickly realize that your real power
—as an individual or as a company—
is not in being picture perfect but in being vulnerable and honest.”
—from the foreword by **KEITH FERRAZZI**, *New York Times* bestselling author

DITCH

THE ACT

Reveal the Surprising
Power of the Real You
For Greater Success

**LEONARD KIM
RYAN FOLAND**

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Contents

Praise

Foreword (by Keith Ferrazzi)

Introduction

Disclaimer

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Own Your Whole Story

Chapter 2: Don't Be Ideal, Be Real

Chapter 3: When You Speak, Speak Your Truth

Chapter 4: Run Farther With Imperfect Friends

Chapter 5: Your Brand Is Who You Are

Chapter 6: Your Brand Precedes You

Chapter 7: Put Yourself Out There

Chapter 8: Ditch the Act and Be Yourself

Chapter 9: Pitching Starts With Positioning. Positioning Is an Art Form

Chapter 9.5: Discover What Makes You Stand Out

Chapter 10: Overcome Fear and Share

Chapter 11: Focus on Form Not Force

Chapter 12: Make Eye Contact With the Camera

Chapter 13: Be Consistent With Content

Chapter 14: Keep it Social

Chapter 15: Sequential Steps Create Success

Chapter 16: Your Success Is Half the Story

FOREWORD

When I host dinner parties at my house, I like to bring together complementary people whose interests and expertise may have some overlap, but who will also bring new insight and perspective to the group. I'm a strong believer in the wisdom of the group and I like bringing those groups together. I also like bringing together these curated groups because I hate small talk and want each person to bring their uniqueness and authenticity to share with the rest of us. That way everyone leaves my dinner parties feeling like they've nourished their minds as well as their bodies.

It was at one of these dinners that I hosted on September 12, 2015 that Ryan and Leonard first met. I wanted to have a dinner for the rising entrepreneurial stars and that night, after my short introduction, my guests broke off to different tables based on the numbers below their plates where, serendipitously, Leonard and Ryan, whom had just met for the first time, decided to build a company together.

Because I like connecting good people, it's not uncommon for someone I haven't seen in years to reach out and say thanks for an introduction that changed the course of his or her career. That is exactly what happened two years after that initial event that Leonard and Ryan attended. I had sent Leonard a connection request on LinkedIn, and a few days later, a message showed up in my inbox, thanking me for connecting him and Ryan.

He then explained that they had been promoting and elevating my brand in the articles they were writing for various major publications. It wasn't, he wrote, just a way to say thank you—the spirit in which I had held the dinner party that night had become a foundational

component of their business. Of course I was grateful to hear this but the gratitude we now shared for each went a step further.

As a measure of their thanks, they offered to help me promote my third book which is on the concepts of co-elevation and leading without authority. The offer made perfect sense. The three of us were practicing and had proven the strength of that very thing. Co-elevating is a new level of showing up at the office—and in life—with a shared commitment to the mission and one's teammates. It's an attitude that says, "Let's do this together. I care about your success, and I'm committed to making sure you succeed too, as we work towards this shared mission in our partnership." Leonard, Ryan, and I were operating as a co-elevating team, and the results have lifted all of us up further.

Back in my early career I was a bowtie guy. Whenever I would go to events, I'd put on a bowtie to make an impression. It often sparked conversations that led to great connections. When I met Ryan at my house that first night, he was, fittingly, wearing a knitted bowtie. He made an immediate and lasting impression on me and continues to stand out in the crowd today. Outgoing and charismatic, and he understands communication in a unique way. When I was working with Ryan through developing his 3-1-3 Method, which you will learn about in this book, he challenged the way that I position myself and my company. The resolution we reached was a small but significant change that is already paying dividends.

I believe that there is nothing more powerful than candor when building relationships. Leonard is a master of implementing the lessons of his truth and experiences—both the ups and downs—that come with success and failure. What sets him out from the crowd is his bravery in sharing through an unfiltered lens not only what has worked, but more importantly what has not. I consult with some of the biggest brands in the world, and what I constantly see lacking in

executive leadership is the candor to let their authentic selves shine through. To accept that we all have flaws, that none of us know everything and, most importantly, that our team doesn't expect us to. What Leonard teaches his clients, myself included, is how to position your "not so good moments" into teachable lessons that make you more approachable and, frankly, more human.

As you will see with the section on Leonard and Ryan's Exposure Résumé, they have broken down their process of turning the moments from which you're hiding into moments that define your strongest brand. These are the moments when you show your strength, resilience and bravery by sharing their own moments of weakness and insecurity that led to greater understanding. Their authenticity, reliability, professionalism, and creativity come to life in the pages of *Ditch the Act*. You will enjoy their candor and approachability from the first page.

Let me finish off with this. If you're scared of what it may mean to expose yourself, this is all the more reason to read this book. You'll quickly realize that your real power—as an individual or as a company—is not in being picture perfect but in being vulnerable and honest. And Leonard and Ryan can show you how—precisely because they were once just as scared and skeptical as you might be right now.

-- KEITH FERRAZZI

New York Times bestselling author of *Never Eat Alone* and *Who's Got Your Back*

Introduction

Ditch The Act demonstrates how revealing your failures and weaknesses is an essential element to building and sustaining a viral personal brand to help propel your relationships, your career, and/or your business. In this book, we'll show how ditching your act and getting vulnerable creates a unique and somewhat ironic combination of differentiation and like-mindedness with your audience.

As marketing and communications experts in the corporate, academic, and startup world, we understand both the reality and the pervasiveness of failure, weakness, and frustration. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 50 percent of new businesses survive five years or more, and only one-third survive more than ten years. Failure is not just relegated to business, though. Around 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, which is to say nothing of interpersonal relationships. Aside from failure, all of us suffer from fears, exasperations, or perceived shortcomings. While these are common experiences, however, our natural tendency is to hide the skeletons in our closets—not just the things we've done but the things done to us—and construct facades of perceived strength. This is how most people build their brands. The trouble is, facades and false images hide who we really are and block true, authentic, and meaningful connection with others—and ourselves.

We live in a world that rewards experts, gurus, and thought leaders. We've been told the way to join their ranks is to share your success stories, offer practical advice, and thus convince others of your value. This, we are told, is why people return. The value you offer them. The problem is that it becomes extremely difficult to stand out when thousands if not millions of others are making the same play. It's also only half the story of who you really are.

What if you came at it from another angle? An angle that's not based on your ability to build yourself up and convince others to put you on a pedestal. An angle that's based instead on your ability to be real and show others that you're, in fact, not better than them but rather a lot like them.

In *Ditch The Act*, we share our own stories of failure and weakness, and show how vulnerably exposing those stories helped us connect with others and cultivate large, authentic, trustworthy personal brands. We share how Leonard's naiveté and arrogance—his *narrogance* as he calls it—led him from failure to failure early in his career. It's quite pitiful actually. Believing success would be easy, and arrogantly refusing jobs that were beneath him, he eventually found himself alone and broke, reevaluating his life and whether it would be best to just end it all. Only in his rock-bottom moment could he objectively evaluate his failures. In that evaluation—and perhaps as a last ditch effort to convince himself of his own value—he began to expose himself through his writing. Through his exposure, Leonard was shocked to find an empathetic, loyal, and growing fan base.

***Ditch The Act* demonstrates how exposing your failures and weaknesses is an essential element to creating an authentic personal brand... We'll show how ditching the act and getting vulnerable is the best way to differentiate and grow your brand, while cultivating brand loyalty.**

Likewise, we share Ryan's story, how he experienced his own series of setbacks. Bullied as a kid, he struggled to achieve in an effort to prove his worth. He dove into martial arts and hockey to show his tenacity and toughness. After college, he did what he could to get ahead, trusting others who promised him an easy path to success, wealth, and popularity. It didn't work. Ultimately, Ryan and his business partner at the time were investigated by the Federal Trade

Commission (FTC) in connection with his partner's activities. After settling with the FTC and coming through the darkness of that period, Ryan set out to learn how manipulation, poor communication, and betrayal had swept him into a string of failures and a criminal investigation. Through the process, he too began vulnerably sharing his story and the lessons he learned from it.

Eventually, we'd meet at a dinner party thrown by entrepreneur and *New York Times* bestselling author Keith Ferrazzi. There, Keith asked us to pair up and share one area of need or vulnerability in our own lives. Having never met before, the two of us paired up and began exposing ourselves. We discussed setbacks and legitimate areas of need and ultimately discovered we each had something to offer the other. We discovered, too, that our unique abilities and areas of expertise grew from a commitment to vulnerability and surprising honesty. Over the following months, we'd partner in creating InfluenceTree, a personal branding and professional recognition company, to share our expertise with others, an expertise centered in our mutual commitment to transparency and vulnerability.

Readers, clients, and customers connect to human stories, stories of those who've overcome failure or weakness and have learned lessons in the process. Yet, when it comes to our own lives, how many of us are able to ditch the act and be that transparent? How many of us are afraid to be vulnerable with others for fear that they will judge, stereotyped or misunderstand us?

Facades and false images hide who we really are and block true, authentic, and meaningful connection with others—and ourselves.

Ditch the Act shows you why exposure is important, and how it helps cultivate connection and grow personal brand loyalty better than any polished persona can. It also teaches you what to expose through the development of a personal, proprietary "Exposure Résumé," which strategically prompts you to list your most valuable failures, setbacks, or perceived weaknesses

and then clarify the key lessons that can be shared with others. Once those lessons are understood through the creation of your new résumé, *Ditch the Act* leads you through a practical seven-step process we use with ourselves and all our clients that is designed to help you use the fresh exposure and lessons to drive brand differentiation and growth:

1. Craft your unique bio, personal brand positioning and strategy, and the problem you are best suited to solve based on your Exposure Résumé.
2. Create stories and insights based on your Exposure Résumé.
3. Post and share your information and then spend time, effort, and marketing dollars where you see performance.
4. Extract key content pieces to turn into video scripts you will post, share and embed in content you've already published.
5. Nourish streams of content to stay top-of-mind.
6. Fostering camaraderie in new relationships.
7. Managing expectations and success stacking.

Ditch the Act is an important, unique book for all who are tired of trying to build and manage their brand by fostering a polished persona that others might admire but that you know is at least partly made to fit the standard of society, yet may not be true. It's a book for those who are ready to ditch the act and stop working so hard to be something they aren't. *Ditch the Act* is for those who want to harness the power of vulnerability and authenticity to build a better, more believable, more profitable personal brand—whether it be in their relationships, their career, or in business—and enjoy a clean conscience while doing it.

DISCLAIMER

In *Ditch The Act*, the ideas and methods outlined will go against what you think you should do. Your entire body and mind will reject the idea of sharing some of the experiences that you have faced in life that you have hidden out of shame, regret, or fear of being judged. You may have deeply buried some of these stories and hid them from the world, aside from a few confidants. We will talk about these parts of your life and walk you through different levels of exposure to ease you into being able to share these dark moments, while storing the most difficult stories for when you can muster up the courage to share them. The sooner you can accept you for who you are, as a result of all your experiences, the sooner you will be able to take off the mask, ditch the act and reveal who you are as the truly authentic person you have always been, both digitally and in real life. Ditching the act and exposing yourself is not a gimmick or a tactic you implement here and there to draw upon success—it's embracing a lifestyle that you fully incorporate—both in your in person and digital relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to the millions of readers and all our friends we made along the way, who have not only believed in us, but helped us get to where we are today (especially you). From the conversations that have helped us get over our personal struggles, to the support that is derived from the love of human connection, to the opportunities that we would have never imagined possible.

To Donya Dickerson, Maura Teitelbaum, Brent Cole, and Sara Bliss, for the immense help in believing in us and helping us put this project together, in order to share this way of life with the world.

To the bosses who have taken a chance on us, supported us in all that we do, and brought out our best selves, Michael Dennin, Iain Grainer, Christopher Bazin, and Jeana Rettig.

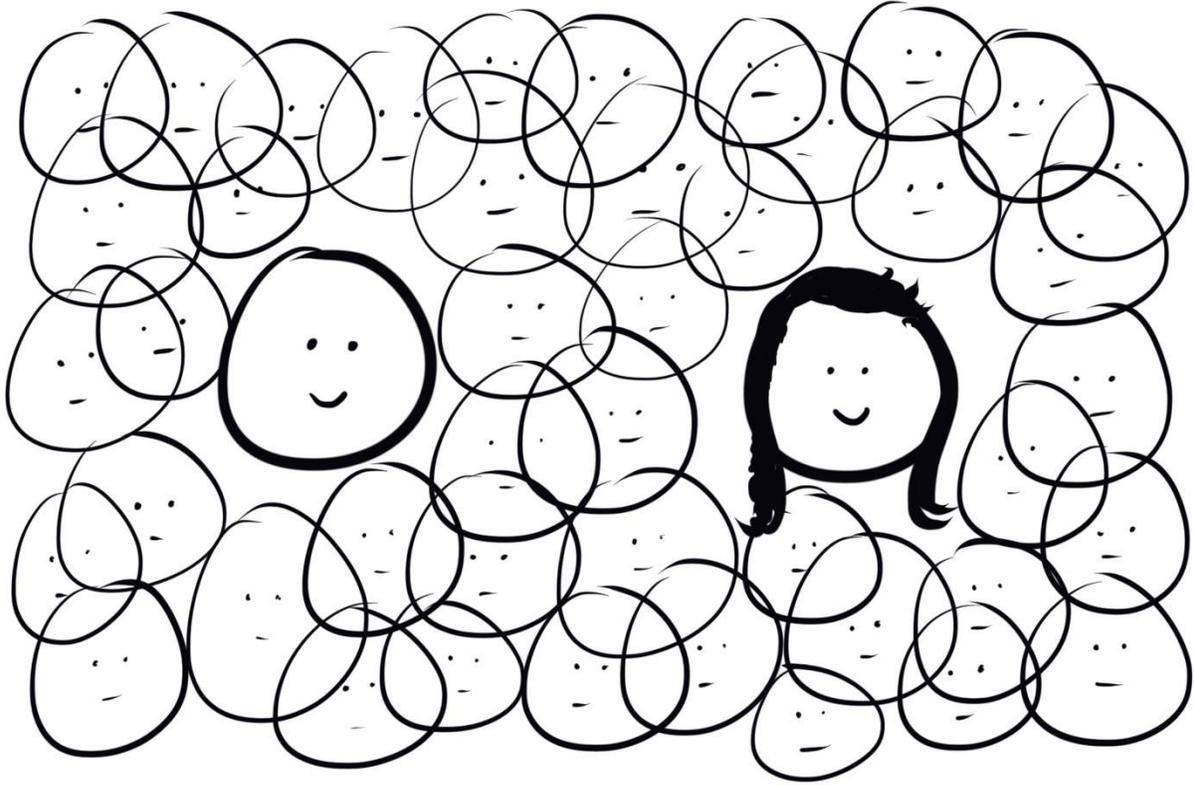
To a few of our close friends we have made through this journey, Keith Ferrazzi, Michael and Bonnie, Catheryn Chen, Tone Loc, Iman Oubou, Ben Landis, Kim Orlesky, Josef Cheng, Winnie Sun, Aaron Orendorff, Daniel Egan, Keith Ferrazzi, Joseph M. Bradley, Cheryl Snapp Conner, Hai Truong, Michael Simmons, Nathan Gold, Brian MacMahon, Kenneth Artery, John Lim, Tiffani Bova, Erin Paige Law, Nathalie Salhi, Alexandre Laulhé, Sol Orwell, Daniel Midson-Short, Evan Duning, Philip Wong, Alexander Ali, Brian D. Evans, Dorie Clark, Kent Jacobs, Blake Jamieson, Ian Chew, David Mack, Kameka M. Dempsey, Allen Han, Rachel Pedersen, Dan Bennett, Dennis Yu, Deep Patel, Aj Agrawal, Vivien Pham, Jessica Stafford, Miguel and Rosario Dias, Kelly Hrudey, Sean McKeon, Daniel, Chelsea and Caleb Vantol, Hadari Oshri, Kevin Huie, John Bates, Josh Linkner, Kevin Stockdale, Angie Sarabia, Barbara Whitmore, Lauren Carpio, Paul and Emma, Jen and Jesse, Dave and Daniel Binder, Brian Nowak, Adam Borland, Mark Deppe, Cameron Brown, Rahfeal Gordon, Levi Eastwood, Louise

Story, Tommy Sanders, Daniel Kim, Brandon Ledford, Daniel Marlin, Dr. Zeev Neuwirth, Arden Kaisman, Noelle Chang, Suzanne Brown, Alissa Carpenter, Mark Wilcox, Mary Dacuma, Joseph Davis, Rhett Power, Deirdre Breakenridge, Jennifer Aaron, Jeff Spenard, Simon Thompson, Nari Hwangpo, Ulyses Osuna, Hunter and Taylor Decker, Jonathan Alpert, Jay Kim, Ryan Bonnici, Kyle Ellicott, Adam Stone, Robin Humbert, Sovanara Ker, Johnathan Grzybowski, David Braun, Kevin J. Ryan, Karen June Freberg, Chris Agos, Myla Morhun-Le, Tara Jaye Frank, Stephanie Lee, Dr. Aviva Legatt, Marsha Collier, Dr. Diane Hamilton, Mike Wood, Arka Sengupta, Erica Rheinschild, May Busch, Allen Ortega, Nicolas Cole, Joe Martin, Dr. Michael Johns, Dr. Maria Nelson, Dr. Karla O'Dell, Dr. Jay Lieberman, Deinis Matos, Chris Strub, Holly Ridings, Rob Balasabas, Justin Keltner, Derin Cag, Danny Moon, Ann Hoy, Christine Cavalier, Mitch Jackson, James Bae, Rebekah Radice, Andrew Smith, Suzie Nguyen, Laura Gassner Otting, Zainab Reda, Alex Fletcher, Julia Arthur, Deb Shufelt, Michael Koerbel, Laura Rubinstein, Alecia Li Morgan, Stephen Panus, Scott Hansen, Tina Mulqueen, Mary C. Long, Stacey Boehrns, Mimi Zheng, Guy Woods, Jason Chen, James Altucher, Nicole Jansen, Byron Hsu, Dr. Linda F. Williams, Leo Bottary, Brian Fanzo, Annie Crawford, Charles Hughes, Julia Malacoff, Fabiola Torres, Yuri Kruman, Nicholas Smith, Eugene Hong, Sangita Dube, Brett Miketta, Paul Shepherd, Jonathan Trejo, Jonathan Beltran, Chris Harvey, Laurena Huh, and the countless other amazing people who have taken time to touch our lives.

A special thanks is made to our significant others, Angie and Cyn, and the family members that have supported us, both in their lifetime, and long after their deaths: Robert L. Landis, Hyang S. Landis, Katherine Choi, Woo C. Park, Jihwa Park, Ron Foland, Joanne Foland, Robert Knowles, Grandma Nell, Terri and Stan Salstrom, Leonard and Angie's chihuahua, Roo, and Ryan's stuffed animals, Cow and Freckles.

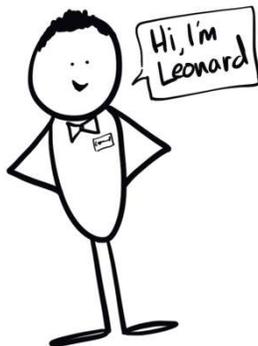
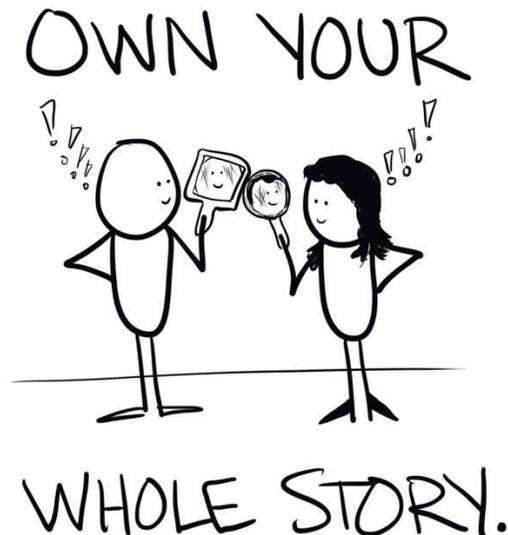
Section 1

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE



ANYONE BUT YOURSELF.

Chapter 1



I walked into Keith Ferrazzi's house like I owned the place, put together and wearing a confident smile. By all accounts, things were going well. I had a growing personal brand. I was writing articles for large publications like *Inc.* and *Entrepreneur*. I was making more money than I'd thought possible after declaring bankruptcy just a few years earlier. I'd reinvented myself, and though I wasn't living some rags to riches story yet, I was on my way. My résumé, my growth, my trajectory—all of it justified my invitation to this exclusive networking dinner party thrown by a *New York Times* best-selling author and entrepreneur. But as I stepped through the front door of his Hollywood Hills home, the truth was that I didn't feel like I belonged. I felt like a failure in so many areas of my life. And, I was fresh off a breakup.

I was dressed as a successful and somewhat eccentric entrepreneur in a dark suit with tasteful sparkling flecks and a red velvet bow tie. I mingled with the dinner party guests, sipped scotch, and enjoyed a spectacular view of the valley from Ferrazzi's hillside deck. It was a party

with up-and-coming entrepreneurs living in the Los Angeles area, a group of individuals who'd created strong differentiated personal brands, and we were all playing the part. I didn't know any of the others, and they didn't know me. Still, we knew what we shared: we were climbing the ladder of success. We were the bad-asses of the business future. It's why we'd been invited.

Before dinner, Keith called us together and offered some welcoming comments. He asked us to turn our cellphones off and refrain from taking any photos or videos. Satisfied that all phones were off, that all distractions had been minimized, he then told us this was a different sort of dinner party than we probably expected. It was a networking event, yes. But tonight, we'd network around the themes of vulnerability and candor. I don't know about the others but I felt the discomfort start to rise...

Until Keith led the way and shared his own current struggles. He shared about a very real, daily challenge in his own business that had been keeping him up at night. Some surprisingly raw stuff. His candidness opened the door with a level vulnerability uncommon in entrepreneurial circles I'd become accustomed to. It was an unexpected move and a moment in which Ferrazzi revealed that while he was a little older and more experienced than us, he was a lot more like us than we thought.

When he finished sharing, he set the parameters for the evening. Just like any other networking event, he said, many of us had come to his party with our personas and profiles intact. We'd come wearing masks of success and were ready to play *that game*. We were probably good at it too. But the truth, he said, was that none of us had all our stuff together. None of us was as put together as we'd liked everyone to believe. We all needed help. Right then and there.

"So," he continued, "over dinner, share with someone near you. But when you introduce yourself, don't share what you do. Instead, share where you need help, an area you're struggling with or not getting right."

This was a simple enough task, I thought. I'd had plenty of personal setbacks over the years, and had grown my personal brand by sharing those setbacks with my readers. I'd learned to connect with others through exposing my shortcomings and that led to me being named a Top Writer on Quora for two consecutive years and attracting over 50,000 social media followers, before even attending this party. And sharing those shortcomings was what I was already teaching to others who asked me for mentorship (or were studying from a bird's eye view of how my writing reached over 10 million reads). I looked across the table to the person I'd be sharing with over the next hour. There sat the only other man wearing a bow tie, his knitted and green.

"Ryan Foland," he said, and I introduced myself. Without skipping a beat, Ryan shared how he was a communications expert who managed an entrepreneurial incubator at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Through failed business partnerships, including one that subjected him to investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, he'd learned hard lessons about the value of truth, candor, and clarity. He used those lessons at UCI and helped his students learn to clearly communicate their vision with investors and business partners. Reaching beyond his students, though, had proven to be challenging. He struggled to get his ideas out. He had to scratch and claw to get free speaking gigs, and though he was a good writer, he wasn't able to solidify a solid platform. Worse, when he landed a gig, he had to constantly explain the FTC investigation that he'd settled because of his public past. He couldn't seem to get much traction in light of the negative publicity of his past.

After he spoke, I shared how I'd built a successful platform through writing but still struggled to connect with people in person and even more when speaking on stage...and that I'd also recently lost my girlfriend.

Ryan listened carefully. When I was finished, he cut to the chase. "I can help you connect with people," he said, "if you can help me build my platform." It was a straightforward comment, an obvious solution. And right there, on the spot, Ryan Foland became my client and I became his.

Over the months that followed the dinner party, I worked with Ryan to grow his platform. Starting with a meager 200 followers across all social networks, we worked together to expand his reach. He began sharing about his own failures and weaknesses—details he'd naturally hid until then—and how he'd learned from them. In a year, he grew his platform to over 200,000 followers and landed several articles in major publications.

Throughout the process, Ryan and I became friends, and discovered that our skill sets complimented each other. I understood the power of print and knew how to grow his social media following. He had an in-person charisma, the kind that was natural on video. We'd also both learned the power of vulnerability in building our own brands. By recognizing our unique strengths and weaknesses and our common belief in the power of vulnerability, it was apparent what happened next. I asked Ryan if he'd consider partnering with me in InfluenceTree, a personal branding and marketing company. Without a second thought, he agreed.

THE BIGGEST BRANDING MISTAKE THAT MOST PEOPLE MAKE

We live in the age of branding, both corporate and personal. The reality is, everyone has a personal brand whether they realize it or not, and though it is true that your brand might encompass your résumé, your skills, and your expertise, there is so much more to it that people don't realize. The

executive of a Fortune 500 company, the upstart entrepreneur, the teenage dishwasher who wants to work hard and become the restaurant chef—each projects a certain image, a way of being seen by others. This way of being seen, the way you carry yourself with friends, co-workers, prospective employers, and clients is the essence of your personal brand.

Yet, the image most people portray isn't the real thing. It's only their good side. This is the biggest branding mistake you can make.

In our work as personal branding experts, Ryan and I have seen so many people try to grow their brand by projecting only their better angles, only beauty, confidence, and success. They've perfected the art of putting on professional masks, and write and speak as if they have it all together. They tout their credentials on their *curriculum vitae* and become master name-droppers. They avoid talking about their failures—the time they were fired from their first job, or their pending divorce or that time they were investigated by the Federal Trade Commission. They minimize the areas where they might need a little help—the trouble they have translating their thoughts to the page or their inability to connect with others from the stage. They minimize, spin, and shade around the truth of their own areas of need, then wonder why their brand isn't quite connecting with others. And though highlighting your competencies is important in promoting your brand, what good is all that expertise if others can't relate to you?

Our clients so often wonder why their expertise fails to connect with their audience. The secret to connection, we tell them, is simple: ditch the act and expose yourself, your whole self. It's by far your best, broadest strategy for connection.

The truth is, we've all experienced failure, fear, and weakness, both in our personal lives and our business pursuits. We've all been bullied, been on the brink of losing a job, or been in hot water with a significant other (or the law). We've all made mistakes; we've all needed a little help

along the way. Because of our own struggles, we're instinctually primed to connect with those who've shared similar struggles and are willing to say "me too." We're less inclined to connect with those who project perfect confidence and success. *In fact, we're actually more prone to disconnect* with those who seem to project they are above us, better than us, or have it together more than we do. It makes no sense—from a personal standpoint or a business standpoint.

THE SURPRISING ATTRACTIVENESS OF OPENING UP

Exposing your whole self is about more than cultivating human connection. So much of our unique expertise and skill grows from those failures, fears, and weaknesses we've overcome. By removing our masks, ditching the act and sharing vulnerably, we demonstrate the authority behind the lessons we've learned. We give a more authentic, relatable basis for our expertise. We simply say, "We've been there too and here's what we've learned. Maybe it can help you." We differentiate ourselves from those who share their expertise without revealing the raw realities behind it.

Exposing yourself also helps you take control of your narrative. It allows you to get in front of negative publicity and mitigate the venom from it. As we'll show, particularly through Ryan's story, you don't have to be afraid of someone exposing the skeleton's in your closet if you've already dragged them out yourself and put it on display.

REWIRING YOUR BRAIN & YOUR SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Even with all these benefits, though, exposing yourself isn't easy. It's a little scary at first. It brings out discomfort and we worry it'll lead to ridicule. We worry others will discount or misconstrue what we have to say. It is true, exposing yourself is a risk. But if we've learned one thing in growing our own personal brands and in helping so many others do the same, it's this: vulnerable,

authentic brands attract the most loyal clients, fans, and partners; vulnerable and authentic brands are the only ones that gain cult-like followings.

There's not a more powerful brand-building tool than exposing yourself. In this book, we'll show you why it is important and how it promotes differentiation that drives brand growth. We'll help you create your own "Exposure Résumé," highlighting those failures and weaknesses that give you a unique perspective and authority. We will walk you through different stages of exposure, such as Level 1, which could be sharing how you have a pimple you are embarrassed about before walking up on a stage to help you ease into the vulnerability process. Then, we will teach you how to progress up to Level 4, which include sharing events that will probably scare you, like a tumultuous event of hardship that reshaped your life—like the loss of a career, losing sight of who you were, or when your life began to fall apart. We will discuss Level 5 exposures, which is when vulnerability can be taken too far. We will also touch upon the Exposure Bank, where you can store the stories that you are too scared to share today, but will work up the courage to share through your personal branding journey. Finally, we'll teach you the tricks of our trade. We'll show ways you can harness the power of your Exposure Résumé to create immediate brand loyalty through your relatability and gain the respect of others.

GET READY FOR YOUR LIFE TO CHANGE

If you're still skeptical of the power of exposure, if you wonder whether the principles in this book can change the course of your brand and make you more influential with your own audience, consider the results of Ferrazzi's vulnerability. Had he not shared about his own setbacks, the places he needed a little help, Ryan and I would never have taken off our networking masks. Ryan would not have shared how he needed advice in building his writing platform and I would not have

shared my own inability to connect with others in person. We would not have become each other's client, and we would not have unlocked the secrets that led us to create InfluenceTree, our personal branding company. Ultimately, we'd have never experienced the power of vulnerability in rapid, reliable brand-building, and you definitely wouldn't be holding this book.

Ferrazzi's unexpected exposure opened the door to a set of possibilities we'd never considered before. It changed the course of both our businesses and launched a new partnership that has become very successful. It also pointed us to a better way to succeed by being our truest selves. No more smoke and mirrors. No more personas. No more spin. Is there any wonder why we're both so loyal to Ferrazzi's personal brand?

Exposure works.

I don't know about you but I haven't always been authentic. I might have said I was, even convinced myself and others I was. But I know the truth...for most of my life I tried to keep my skeletons hidden and only expose the "acceptable" stuff—or make it up if it didn't exist. It's a horrible, exhausting way to live, to be perfectly honest. It's also much more difficult to sustain a brand that way. You're always on guard, and always detached from your real life and the deeper matters that's on your heart and mind. I'm grateful that's all changed.

While I haven't always been authentic, I do know I have always been drawn to authentic people. Now I've learned how to become one and not only that; Ryan and I have learned how to use that realness to help people like you build a better brand. I'm not just talking bigger numbers. I'm also talking about tangible results like more media coverage, more clients, more business. This isn't hyperbole. It's been happening for our clients time and time again. You'll hear some of their stories in the pages to come. And you'll also hear the dirty details of ours too. You'll see we're a lot more like you than you realize. We're both train wrecks who got back on track despite the

damage because we stopped trying to act like the wrecks didn't happen...or won't again. We can both tell you with a high degree of certainty that this one change has been the most liberating career move we've ever made. It's also been the most lucrative by far.

We're inviting you to ditch the act along with us. We're inviting you to grow your personal brand by exposing your whole self. If you follow the tips in this books, we believe you'll be well on your way to developing your own cult-like following. It won't take as long as you think. Authentic exposure yields results almost immediately.

To purchase the full copy of Ditch the Act: Reveal the Surprising Power of the Real You for Greater Success, written by Leonard Kim and Ryan Foland, either visit:

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To learn more about Leonard Kim, visit <https://lk.site>

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