

## The Big Mac & The Erhu

If you ever ate or enjoyed a McDonald's Big Mac, thank Jim Delligatti. The Big Mac accounted for almost one-fifth of McDonald's sales in less than two years in its launch. Jim was a franchisee and his initial proposal was met with nothing but objections from MacDonald's top executives; essentially saying, 'We don't do two patties here'.

Refusing to back off, Jim advocated strongly and lobbied a regional manager to allow him to run a pilot test on the conditions that only McDonald's ingredients were used. However, Jim went rogue when the company's buns could not fit what he wanted and also went ahead with a sauce he created. Sales shot up fast and McDonald's quickly tested the Big Mac across the US. The rest is history.

Most of us would agree that good products and good ideas need good marketing and clever promotion, and in Jim's situation, some persistence and even going rogue. What if that good product is YOU? This is where we get some mixed views.

Some of us see advocating for ourselves undignified while others believe that it is a good leader's job to uncover and polish the gems in us. There are many underlying reasons why we refrain from marketing ourselves but going into them will mean this will be an even longer email!

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启发式，画龙点睛的领导，职场教练

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A very common reason that I often hear in my coaching is, 'Asian culture is collective and especially for the Chinese, humility is a prized virtue. The day will come where my hard work will be recognized and appreciated'.

If the Chinese classic story of Mao Shui recommending himself for an important job doesn't convince you that humility and self-promotion are equally valued in Confucian thinking (毛遂自荐), let's try this story coming from the Tang Dynasty, whose wisdom was listed by a strong Confucianist, Si Ma Guang:

Chen Zi Ang (陈子昂) was one of the great poets from the Tang Dynasty who served as a senior official under the brutal regime of the first lady emperor of China. He used both his position as well as his poems to advise and admonish the lady emperor, acting as a moral compass to the regime. However, Chen Zi Ang would not be able to save many commoners from the harsh rule of the lady emperor if his talents were not even recognized.

When Chen Zi Ang initially arrived at the capital city for the Imperial Exams, he realized that he faced an uphill battle because the exams were rigged in favor of participants who had ties to the government officials, which he had none. One day when strolling in the capital city, Chen Zi Ang saw an old man trying to sell a piece of musical instrument, the Erhu (二胡) for an astronomical sum, which obviously drew a lot of bystanders and onlookers but no takers. Chen Zi Ang yelled out that he specializes in this instrument

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and this was indeed a rare piece. He bought it immediately to the amazement of the crowd.

Many then asked if Chen Zi Ang could play for them, now that he is in possession of a prized instrument. Chen Zi Ang said that he is happy to oblige but the ambience is not right and suggested that he treats the crowd to a good meal the next evening and they can then enjoy his performance. The crowd was thrilled.

Word spread like wildfire and a lot of people turned up the next evening. After a good meal Chen Zi Ang took centre stage and held up the Erhu. Looking at it for quite a while, he began to lament that he had been in the capital city for some time now and no one had recognized his talents despite him having written many articles articulating his world views. He said that his musical ability was nowhere near his wisdom. With that, he smashed the Erhu into pieces and started distributing his articles to those present.

Chen Zi Ang's acts of buying the instrument at a high price and smashing it subsequently were sensational and quickly circulated in the capital city. They quickly reached the ears of the emperor who duly called for him.

This was how Chen Zi Ang marketed himself. The instrument was actually an ordinary one and the old man who sold it was Chen's old servant!

There are usually 4 types of people in most organizations:

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- a. Incompetent but markets themselves shamelessly - most people dislike them (perhaps are jealous of them) but they have the ears of the decision makers.
- b. Competent but refuses to market themselves - The decision makers don't know these people though most of the tangible work is produced by them. Unless the person is fortunate to have a nurturing leader, more likely than not he or she experiences frustrations during much of their career. Frustration is of course spared if this person is of pretty low aspirations.
- c. Competent and markets themselves with finesse - be like this! The key is finesse.
- d. Incompetent and doesn't market themselves - these we would find in the government sector and state-owned enterprises of many emerging economies, and, in some family businesses - well, someone related by blood to them owns the business after all.

Chen Zi Ang went into the con-artistry zone for self promotion. You might not want to go on this path or have any shade of being hyperbolic. You don't need to become the Adam Neumann of WeWork. Choose something suitable for you.

Whether you need to navigate internally for a promotion, look externally for a new corporate home, gain some prominence in your complex family business relationships, or, build your venture, some level of self-promotion is crucial.

Is it time to shift some thinking and start planning for some self promotion?

Big Mac anyone? By the way, McDonald's Hotcakes and Sausage Breakfast Meal is also credited to Jim Delligatti.

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