

Developing “The Brand Called You” in Nursing: Building Professional Identity by Professional Image, Courageous Communication and Career Ambition

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ABSTRACT

In the current healthcare landscape, nurses are expected to not only have clinical competence, but also to develop a strong professional identity that marks them as trusted, influential and future-ready healthcare professionals. The Brand Called You is an employee-branding program designed to support nurses' professional growth by intentionally developing personal and professional attributes. This article presents a framework based on three pillars: professional image, empowered communication and career ambition. The first pillar stresses the significance of professional identity and sense of pride in appearance, behaviour and ethical conduct. The second pillar emphasises the need to speak up for patient advocacy, safety and interprofessional collaboration. The third pillar is ambition and ambition is the driving force for continuous learning career advancement and professional development. These pillars together foster a professional brand that builds patient trust, improves workplace culture, strengthens leadership capacity, and promotes excellence in nursing practice. This framework offers practical ways for nursing leaders to nurture

professional growth and develop a confident, competent, and lifelong learning workforce.

Keywords: Professional identity, Nursing leadership, Professional image, Speaking up, Career ambition, Employee branding, Professional development, Nursing excellence.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is much more than technical skill and clinical expertise. Today's nurses are expected to be carers, communicators, patient advocates, educators, researchers, innovators, and leaders. These multidimensional roles require a strong professional identity that shapes how nurses think, act, communicate and represent the profession. Professional identity has become an integral part of nursing practice, encompassing values, ethics, leadership, professional comportment, and a commitment to excellence⁶. Nurses who have a strong professional identity demonstrate higher levels of confidence, accountability, resilience, job satisfaction, leadership behaviours and commitment to patient-centred care. In contrast, healthcare organisations still encounter challenges like decreased professional confidence, unwillingness to speak up, passive

communication, low engagement in professional development, and lack of career ambition. The challenges have adverse impacts on quality of care, patient safety, professional visibility, and workforce retention^{3,5,6}. Recognising these gaps, Apollo Nursing leadership team developed the “Brand Called You” initiative as a structured employee-branding strategy to empower nurses to consciously build their professional image, communication capability and career aspirations.

The framework is structured in three developmental modules:

1. Your Identity Your Pride
2. Voice Up
3. Be Ambitious To Make It

These modules collectively offer a pathway towards professional identity formation, professional branding and nursing excellence.

Theoretical Framework: Professional Identity and Personal Brand in Nursing

Theoretical Framework: Professional Identity and Personal Brand in Nursing Professional identity is the internalised values, beliefs, behaviours and sense of belonging to the profession of a nurse. The International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing (ISPIN) identifies four major domains of professional identity: values and ethics, knowledge, leadership and professional comportment⁶. Professional branding takes this understanding a step further, to include nurses’ intentional shaping of how they are perceived through their appearance, communication, behaviour, achievements and leadership. In healthcare, professional branding results in increased credibility, patient trust, professional influence, and career advancement⁵. The Brand Called You framework integrates professional identity theory with leadership development and professional growth principles, offering a practical roadmap for nurses at all stages of their career.

Pillar 1: Your Identity, Your Pride

The Foundation of Professional Identity Professional Image

Professional image is often the first visible manifestation of professionalism in nursing. Patients and families often develop impressions of competence, reliability and trustworthiness during the first few encounters. Thus, the way in which nurses present themselves has a great impact on the public’s confidence in nursing care.⁵

1. Professional image includes:
2. Personal hygiene and grooming
3. Appropriate professional dress
4. Ethical behaviour.
5. Business Communication
6. Respectful behaviour
7. Accountability and responsibility
8. Pride in one’s work

A well-groomed professional image says that you are competent and professional. By contrast, bad grooming, dress code violations and unprofessional behaviour can undermine patient confidence and the public’s perception of nursing⁵.

24 Hour Professionalism

Professionalism isn’t just what you do in working hours. Nurses continue to represent the profession in their communities and social interactions. Their conduct in the workplace and in their private lives has a bearing on the image of nursing in society. The Brand Called You initiative is grounded in the belief that all nurses are constantly visible ambassadors for nursing excellence.

Professional Pride: The Excellence Driver

Professional pride is not self-centredness, but the recognition of one’s competence, responsibilities, contributions and commitment to professional standards. Professional pride demands:

1. Confidence
2. Responsibility
3. Resilience
4. Job satisfaction
5. Dedication to quality care

Nurse leaders can encourage professional pride through recognising achievement, celebrating success stories, mentoring staff, and reinforcing professional standards.^{5,6}

Pillar 2: Say What You Think Patient Advocacy and Assertive Communication

Communication failures continue to be one of the most common causes of patient safety incidents worldwide. Good communication is an essential component of quality healthcare, teamwork and patient safety.

“Nurses are in the best position to be an advocate for patients because they spend the most time in the direct care of the patients. So, it is an ethical obligation and a professional responsibility to speak up.

To speak up means:

1. Enhancing patient safety
2. Reporting unsafe practice
3. Difficult decisions that could damage patients
4. Ethical Problems
5. Dealing with improper behaviour
6. Explain unclear orders
7. Exchange of professional views

Why Nurses Are Afraid to Speak Up

Barriers still exist to keep nurses from voicing concerns:

Fear of reprisals

Fear of being criticised

Organisational structure

Absence of Psychological Safety

Negative past experiences

Futility as perceived

Evidence shows that delay in escalation of concerns may lead to preventable adverse events and impact patient outcome².

Building a Culture of Brave Conversations

Organisations can reinforce speaking-up behaviours by:

1. Open cultures of communication
2. Accessible leadership
3. Structured communication training.
4. Recognition of advocacy practices
5. Psychological safety at work

6. Fault-free reporting systems

Communication empowerment enables nurses to be active patient advocates and strong members of multidisciplinary healthcare teams^{2,8,9}.

The core message of the module is simple: “Silence is dangerous. Speaking out is safe.”

Pillar 3: Have a Desire to Win

Ambition as professional competence

Healthcare is always changing and nurses need new knowledge, skills and competencies throughout their career. Yet, many professionals get comfortable in their positions and stop actively looking for opportunities to grow.

The Brand Called You movement defines ambition as a professional competency, not a personality trait.

Ambition includes:

1. Setting significant goals;
2. Lifelong Learning
3. Looking to progress my career
4. Doing research
5. Developing skills
6. Leading the way
7. Powering Innovation

Growth Mindset & Lifelong Learning.

The nurse with a growth mindset can see what is possible instead of what is not possible. Ambitious nurses read, seek certification, specialise, do research, attend conferences, and engage in scholarly activities to further their professional development.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is universally recognised as an essential tool for maintaining competence, improving patient outcomes and ensuring flexibility in the midst of rapidly changing healthcare systems^{4,6}.

The Magic of Positive Affirmations to Reach Goals

The module encourages nurses to use realistic positive affirmation that builds confidence and strengthens self-efficacy. Research shows that workplace confidence,

motivation and ambition can have a big impact on career success over time ⁴.

stronger leadership pipelines, fuel innovation, improve succession planning and bolster workforce sustainability ⁶.

Developing Future Nursing Leaders

Ambitious nurses are tomorrow's leaders. Organisations that encourage ambition build

Theoretical perspective



Figure 1. Conceptual model of the interaction between professional image, empowered communication and career ambition to consolidate professional identity and to build a sustainable professional brand among nurses.

Table 1. Mapping Nursing Outcomes to Brand Called You Modules

Module	Key Components	Professional Identity Outcome	Patient Safety Outcome	Leadership Outcome	Retention Outcome	Career Growth Outcome
Your Identity, Your Pride	Professional image, grooming, professional pride, ethical conduct, role modelling	Strong professional self-concept, increased confidence and credibility	Improved patient trust and therapeutic relationships	Greater accountability and professional influence	Higher job satisfaction	Foundation for advancement
Speak Up	Advocacy, assertive communication, psychological safety, teamwork	Empowered professional voice	Reduced communication errors, stronger safety culture	Improved influence and decision-making	Reduced moral distress and burnout	Enhanced visibility and recognition

Be Ambitious to Succeed	Goal setting, lifelong learning, CPD, innovation, research	Identity as a learner and professional achiever	Increased evidence-based practice adoption	Leadership pipeline development	Greater organizational commitment	Promotion, specialization, academic progression
Integrated Impact	Confidence, competence, advocacy, learning, professionalism	Comprehensive professional identity formation	Improved quality and safety outcomes	Transformational leadership development	Strong workforce engagement and retention	Sustainable career success

Brand Called You framework Organisational outcomes

The implications of the Brand Called You framework extend beyond the growth of individual nurses.

Individually, nurses achieve professional confidence, accountability, communication effectiveness and career focus.

At the team level, better communication leads to greater collaboration, a stronger safety culture, fewer preventable errors, and better patient advocacy⁶.

Ambitious, professionally engaged nurses add value at the organisational level through innovation, quality improvement, workforce stability, leadership succession, and scholarly productivity^{1,4}.

Potential benefits to the organization:

1. Improved patient experience
2. Better patient safety culture
3. More employee engagement
4. Retention of nurses is up
5. Stronger succession in leadership
6. Greater professional exposure
7. More research and publication output
8. Developing organisational reputation

Implications for Nursing Leaders

Nurse leaders are critical to operationalising the Brand Called You framework. Leaders must:

1. Utilise professional branding in orientation programmes.
2. Set standards of professional appearance and conduct.
3. Create psychologically safe workplaces.
4. Encourage open communication and speaking up.

5. Acknowledge professional accomplishments.

6. Encourage continuing professional development.

7. Promote research, publication and innovation.

8. Establish structured mentorship programs.

9. Help with individual career planning.

Changing professional branding from an educational effort to an organisational culture must involve the commitment of leaders.

CONCLUSION

Every nurse has the potential to be a strong professional brand. A professional image builds credibility Speaking up builds influence and advocacy Ambition builds growth and leadership.

The Brand Called You framework offers a practical and evidence-informed approach to professional identity formation in nursing, integrating three critical dimensions: professional image, empowered communication, and career ambition. Together, these pillars create confident, competent, visible and future-ready nursing professionals who positively impact patient outcomes, organisational performance and the advancement of the nursing profession.

A professional brand is not ultimately built on the shoulders of one success. It is built every day through behaviours, communications, learning, leadership, and a commitment to excellence.

The highest brand for a nurse is the unwavering professionalism, courage and ambition in the service of humanity.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: This article is a scholarly concept paper based on professional development and employee-branding modules developed for nursing leadership and workforce development. The manuscript does not involve human participants, patient data, biological samples, surveys, interviews, or experimental interventions. Therefore, ethical approval from an Institutional Ethics Committee/Institutional Review Board was not required.

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