

**B R E
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Personal Branding for College Coaches: Why telling your personal story matters to your Gen Z recruits

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Introduction

Really knowing who your student-athletes are, what they value, and “what makes them tick” is essential to unleashing their potential. As important as it is to get to know them as individuals, it is also important to understand the broader societal and cultural context in which these student-athletes are living in order to form connections.

The new student-athletes stepping onto your campus today are part of Generation Z—aka “Gen Z.” After growing up during the recession, Gen Z is skeptical of most authority, so, as a coach, you are going to have to work hard to earn their trust. On the bright side, Gen Z also appreciates transparency and authenticity over almost everything else. In order to make meaningful connections with potential Gen Z students, you’ll need to tap into your personal side and develop your **brand story** as a coach. Let’s take a closer look at why and how to do this.



Gen Z: the New Frontier

Because Gen Z has access to unlimited amounts of information, they have a tendency to question and fact-check most of what they see or hear. If the story or information they're looking for isn't easily accessible, they are immediately skeptical. On the other hand, if they see universities and coaches being open and honest about who they are and what they stand for, it becomes much easier to earn their respect and commitment.

Additionally, Gen Z is more exposed to word-of-mouth reviews and referrals than any generation before it—which means they rely on the opinions of the communities they trust. In terms of products, **86% of Gen Z** reads online reviews before making a purchase, and 68% say they read three or more reviews. The bottom line here is that **a brand's consistent reputation matters—whether that in-person or digitally**. And this is especially true for Gen Z folks who are diligent about gathering data before making decisions, such as choosing a college or university.

Why Authentic Storytelling Matters

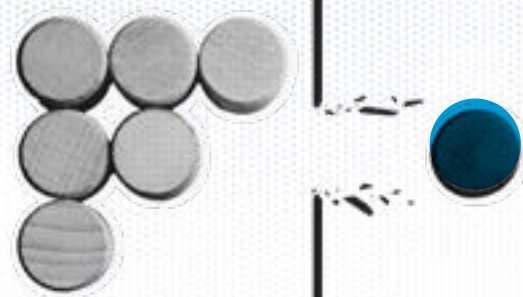
Gen Z student-athletes highly value input from their peers more than parents or other role models compared with previous generations. In fact, **Gen Z relies on the opinions of their peers more than admission or school counselors when it comes to selecting a college.**

Additionally, 56% of Gen Z consider themselves to be socially conscious, and **more than 50%** report that knowing a brand is socially conscious influences their decisions. By creating an authentic image for your school or your team, one that pursues ethical, socially conscious initiatives, you'll earn Gen Z student-athletes' trust, and they'll share their high opinions with their peers.

Most importantly, Gen Z wants to know who you are as a coach. The reputation and image of your school and your team are valuable, yes, but nothing compares to your reputation as a coach and the power of your own storytelling. Are you putting your best foot forward in terms of creating a brand that others perceive positively?

Have you Googled yourself recently? Or worked on building your brand? Beyond your win-loss record or your online bio, do your student-athletes (and potential recruits) know who you are and what your values are off the court? Making these aspects of yourself as a leader visible and known to others can help you to attract the best fits for your team and build your program.

With the **transfer portal**, we know that talent comes and goes. But what stays are the relationships. And there's no better way to accelerate the formation of relationships with recruits than by owning and sharing your unique, personal brand as a coach.



Coaches: Tell Your Story

Often, schools are out to recruit top talent—but a team is more than the sum of any individual players. When it comes to recruiting, authenticity matters. Not just for you as a coach, but also for the students with whom you're interacting.

What is the story you tell about yourself and your program when you are pitching? Do your recruits see themselves in these stories? Who are you seeking to join your program and why? Your ability to recruit effectively to build your team, and your legacy as a coach, relies on your reputation as a leader and the consistency of your brand.

In fact, one could argue that some of the most important brands that a school has are its own coaches. These brands are assets and, as such, there should be an investment in building them strategically and in a way that helps schools attract talent that aligns with their values. An investment of this nature could lead to more ideal recruits, a better win-loss record, and even NCAA appearances—all of which benefit coaches, students, and schools alike.

Without a tight, clear, and confident coach story, teams and schools could miss out on game-changing opportunities and extraordinary student-athletes.

Creating a Personal Brand

For your brand story to be impactful in the recruiting process, it will take more than just “putting yourself out there more.” Students will connect with your story when it is relevant—when it touches on what truly matters to them.

Relevance, generally speaking, is about being appropriate or meaningful in the moment. In branding, we talk about achieving relevance in terms of reaching the right consumer, with the right product, with the right message, at the right moment/point in time, in the right place to compel them to choose your brand.

But beyond just the image, the most powerful (and relevant) brand stories from coaches have the ability to evoke and create meaningful emotions, feelings, and inspiration. Most of the time, the pathways to these meaningful connections are forged by personal stories.

Stories serve as inspiration and motivation for Gen Z students. When they recognize your authenticity, they are more likely to give you and your team a chance.

As you think about building a stronger personal brand and making a positive impact on potential student-athletes, here are a few **self-reflection questions**:

1. What do you want others' perceptions of you and your personal brand to be? Do you have the “social proof” and credibility to match and deliver relative to these perceptions?
2. Who are your ideal recruits and what type of content and what channels (i.e. what places, both on and offline) are most relevant to them?
3. How can you tell your story in a way that connects emotionally to potential student-athletes? (i.e. introducing your background, your history with the sport, your values)
4. What impact (thoughts, actions, feelings) do you want your personal brand to have on others on your team, at your school, and in your community?

Conclusion

As a coach, your plate is often full, especially with recruiting ([some coaches say 70% of their workload is recruiting](#)).

So what if the best Gen Z student-athletes for your team came to you ready to make their big decision? By building a personal brand as a coach, and by authentically telling your story, attracting your dream recruits is possible. While it might seem daunting, our team at BREAKTHRU Brands is here to help you develop an authentic, bold, cohesive, and nuanced brand, just like we've done with award-winning coaches [Kathy Delaney-Smith](#), [Jackie Carson](#), and [Tricia Cullop](#).

If you are seeking a clearer, more established brand voice, our team at BREAKTHRU Brands is standing by, ready to help you unlock your potential and give you the boost necessary to own your mission, recruit like-minded talent to your programs, and continue to stand out as a leader in your community. Through our work together, the moment a potential student-athlete Googles your name, they'll know your values and your story.

Are you ready to create and build a brand that is uniquely YOU?

You don't have to go it alone.

Schedule your free 15-minute exploratory call with our Founder (and former Harvard basketball player), Laura Barnard, to learn more about how we can help you on your journey.

[Schedule a Call](#)

