

Take a look at how to go about determining and developing your downtown brand personality. The only things you will need for this exercise are pens or pencils, small pieces of paper and a white board, blackboard or a large sheet of paper for writing down lists for everyone to see.

When setting up this exercise, try to get as many people involved as possible and try to get them from many different viewpoints... suburbanites, students, old, shopkeepers, come-heres, you get the idea.

Next, take a moment to explain that your downtown's personality is very similar to a human's personality; its what attracts you to or repels you from them. You really need a common frame of reference here. So, ask everyone to write, on small scrap of paper, a movie or tv star or character that reminds them of the downtown.

Compile all of these on a list up front so everyone can see it. Look for some similarities. Try to group these characters or stars by common traits. Is your downtown more Jimmy Stewart or Terminator? Is it Aunt Bea or Angelina Jolie.

Ask the group to explain some of its picks. Guide them to tell you what aspects of the characters they chose match how they feel about the downtown. Are the characters approachable? Tough? Interesting?

On a new sheet of paper or on the erasable board, start compiling the list of personality traits that people mention. Once you have a solid list, divide it into 'attractive' and 'repulsive' traits. Then pick the 3 or 4 traits with which you would most like to be identified. These three or four personality traits, when combined, will serve as your downtown brand personality.

Ask yourself, is this a personality that would make people give downtown a chance? If you met a person like that, would you want to see them again? Would you be comfortable spending long periods of time with them? Would you tell your friends about the person you met today?

Now pick the 3 most often mentioned “bad” traits. These are the reasons that people stay away and probably tell their friends to stay away. What can you do to mitigate them? Assign two or three people to come up with a plan to fix these problems.

It will be good to keep a record of this session and follow up in a month, 3 months and 6 months to see if you are truly implementing the mitigation plan and the public branding.