

Let Yourself Be Typecast

By Rusty Cawley

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In 1930, Hollywood actor Bela Lugosi turned down an offer to play the Monster in "Frankenstein." This happened just after Lugosi scored a huge box office hit as Count Dracula.

A European-trained stage actor with experience as a romantic lead, Lugosi rejected the Frankenstein role because he didn't want to be typecast as a star of horror movies.

He would later declare this as the worst decision in his life.

Instead, the role of the Monster went to Boris Karloff, a journeyman actor who embraced the curse of typecasting as a blessing.

Had Lugosi said yes to Frankenstein, he could have dominated the horror genre for the next 25 years. Instead, his decision forced him to share the spotlight at Universal Studios with Karloff and later with Lon Chaney Jr.

Indeed, Karloff went on to eclipse Lugosi. As late as the 1960s, Karloff continued to star in major projects, such as the TV series "Thriller" and the animated version of "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas."

Lugosi ended his career in 1956 by starring in what is generally regarded as the worst movie every made, "Plan 9 From Outer Space."

So what's the lesson?

Don't fight typecasting. Forget about being all things to all people.

Focus your energies on a narrow band of profitable opportunities.

As long as Harlan Sanders ran a roadside café that offered a menu aimed at satisfying any appetite, he remained a small-time entrepreneur. But when fate forced him out of the café, Sanders focused his energies upon his most popular dish: a chicken fried in 11 herbs and spices.

Sanders typecast himself as a Kentucky colonel, complete with black string tie and white linen suit. You know the rest.

The point is: Not only should you accept typecasting, you should embrace it.

When Jack Welch became CEO at GE, he got rid of 100,000 employees to streamline the corporate giant's bureaucracy. That earned him the name "Neutron Jack," which refers to the neutron bomb, a device that kills people but leaves buildings untouched.

Warren Buffett is known as the "Oracle of Omaha," and is often referred to as the "most successful individual investor of all time." These titles recognized Buffett's skill at picking stocks, like Coca-Cola and Gillette. But they ignore the fact that Buffett generated most of his billions by assembling and maintaining his mighty conglomerate, Berkshire Hathaway, and not through stock picking.

Sam Walton possessed one of the sharpest and most ruthless retailing minds of the 20th century. Yet he is usually depicted as kindly "Mr. Sam," the dog-loving, pickup-driving bubba who just happened to launch Wal-Mart.

Did Welch, Buffett and Walton reject their typecasting? Of course not. They understood what every PR Rainmaker understands: Typecasting is the only path to a singular identity.

When typecasting is combined with a powerful reputation, the result is the sort of corporate prestige that separates the Jack Welches, the Warren Buffetts and the Sam Waltons from the rest of the nation's CEOs.

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Rusty Cawley is a 20-year veteran journalist who now coaches executives, entrepreneurs and professionals on using the news media to attract customers and to advance ideas. For your free copy of the ebook "PR Rainmaker," please visit www.prrainmaker.com right now.

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