

# GETTING AHEAD: THREE STEPS TO TAKE YOUR CAREER TO THE NEXT LEVEL

*by Joel A. Garfinkle*

**T**he most successful leaders have risen to the top by leveraging and applying perception, visibility, and influence (PVI) better than anyone else. Positively changing the perceptions others have of you, increasing your visibility, and exerting influence regardless of your level in the organization are the keys to becoming an in-demand leader.

When you combine these three powerful elements—perception, visibility, and influence—you'll be recognized and rewarded for your contributions and become the influential leader you were meant to be.

## **Improving Your Perception**

*Create the right image of yourself by taking control of how others see you, so their perception of you accurately reflects your impact on the organization.*

The PVI model starts with perception. People are constantly observing and making judgments about the type of person or employee you are. Initial impressions are formed within mere seconds. If the first impression is negative, it can be difficult to change. You must be aware of the way people perceive your actions, both large and small, to ensure you

are creating positive perceptions in the minds of your coworkers and supervisors.

When Arthur Collins joined the vice presidential ranks at Abbott Laboratories, Umesh Ramakrishnan points out in *There's No Elevator to the Top*, the first thing he was told was that others would constantly be watching him: "You're going to be very surprised at how much people will watch what you do and listen to what you say. They'll take away much more than you think should be taken away from your words, little words or little things that you do."

To ensure that your actions are being perceived in a positive light, you must first determine how your colleagues perceive you. Although it can be awkward and intimidating to ask, this is the only way you can know what adjustments need to be made. Feedback is imperative to professional growth.

For example, a Google executive I was coaching was unclear about how she was viewed by her coworkers. This caused her to doubt her abilities. After participating in a major company initiative, she asked her project manager to meet with her and give her feedback on her performance. Besides gaining valuable insights, she also positively influenced the project manager's perception

of her. He saw her as someone who wanted to improve herself and was committed to delivering even higher quality work. Eight months later she was promoted.

Don't wait for your next appraisal to obtain feedback. Be proactive and seek out opportunities to better understand how you are perceived by others. For example, after a difficult or contentious conversation, you might ask a coworker, "Did I handle that situation well? What could I have done differently?" Be open to constructive criticism and thank others for sharing their perceptions.

Often, people are completely unaware of the little things they do that are viewed in a negative light. Seemingly inconsequential actions such as sending e-mail with spelling mistakes can prevent you from making a positive impression on those around you.

Once you know how you are perceived, you can pinpoint specific behaviors that need to be modified to create the perception you desire. Perhaps you speak too loudly, interrupt when others are speaking, or spend too much time socializing. Sometimes only relatively minor adjustments are needed to make a big difference.

Here are a few other suggestions that will influence others' perceptions of you.

## Tips for Changing How Others Perceive You

1. Seek out highly visible projects.

Working on high-visibility projects allows you to influence the way you are perceived and the level of respect others have for you. Try to become involved in a project that will have a huge impact on the company's bottom line. By making valuable contributions to the project, you will enhance the way you are perceived by decision makers in your organization.

2. Gain exposure to influential corporate leaders.

Seek out opportunities to interact with the most influential leaders in your organization. Ask relevant, insightful questions and discreetly share the

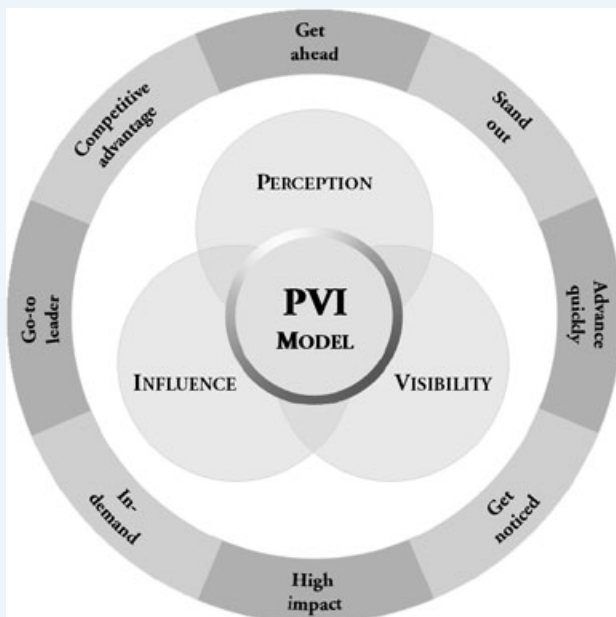


FIGURE 1. PVI MODEL

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## *Feedback is imperative to professional growth.*

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successes you've achieved. Make sure the influencers in your company know who you are and have a positive perception of you.

### 3. Speak up more often.

Make an effort to share more of your opinions, insights, and ideas. Contribute to the conversations around you, speak up at meetings, and make sure your ideas are heard. Present ideas that will generate new revenue, improve customer service, streamline operations, and reduce expenses.

Your value-quotient to the organization rises in direct proportion to how effectively you are able to create an accurate perception of your abilities among colleagues, supervisors, and top management.

Next, learn the importance of visibility.

### **Increasing Your Visibility**

*Increase your profile across the organization and among higher levels of management by standing out and getting noticed.*

To increase your visibility, you need to stand up and get noticed. You do this by identifying and highlighting specific achievements you have made that are remarkable, distinctive, and genuinely add value to the company. Never be content to stand in the wings or hide in the shadows. Make sure others know how indispensable you are. Don't just be above average—be memorable.

Name a leader who isn't visible. Chances are that you can't. Leadership and visibility go hand in hand. When you have both, people will see you as someone with power, influence, and authority. They'll know who you are and what you do, and will appreciate the value you

provide. Without visibility, you won't be noticed, and your career progression will come to an abrupt halt.

Keith Ferrazzi, author of the best-selling book *Never Eat Alone*, tells how he insisted on meeting with the "head guys" of Deloitte Consulting before accepting a job offer from the company. At this meeting, he told Pat Loconto, who was head of Deloitte at the time, that he would accept the offer on one condition—that Loconto would have dinner with him once a year. As Jeffrey Pfeffer explains in *Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't*, Ferrazzi took control of his visibility in the company right from the start by arranging access to the company's top leaders. He made himself unforgettable and went on to become the youngest partner in the company's history.

Visibility is not about who you know—it's about who knows you. To make yourself known to the people who matter most, you need to promote yourself. Then you need to encourage others to promote you as well.

### **Promoting Yourself**

Before you can promote yourself, you must have something to promote. Make a list of your most significant accomplishments during the past 6 to 12 months. Identify concrete examples of the impact your projects had on the organization. For example, perhaps you found a way to cut the manufacturing costs for a certain product line or you implemented a new process that improved customer service. Write these accomplishments down in detail and start keeping track of the results you achieve in the future.

Routinely keep your boss updated on your progress. Rather than waiting until the project is complete, send written weekly progress reports via e-mail to describe your successes along the way.

Here are a few more ways to promote yourself at work:

#### 1. Document the praise you receive from others.

Be sure to document every time you receive positive feedback from customers, suppliers, colleagues, direct reports, or supervisors. Praise from others is a powerful promotional tool. It can be leveraged during your performance review or at appropriate

times throughout the year. If someone in your business world loves you, make sure everyone knows it.

2. Take the initiative.

The more proactive you are, the more visibility you gain. If you see a problem, solve it. If something isn't working right, fix it. Watch for opportunities to gain visibility and capitalize on them. Seek out projects, ask for more responsibility, be involved outside your job, speak up in meetings, and take advantage of opportunities to gain face-time with top executives. This will help you become better known and respected.

3. Promote yourself by promoting others.

When you give praise and recognition to your employees, you eliminate the number one reason people leave their jobs—feeling unappreciated. Instead, you'll witness increased morale, improved performance, and a deeper sense of loyalty.

4. Tell stories.

Stating an accomplishment in the form of a compelling story creates a lasting mental picture that people are likely to remember and pass along. Try to limit your success stories to 30-second sound bites that are easy to understand and remember. Everyone has a story; it's just a matter of figuring out the most compelling way to tell it.

Watch for opportunities to gain visibility and capitalize on them.

### Get Others to Promote You

Are you more likely to buy a product as a result of an endorsement from a salesperson or from a personal acquaintance? Most likely, you give your friend's opinion more weight because you're sure a friend has your best interests at heart while the salesperson has a vested interest in getting you to buy. The same is true in the workplace. People will see you in a much more favorable light if the good things they hear about you come from a trusted third party.

You need advocates to speak up on your behalf. There are many people you can ask to be an advocate. The most obvious would be your boss or someone else above you in the organization. These people have in-

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fluence and their opinions carry a great deal of weight. Others who can make effective advocates include your peers, your subordinates, your clients or customers, and your vendors or suppliers.

Try to find at least three people who will advocate for you. They will campaign on your behalf, champion your cause, and help improve how others perceive you. Provide these individuals with specific details regarding the value you've provided to the company and ask them to share your achievements with a targeted list of influential people. The clearer you are in providing the details of your accomplishments and how these have impacted the company, the easier it is for your advocates to promote your success.

Many people are uncomfortable asking someone to advocate on their behalf due to lack of confidence or fear of rejection. If you impress others with your skills and personality, they will *want* to tell others about you. Develop relationships with potential advocates first, and it will be much easier to ask them for help.

Visibility will help you get noticed, gain recognition, and advance within your firm. Visibility is the key to increasing your exposure and becoming known as a valued leader. Paired with perception, visibility is one of the pillars that support your ability to influence others. Without perception and visibility, influence is not possible.

### Exerting Your Influence

*Have impact and leverage your power to influence and improve situations, regardless of your position or level of authority.*

Once you have improved your perception and increased your visibility, you are ready to develop influence. With influence comes impact. Your ability to change and alter situations grows as you expand your influence.

Start by assessing how influential you are now. When is the last time someone above you in the chain of command acted on one of your ideas and gave you credit? Do your employees act quickly when you make a request? How often do people buy into your projects and ideas? These questions can help you determine how much influence you currently have within your organization.

If you have influence, you can move your team or organization forward by taking action and producing powerful results. People with influence inspire others to execute and accomplish significant achievements. Influence is the ability to get people to do things they would not normally do, even within those areas of the organization where you have no direct authority.

In her *Harvard Business Review* article “Becoming the Boss,” author Linda A. Hill underscores that last point: “We see a new manager fall into the trap of relying too heavily on his formal authority as his source of influence. Instead, he needs to build his influence by creating a web of strong, interdependent relationships, based on credibility and trust, throughout his team and the entire organization—one strand at a time.”

What does “one strand at a time” mean? It means developing concentric circles of influence, starting within your immediate department and radiating outward throughout the organization.

## The Benefits of Being an Influential Leader

If you are an influential leader, you get things done. People know they can count on you to complete difficult assignments. As a result, you may exert your influence on high-profile projects.

You’ll gain respect from senior leadership and they will seek your advice before making important decisions. This allows you the opportunity to influence decisions

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*With influence comes  
impact.*

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that you otherwise might not even know were being made until after the fact.

When you are an influential leader, people will embrace your ideas. Because of your credibility and the respect they have for you, others will desire to participate in whatever you are advocating. You will be able to build strong and supportive alliances, enhancing your ability to effect significant change within the organization.

## Five Ways to Be More Influential

The first step to increasing your influence it is to master the specific traits prevalent among influential leaders. Think of the most influential people you know and determine how many of these traits they possess:

1. A solid reputation

This gives you a head start in exerting influence over people you have just met. They will give you the benefit of the doubt because your reputation precedes you.

2. An enhanced skill set

With this, you are able to do your job exceedingly well. You constantly surprise people and exceed their expectations with the quality of your work.

3. Executive presence

People trust your leadership because of your confident and powerful persona. The magnetic pull of your charismatic personality draws people to you and compels them to follow you.

4. Superior likeability

People are drawn to you. You have a way with others and put them at ease. They feel comfortable around you.

5. The power to persuade

If you are persuasive, you have the ability to sway people to your side and convince them to follow you.

Regardless of your title or position in the organization, you can develop the ability to influence others. In fact,

if you want to continue to advance your career, you *must* develop this ability. Without influence, your career will stagnate and you will find yourself stuck and unable to advance any further. By combining all three elements of the PVI model—perception, visibility, and influence—you can avoid career stagnation and become recognized as a go-to leader.

**Evaluate Your Ability to Influence**

Leaders with influence do the following things. Rate yourself from 1 to 5.

1. *Get things done.* People know they can count on me to accomplish even the toughest assignments.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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2. *Become a go-to person.* Others seek me out for advice to accomplish the most essential tasks and to make important decisions.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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3. *Build strong alliances.* I'm able to create alliances across all business units, thereby developing a wider base of support and cooperation.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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4. *Gain buy-in for your ideas.* My established credibility and respect will prompt people to embrace my ideas and to want to be a part of what I'm doing.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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5. *Leverage your allies.* My allies will support my ideas and accomplish the tasks that have been deemed important.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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6. *Sway decisions.* When I speak, people will listen to what I have to say so that I can sway decisions to my desired outcome.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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7. *Cause others to rely on you.* When I influence decisions and change outcomes for the better, people appreciate my confidence and know they can depend on me.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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8. *Lead up.* I establish mutual respect with people above me who want to seek out and hear my opinions, ideas, and insights.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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9. *Gain results from others.* I inspire others to take on activities that affect the organization and improve bottom-line results.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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10. *Attract the star employees.* I create a committed, engaged, and excited workforce that executes the projects or activities related to what I am influencing.
 

No, not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Yes, definitely
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**Scoring:** Add the circled numbers in each column

*If you scored between 45 and 50, you are doing an excellent job exerting your influence. You move the organization forward and change outcomes for the better. You are depended on and seen as a difference maker. Review the scores above to identify at least one area in which you can improve your influence even more. If you scored 4 or lower, focus on improving that specific area.*

*If you scored between 36 and 44, you are doing a pretty good job utilizing influence at work. You contribute to major decisions and drive change for the betterment of the company. To reach a higher score, you'll need to continue focusing and improving your influence ability. Review the scores above and select three different areas that need to be improved upon. If you scored 4 or lower, focus on improving that specific area.*

*If you scored 35 or below, you need to immediately improve your influence ability. Learn how to be included in important decisionmaking and work on projects that add value and impact. Review the scores above and select five areas that can be improved. First, focus on the areas in which you scored 1 or 2. Then, move on to the ones where you scored 3.*

## Elevate Your PVI for Professional Greatness

The PVI model can be your guiding light throughout your career, allowing you to maximize your potential and realize your professional greatness. When you apply the PVI model, you gain the competitive edge necessary to excel in today's intense work environment. You become recognized as extremely capable, credible, and highly respected by upper management. You advance and achieve the promotions you deserve. You make the most impact on the company. Extraordinary success is gained.



*Joel A. Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 leadership coaches in the United States, having worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Google, Amazon, Citibank, Deloitte, Cisco Systems, Oracle, Ritz-Carlton, and many more. He is the author of seven books, including "Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level," which provides the exact steps you must follow to develop your PVI and advance to the next level in your career. Visit [www.GarfinkleExecutiveCoaching.com](http://www.GarfinkleExecutiveCoaching.com) for information about Joel's executive coaching services and to download his free e-book, "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*