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Visibility & Your

Personal Brand

November 7, 2021

Well hello Friends! I hope you guys had an amazing week.

Today I want to talk about visibility within your career. Specifically, why it matters, why we need to proactively manage our visibility within our job and our company *and* what to do when you feel like it’s become an issue for you.

As I researched the topic this week, I noticed that there’s a lot of different definitions out there. But in my business, I define visibility within your career as the need to be “broadly recognized for your skills, ideas and accomplishments.”

Now, you might be thinking “why do I need to be broadly recognized? Isn’t it enough that my boss sees my value?”

And the short answer is, no. Regardless of the size of the company you work in it takes more than one person – your boss – to see your value. And this also affects entrepreneurs. For them it’s about how they show up with their employees, clients and even within the business communities they’re part of.

It’s really about proactively managing your personal brand. How you want others to view you. And that’s not something you want to leave to chance.

The truth is if you want to keep moving forward in your career, if you want to be the first one, they think of with new assignments or next level opportunities, it’s going to take more than your direct manager to recognize and see your worth.

It’s the same for entrepreneurs. If you want your employees to follow you, if you want to be at the top of the list for the next great speaking engagement within your community, if you want to be a leader within your niche, you can’t just leave it to change. You have to be visible.

The way I see it, visibility in business comes down to two things – both of which are tied to your personal brand or how you want to be thought of.

The first is something I call **leading out loud.** This isabout having the confidence and self-belief to speak up. To believe in yourself and in your ideas so much that you lean in. You share your ideas and concerns, you’re not afraid to express an opposing opinion. You volunteer for hard or high-profile assignments. Basically, you put yourself out there.

The second, is about what I like to call 360-degree personal brand management. This is about being smart about managing your brand with the important stakeholders who need to have a positive opinion of you so that you can get the things you want. And this isn’t about being a shameless self-promoter, but it **is** about taking smart, proactive steps to ensure that the people who you want and need to be aware of you, are. And that you’re controlling your own narrative and not relying on others to do that for you. An important part of it.

So, you might be thinking that professional visibility is just a problem for introverts. I can assure you, it’s not. I know many **natural introverts** who are amazing at both **leading out loud** and **360-degree brand management**.

The truth is having a visibility problem can become an issue for anyone at any stage of their career – no matter how extroverted you might be. I think it comes from a lack of confidence or a feeling of uncertainty and that can happen to any of us if we land in a less than ideal work situation.

All it takes is a boss who doesn’t favor you, who gives you less high-profile projects and you might find yourself less visible, feeling like you’ve been sidelined. And then what happens? You start to feel less certain. Self-doubt creeps in. And suddenly you’re speaking up less, showing up differently than you used to. And all that’s going to do is get you even fewer high-profile projects. It becomes a negative cycle.

Or maybe the issue stems from an ill-defined role, a role you’re less certain or even a culture or a boss that’s not a great fit for you and suddenly, you feel uncertain, less sure of yourself. So, you show up differently. Suddenly, where you used to speak up without hesitation, now you hesitate or maybe don’t speak up at all in meetings. You don’t raise your hand to volunteer for big new projects. And you don’t seek out opportunities to network more broadly. You kind of shrink back and watch from the sidelines.

Or maybe you’ve always been uncomfortable being visible. Maybe you are a natural introvert. Or maybe you have an overactive Inner Critic. And while you know you do good work; you’re always questioning whether it’s good enough. Or whether you want to be in the spotlight. And so, you rarely speak up in meetings or large groups. You’re more comfortable 1:1. And you definitely don’t get out into the organization to proactively build your brand.

The truth it’s less about the situation that’s happening and more about how you’re feeling. That’s what’s causing you to accept being less visible.

And you might be wondering, well is that a problem? Doesn’t my work speak for itself?

Unfortunately, the answer in most organizations is no.

I mean ideally, working hard and adding value would be enough, right? We’d just do great work and magically everyone that needs to know that and to have a good opinion of us WOULD know.

And at earlier stages of our career, many time that ***is*** enough because when we’re at more junior levels, it’s mostly about having your boss and your close working group see and value your contributions. That’s usually enough to get you the promotional opportunities or the bigger salary. That’s because earlier on, when we’re just getting started, most of what we’re measured on is about our ***individual*** ***contributions.***

But as we move up the ladder and lead bigger initiatives or manage a team or find ourselves working for a large corporation with a more matrixed organization, it’s not enough that only our boss or close working partners see our value. Granted, that never hurts, but it won’t be enough to get you ahead at more senior levels.

Why?

Because as you move up the ladder, you’re evaluated on your ability to influence broadly. Being great at the work you do is an important baseline but increasingly it’ll be about how well you sell others on your ideas or lead cross functionally. As you move up, you have to become more widely known for the value you add. That’s how you not only get more plum assignments but the big promotions too.

So hopefully I’ve now convinced you that it doesn’t pay to just keep your head down and do the work. That you need to find ways to be more visible in your workplace. So, let’s go back to those two components we talked about earlier: Leading Out Loud and Personal Brand Management.

The first one, Leading Out Loud starts with believing in yourself. And it’s something you can do regardless of the situation you find yourself in. Because first and foremost, visibility starts with you **feeling self-confident**. And that comes from **how you think about yourself**. When you FEEL this way, you’ll be among the first to speak up in meetings when you have an idea instead of waiting for someone else to talk first. You won’t be afraid to weigh in with an opposite perspective. And you’ll keep believing in yourself even when others don’t buy in to what you’re saying. Leading Out Loud is something you DECIDE to do and it’s something you can control no matter what situation you’re in.

The second part of it is about something I call 360-degree personal brand management. And this is about getting out into the organization, identifying your key stakeholders and finding organic ways to build relationships and connections with others. I like to think of this exercise as three concentric circles. Each circle represents a part of your stakeholder community. The inside circle – the bull’s eye or center point if you will – is your “Boss and Team.” The next ring is labeled “Partners” and the outer ring is labeled “Others.”

The boss and team part is self-explanatory. You need to have good relationships with everyone in your inner circle. This is your unit. So you need to establish yourself as trustworthy, dependable and someone that can be counted on. This part of your reputations is about how you show up and others will watch your actions. So, to brand build at this layer, you need to be consistent and be the person the team can count on to always deliver your best.

The next layer is partners. These are people, usually cross functional, that you work with on a fairly regular basis. This is about being a good collaborator. Someone who plays well with others instead of playing politics. Someone who can be counted on to help move things forward. It doesn’t mean you’ll always agree with others as many times, at this layer, you’ll be working with people from other groups, teams or organizations who might have opposing objectives or whatever. But it means showing up and doing the hard work to keep things moving forward productively. In this layer, it’s again about how you show up and others will watch your actions, so consistency is important in brand building here.

The last layer is others. And this is a broad one. First, there’s both an internal and external layer to this as it includes both upward stakeholders like your boss’s boss or maybe other senior execs from across the company. But it also includes external stakeholders like people within your industry or functional area. So here because these are people you don’t know well or work with much or at all, it’s about showing up in a different way. For those upward in your org, maybe you’re scheduling mentoring sessions so you can get to know them. For those outside the organization there are two great ways to do this. You can maybe schedule informational interviews which are 30-minute networking sessions to get to know others in your functional area or industry. And of course, there’s social media platforms like LinkedIn or Twitter, which are great opportunities to build your professional brand at scale. Share thought leadership or join online groups where you can network with others or learn best practices to bring back into your organization.

Bottom line, what I want you to know is that Professional Visibility is something you manage. No one can make you invisible. Because you can always find ways to manage around it. And you need to. Because the career you want won’t happen by accident. You have to proactively create it. Build your communities. Identify your allies.

If you leave it to others, they won’t always see and recognize the value you deliver. Even when you do great work. And the concentric circles we talked about in 360 degree brand management illustrate this perfectly. The further away from your day-to-day that other people are, the less they will know about you. And you can’t expect your boss to do all the work on representing what you have to offer.

So, with 2021 coming to an end, I challenge you to put together your own visibility plan for 2022.

How can you show up as your most confident, assured self in meetings or when interacting with others?

And what kind of 360-degree brand management plan can you put together to manage those stakeholders in a way that will serve you moving forward.

When I work with clients on the visibility thing, they always feel better. Because they walk away feeling more empowered. It’s always nice to know that no one can make us invisible. WE are the ones who get to decide how visible we want and need to be.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.