

Creating Visibility

by John West Hadley

“I don’t like to brag.”
“Why can’t everyone just recognize the value I bring to the table?”

These comments are typical of what I hear at workshops to help people market themselves more effectively. Actuaries in particular seem to have a mindset that they shouldn’t have to market themselves. Perhaps we were lulled into this by the actuarial exam process. To gain recognition and progress to the next level, all we had to do was pass the next exam. After five to seven years of that, it felt like the natural order of things. Then we got our FSAs, and suddenly there was no automatic path up the corporate ladder. And while we were focused on building our technical skills, others learned how to navigate the promotional/political process.

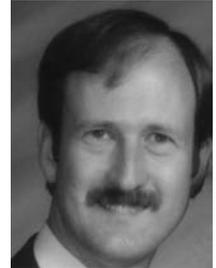
The bottom line is that the person who cares most about your career is YOU! It’s up to you to take charge of your career. And to accomplish that most effectively, you need to make sure you are visible. People need to understand how you can contribute in order to keep you in mind when opportunities arise. This doesn’t mean you are out there constantly bragging about what a great job you are doing. It simply requires that you take advantage of the chances that present themselves to create visibility for yourself, and learn to present yourself in those situations to highlight the value you add.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Seek assignments outside of your normal routine, areas of expertise or department. Seek to work with people you don’t normally work with. This will get you known in different capacities, for different skills and by different people. It will also expand your skills and help you

build new relationships, both of which make you more valuable.

- When you run into a senior officer at the company cocktail party, and he or she asks what you do, don’t answer by saying that you price universal life products, or you run the actuarial department. Focus on the real question you should be answering, “Why do I pay your salary?” Give an example of a result you’ve achieved for the company, the type of problems you’ve solved, the solutions you’ve provided, the value you have added.
- Get used to thinking of all the projects you’ve performed in terms of accomplishments, tied to results you’ve achieved, such as revenues generated, profits earned, resources or time saved, or costs eliminated. Every time you complete a project, write a simple accomplishment story about it to put in your files. (This will come in particularly handy at performance review time, or when preparing your next resume!) Focus in particular on what challenges you had to overcome to achieve the objective, and what specific actions you needed to take to do so. This will also help you remember the important contributions you’ve made so that you will be more fluid in expressing those as needed.
- Schedule a discussion with your boss to find out what you can do to help him meet his goals. Explore what he would like to see you do more of, less of or differently. Find out how those goals fit the company mission and the goals of your boss’s boss.
- Explore your department’s longer-term goals. Seek ways to better align what you are doing with those goals.



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- Just as you would hope your boss would find ways to recognize things you have done well, occasionally find an opportunity to show recognition of what your boss is doing right. Even a simple statement like, “I really appreciated it when you spoke up on my behalf at the manager’s meeting last week” can go a long way to reinforcing a good relationship!
- Find opportunities to speak up (but in a way that actually contributes) in every meeting you attend. Don’t monopolize the discussion, and don’t criticize others’ ideas—figure out a way to express what’s valuable out of their ideas and validate that portion, while building on them.
- Give credit to your team, to your employees, to anyone who helped you achieve your goals. Everyone knows you can’t do it all yourself, and if you try to take sole credit, pretty soon no one will pay much attention to what you say, and no one will want to be on your team.
- Network intentionally. Don’t go to lunch with the same group of people every day, pick someone new to eat lunch with once in a while. Don’t eat lunch at your desk every day; make sure to use the occasional lunch to catch up with people. Go to professional meetings on a regular basis. Schedule some time on a weekly basis to e-mail some friends at other companies, or to call someone to catch up.
- Think about how what you wear to work enhances or detracts from the professional image you would like to present. You don’t need to invest in a lot of new clothes, but you should make sure that what you wear is clean, pressed, in good condition, and matches.

If you just follow a few of these suggestions, you will go a long way toward raising your visibility. □

(Readers who want help in creating more visibility for themselves are invited to call John Hadley to schedule a free 30-minute phone counseling session.)

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