

## Perception is Reality: 8 Steps for Changing How Others See You



Today's guest post is from Joel Garfinkle, executive coach and author of [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#) ([CLICK HERE](#) to get your copy). While all our guest bloggers are great, every once in a while a guest writes a post that I read and say "I wish I had written that!". This is one of those posts. Enjoy!

James is an up-and-coming sales manager for a Fortune 500 company. He sees himself as outgoing, friendly, fast-moving—a real deal maker. Some of the people he works with, however—as well as some of his clients—see him as a fast-talking backslapper and a bit of a phony. Which perception is accurate? And why does it matter?

The "perception is reality" adage is most often applied to the way each of us sees our own environment. If we see the glass as half full, we will operate from that reality and the glass will always be at least half full. But what if we turn that adage inside out? What if the reality we're experiencing is due in part to how others perceive us?

Carly Fiorina, former Chairman and CEO of Hewlett-Packard, stated: "Leadership is a performance. You have to be conscious about your behavior, because everyone else is."

Let's revisit James for a moment. He sees himself as a deal-maker, but lately the deals have been drying up. He's having trouble getting appointments, even getting clients to return his phone calls. And the people on his team are working around him, leaving him out of important conversations and meetings. James is in serious need of a perception correction. So how do we create the "me" we want others to see? How do we change perceptions? There are a number of actions we could take but we need to begin with behavior.

### 1. Observe how your behavior impacts others

Start by being honest with yourself. Notice how your behavior affects those around you. How do people react to you in meetings? In the coffee room or at lunch? If clients are not returning your calls, perhaps your behavior is making them feel pressured or uncomfortable.

### 2. Ask for feedback

Ask others how they see you. It takes courage and you may get some feedback that is hard to hear, but it's an important step in creating a new perception.

### 3. Make behavioral changes immediately

Once you have some basic information, take small steps toward behavioral change. If you're the type who usually dominates the conversation in meetings or groups, try keeping absolutely quiet and taking notes for a change. If you usually hang back and let others take the spotlight, write down some key points that are relevant to the topic being discussed and speak up. Perceptions will not change overnight, but you will begin to notice that others are reacting differently.

#### 4. Up your visibility

If you want high visibility, you have to do what it takes to become visible. Start by volunteering for high impact projects. Look for a tough job that nobody wants to tackle, or something that's been languishing but that you know is important to your boss or the company as a whole. If you see the company putting a lot of time and energy into a new idea or venture, get involved.

#### 5. Seek out cross-functional opportunities

Identify opportunities with other departments that will increase your visibility. Such as a project or task force that will give you a chance to see and be seen by people you wouldn't meet otherwise. Offer to make presentations or speak to groups, both inside and outside the company.

#### 6. Promote yourself

You might be the best employee in the world, but if your contributions go unnoticed, it won't matter. You need people who will speak positively about you and your accomplishments. This can happen on many fronts, but it begins when you speak up for yourself. This does not mean uncontrolled bragging about everything you do. It does mean sharing wins openly, and sharing credit with coworkers and team members. Tell success stories and celebrate accomplishments.

#### 7. Seek out advocates

Identify advocates who will speak on your behalf. Ask your boss to publicize your work with his boss and on up the corporate food chain. Look for opportunities to expose your work to corporate leaders. If, like James, you work with clients or vendors outside your company, ask for their endorsement and referrals.

#### 8. Get branded

You are the CEO of You, Inc. You are responsible for creating your personal brand, for getting your name known, for being memorable. You do this in dozens of ways, large and small. Branding "You" can be anything from developing a unique signature line on your emails to becoming an expert who is quoted in industry publications and asked to speak at seminars and meetings.

The perception others have of you will not change overnight. And once a change is made, it won't necessarily stay that way. Creating a positive perception takes your commitment as well as consistent action on your part to develop and refine the image you want the world to see.



- [Joel Garfinkle](#) is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., having worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Oracle, Google, Amazon, Deloitte and The Ritz-Carlton. He is the author of seven books, including [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#). More than 10,000 people [subscribe](#) to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. If you sign-up, you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"