

Perceptions of your work may linger longer than actions

By Anita Bruzzese, Gannett

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If you hang out with people at work who gossip around the water cooler, you may be perceived in the same way.

If you think you'll be recognized at work or garner a promotion just because you work hard, you need to get a clue.

While you may believe you're a diligent worker and deserve to be rewarded, others may not perceive you the same way. And it's others' perception of you that will determine your success,

says [Joel A. Garfinkle](#), a career coach.

"Perception is important because how people view you and how their minds gets made up about who you are directly impacts your career," he says. "Everyone gets to the point at sometime in their career where you can't just expect to be noticed for what you do."

It's critical to let others know what you do and how your efforts directly help a company, Garfinkle says. That doesn't mean you become an arrogant blowhard who brags constantly about your efforts, but do keep others informed of the facts about your work that are helping the bottom line.

Instead of bragging how you're the only one able to handle a certain customer, send an email to a boss noting how you used strategies suggested in a recent industry article to deal effectively with an unhappy patron. This shows the boss that you not only made an important contribution, but that these are valuable strategies that could help others.

"Too often people feel that if they promote the good work they're doing, people will look down on them," Garfinkle says. "But you can talk about your role in the process and what you achieved. Or, relay the good comments people make about your work to the boss. You're just passing on information, and that starts to change their perception of you."

What happens if you find out that others don't have a flattering perception of you? If that happens, Garfinkle says you should try to find advocates within the company willing to speak positively about you.

If just one person holds a negative view of you, try building a better connection and rapport with the person, he suggests.

"Engaging this person and getting to know him or her takes courage and a lot can be gained by it," he says.

In his book, [*Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*](#), (Wiley, \$24.95), Garfinkle outlines several "influencers" on perception that may be out of your control, such as your life experiences or where you grew up. He says you can take some steps to deal with such perceptions. For example:

- **Your cultural upbringing** taught you not to stand out or be too visible.

That's a problem in American business climates where you must learn to call attention to your contributions. To battle this problem, seek high-profile projects and learn to share your accomplishments with colleagues.

- **You behave in a certain way** because of the region where you grew up.

A New Yorker may be more direct while a Southerner may be more reticent. Garfinkle says it's a good idea to learn where your colleagues or boss grew up. That may help you connect with them better.

Making an effort to understand differences will help give others a better perception of you.

- **You're a woman** in a mostly male environment.

Such women workers may be judged because they are in the minority and may have a more difficult time being heard if they don't speak strongly.

A male mentor can help give advice to women in such a position, Garfinkle says. He also suggests women develop advocates among their male counterparts.

- **You can be judged** by the company you keep.

If you mostly hang out with people at work who don't have good reputations, you may be perceived in the same way. Try to limit interactions with gossips while spending more time talking to those who are well respected.

[Anita Bruzzese](#) is author of "45 Things You Do That Drive Your Boss Crazy ... and How to Avoid Them," www.45things.com. [Find an index of On the Job columns](#) . Write to her in care of Gannett ContentOne, 7950 Jones Branch Drive, McLean, VA 22107. For a reply, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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