

DANIEL H. PINK

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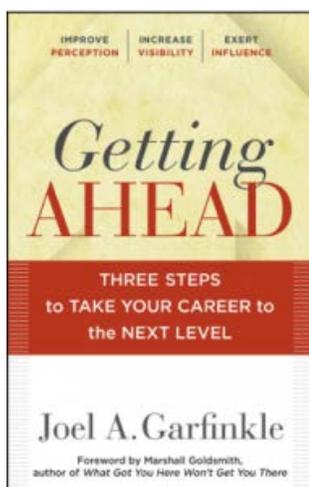


DAN'S BOOKSHELF

How to get ahead: 5 questions for Joel Garfinkle

Not everyone craves the proverbial key to the executive washroom, but nearly everyone wants to have influence in their workplace, have others think well of them, and attain success in a way that's meaningful to their lives. **Joel Garfinkle** has coached countless executives in how to reach their goals, and now he's written a book called *Getting Ahead* (which you can buy at [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Indiebound](#), or [800CEORead](#)) so that anyone can take his proven methods and use them to boost their own career.

Because his book addresses such core desires, I've asked Joel to answer a few questions about the book and his work as an executive coach. Here are his answers:



1. In *Getting Ahead* you coach readers through three steps that are necessary to career advancement: improving other peoples' perceptions of us, increasing our visibility, and exerting influence. In your experience, what holds otherwise high-achieving people back from taking these steps?

Many of my clients protest that they're "too busy" to make the effort to bring perception, visibility, and influence into their work lives. They are consumed by and can barely keep up with their daily responsibilities. They oversee too many projects and have extensive to-do lists. They have seemingly endless meetings and are overwhelmed by e-mails. Well, let me ask: Do you think that leaders of large organizations receive fewer e-mails than you? Do they have fewer projects to work on, or shorter to-do lists? No. The difference is that they take time to prioritize perception, visibility, and influence. Despite the sense of urgency and importance that these demands provoke, these leaders still are able to make perception, visibility, and influence a vital part of their professional lives.

2. In the chapter on improving one's image, I like your emphasis on getting constructive feedback from others. What do you think is the most painless (or least painful) way to go about doing this?

Many people are afraid to ask for constructive feedback. You may worry that you'll

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discover something you don't want to know. It can feel risky and vulnerable to ask how others perceive you. The most painless way to go about asking for constructive feedback is to explain why you are asking for feedback.

Some possible ways to introduce the discussion are:

- "I am doing a bit of self-evaluation and looking for some ways to grow my career. I talked to my boss already and felt it would be beneficial to speak to other people with whom I work. I want to know how you think I am performing and what your perception of me is. I value what you have to say."
- "I know you are someone with whom I work indirectly. I would like to learn about myself and the ways I can improve in this company. I respect you as a person and would therefore appreciate your feedback."
- "I want to improve my performance. I am asking for honest feedback because I know you are aware of and see things that would be helpful for me to know about."

3. If I had to guess, I'd say the chapter on increasing visibility is the one that creates the most anxiety in readers. Nobody wants to be seen as pushy, aggressive, or a credit-hog. What are some ways to cultivate visibility without being obnoxious about it?

- **Focus on how what you've done benefits your group, department, or company.** The self-promotion process can often cause you to concentrate on what you've accomplished without giving any thought to how it benefits the company or management. A big picture approach can soften the impression that you care more about furthering yourself than you do about your organization's success. You need to show how what you do benefits other business units, customers, clients, and people above you, below you, and inside your own department.
- **Have others sing your praises.** Have clients, customers, or vendors sing your praises. These groups can share compliments about you via e-mail or voice mail. Whenever you do something positive above and beyond expectations, solve problems, or provide top-notch service, make sure to ask the person you're serving to tell your superiors (your boss and boss's boss) about it.

4. Clearly *Getting Ahead* is relevant to people at the beginning of their working life – but what about people who are nearing the end of their careers? Where could improving perception, visibility, and influence take them?

The book's third section, on influence, is most relevant to people nearing the end of their careers. As upper executives, you spend most of your time influencing significant results and people's behavior. By influencing others, you increase your value to the overall organization.

While visibility isn't as important as it used to be, as a person in upper management, you still need to make sure you have visibility to other executives who identify you as someone who drives the company's success forward.

5. Your book is packed with tools and tips. What's one tip Pink Blog readers could use – today – to take themselves to the next level?

Two studies conducted by **Cameron Anderson** and **Gavin J. Kilduff** in 2009 found that people who speak up and act dominant will be perceived as competent even if they aren't. They merely appear so because they believe so completely in their own competence. So what does this teach us? Speak up. Speak first. Speak often. Stop overthinking and delaying what you want to say. Stop being fearful; instead, trust in

yourself. Have confidence in your knowledge. Focus more on what you know and less on what others think. Identify two different situations in which you decide to speak up and speak often. You might have to leave your comfort zone, but do it. You'll be heard and seen as competent, and you'll notice others' perceptions of you starting to shift favorably as you contribute more often.