

## Smashing through the Glass Ceiling: Three Career-Advancing Strategies for Women and Minorities

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Coaching

JOEL A. GARFINKLE is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., having worked with many of the world's leading companies. He is the author of seven books, including *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. View his books and FREE articles at his [Leadership Coaching](#) website. You can also subscribe to his [Leadership Development newsletter](#) and receive the FREE e-book, 40 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now! According to a survey conducted by U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) in 2010, approximately 18% of corporate directors are women and 14.5% are minorities. To put this into perspective, the number of women and minorities on corporate boards is less than half what would be expected based on their proportion of the general population. The fact that there is a discrepancy is indisputable, but the reason for the shortfall is not so clear. Is it blatant discrimination, or is there something else at work here? The answer is probably a combination of both. I have worked with many women and minorities in my [executive coaching](#) business and I have found that when they apply the principles of perception, visibility, and influence—what I refer to as the PVI model—they are able to advance their careers faster and further than they previously thought possible. They do this by earning the respect of their colleagues and bosses, becoming known throughout the company as someone who can be depended on to solve problems and deliver quality work, and learning how to exert their influence at all levels of the organization. Many of the challenges faced by women and minorities in the workplace can be attributed to cultural differences and differences in the way boys and girls are raised. These challenges can be overcome if you are aware of them and adapt your behavior to change the way you are perceived. Here are three challenges women and minorities might face, along with strategies you can use to overcome them.



1. Not Getting the Respect You Deserve People may perceive you differently just because you are a woman, or just because of the color of your skin. Yes, it's unfair. But if you want to keep climbing the career ladder, you've got to do what you can to replace any negative perceptions related to your gender or ethnicity with positive ones. To do this, ask your boss and peers for honest feedback about how they perceive you. Then create a plan to change those perceptions. Asking for [feedback](#) first is essential. Without it, you'll never know if you're on the right track with your perception management plan. You may not agree with the feedback, but if people perceive you in a certain way, their perception is their reality regardless of whether you feel it accurately represents you. Find out why you are perceived the way you are and take steps to correct the problem. For example, if you never speak up at meetings, you might be perceived as someone who is not a team player or who has no ideas to contribute. You can change this perception by preparing what you want to say ahead of time and looking for opportunities to be a more active participant.

2. **Going Unnoticed** Girls are often told to be quiet and keep their opinions to themselves. A similar challenge is faced by people who come from different cultural backgrounds. For example, in India, people are taught not to bring attention to themselves. Japanese employees come from a culture where it is considered rude to say no or to appear disagreeable. All of these employees will have trouble getting noticed at work, and if no one knows about their successes, they won't get credit for them when it comes time for a review. So even if it is uncomfortable, you must take steps to make sure your contributions are recognized. One way to ensure that you get credit for the work you have done is to point it out to your boss and your boss's boss. Send regular e-mail updates to keep your superiors apprised of the progress you have made. If you can, quantify your results by determining how much money was saved or revenue earned as a result of your efforts. Doing great work and making sure your boss knows about it is a start, but you need to make sure that other people in the company know how great you are too. In many companies, promotions are given only after an inter-departmental meeting in which each manager tries to sell his or her candidate as the right one for the job. Your chances for promotion will be much greater if every manager at that meeting knows who you are. To become visible in other departments, look for opportunities to get involved with interdepartmental projects. Ask your boss to help you identify projects that will help you **stand out** and increase your visibility with other managers. Also look for reasons to copy other managers and executives on the e-mail updates you send to your boss each week. If you just found a way to save 16 percent on a certain component used in the manufacturing process, for example, the purchasing manager might appreciate being copied on this accomplishment.

3. **Being Treated Unfairly** Women often find they have a hard time speaking up at meetings—not because they have nothing to contribute, but because the guys get favored when it comes to floor time. Often, if a man and a woman start speaking at the same time, it is the man who is given permission to speak first. In situations like this, be proactive and request a meeting of your own with the person who runs the meetings. He probably doesn't even realize what he is doing. Express your desire to contribute more during these sessions and ask for his help to make sure you get a chance to talk when you have something to say. Do you find yourself being completely excluded from meetings or after-work activities? This may be intentional or just an oversight. It is possible that no one tells you about the meeting because they think it is outside the scope of your position. In that case, getting yourself included may be as simple as mentioning to the person in charge that you want to be involved. If that doesn't work, try talking to your boss about the situation. Be prepared to give convincing reasons why you need to be at that meeting. After-work activities are an entirely different matter. These social engagements are technically not part of the work day, but being invited along—or not—can make or break you. Being left out of the discussions that take place at these events can be a huge disadvantage if you want to climb to the next level in your career. If you are missing out on social engagements that are important to your career, try to find a way to get yourself included. Build relationships with the participants and express your interest in joining them. Once they get to know you better, they might decide they want you to be part of their group. When it comes to social gatherings, recruit an advocate within the group who is willing to help you. Ask someone who has some clout to speak up on your behalf and try to get you invited along next time.

**Perception, Visibility, and Influence** These are just a few of the career-building strategies you'll find in *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. By applying the three key principles of the PVI model—perception, visibility, and influence—you'll be able to improve the way you are perceived at work, increase your visibility in the organization, and learn how to exert influence at every level of your company—regardless of your position, race or gender.