

The image features six light bulbs hanging from the top against a blue gradient background. The central bulb is illuminated, casting a bright glow, while the other five bulbs are unlit. The text 'The Visibility Factor' is written in a large, white, serif font, with the word 'The' positioned above 'Visibility' and 'Factor' below it. The glowing bulb is positioned behind the letter 'i' in 'Visibility' and the letter 'o' in 'Factor'.

The Visibility Factor

**BREAK THROUGH YOUR FEARS,
STAND IN YOUR OWN POWER
AND BECOME THE AUTHENTIC LEADER
YOU WERE MEANT TO BE**

SUSAN M. BARBER

The Visibility Factor

**BREAK THROUGH YOUR FEARS,
STAND IN YOUR OWN POWER
AND BECOME THE AUTHENTIC LEADER
YOU WERE MEANT TO BE**

SUSAN M. BARBER

The Visibility Factor:
Break Through Your Fears, Stand in Your Own Power and Become the
Authentic Leader You Were Meant to Be

Copyright © 2021 Susan M. Barber.

All rights reserved. No part or any portion of this book may be reproduced in any form, mechanical or digital, or transmitted without the prior written permission of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

This book is presented solely for educational and entertainment purposes. It is the intent of the author to provide general knowledge and helpful information on the subjects discussed to assist readers in their quest for greater understanding and utilization of the ideas, thoughts and principles presented. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation.

ISBN-13: 978-1-7376104-4-1 (Trade Paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-7376104-6-5 (Digital Online)

ISBN-13: 978-1-7376104-2-7 (Audio File)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021914571

Cover and Book Design by CB Messer

Cover Photography ©depositphotos.com/3dconceptsman

Edited by Zoë Bird

Proofread by KellyAnn Bessa

Printed in the United States of America.

First printing edition 2021

Susan M. Barber

P.O. Box 913

Lake Villa, IL 60046

<https://susanmbarber.com>

10987654321



Chapter 1:

WHEN THE STUDENT IS READY, THE TEACHER APPEARS

“SUE, WHY ARE YOU PLAYING small?”

I was stunned to hear these words from my mentor, Kathy. I felt shame wash over me as I looked at her from across the conference room table and suddenly, everything went into slow motion. I could feel my face grow hot as it turned red with embarrassment. I am one of those lucky Irish girls with fair skin, which meant that whenever I felt the spotlight shine on me, my neck and face turned a bright crimson. Unfortunately, it was one of those things I couldn't control or hide, so I had to learn to accept it.

I was in a one-on-one meeting with Kathy to connect with her and share the latest updates on our different areas of responsibility. I had worked with her for many years, but she had climbed the ladder faster. She was confident, all business, and known for her extreme directness. Just moments before, the meeting had started in such a positive way as we shared updates about our families; but it was clear now that chitchat time was over, and the conversation was quickly escalating into

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

an unexpected feedback session. It was a conversation that I would never forget.

The walls in the small conference room began to close in on me as she said, “You have so much potential, but you sit at the back of the room in meetings and don’t say a word. Why do you even show up?” *That was harsh!* “If you don’t participate, then you won’t add any value. You know that we expect you to step up at this level and set an example for the organization. We can’t consider you for your next role until you figure out how to be more visible.”

I am sure she said more than that, but I shut down. I was experiencing an example of that moment when the brain’s amygdala senses danger and goes into fight, flight, or freeze mode. I weighed my options. If I pushed back too hard and defended myself, it probably wouldn’t help. I couldn’t begin to move my legs, so flight wasn’t a possibility either. Freeze became the only option as my brain struggled to process what Kathy had said.

The words she had spoken were the last I’d ever expected to hear. I felt defensiveness and emotion rise within me, and suddenly felt the pain in my stomach that I get whenever conflict arises. I could feel my eyes start to fill up with tears and did everything in my power to hold them back. *I will not cry in front of her.*

I had always thought of Kathy as someone who was in my corner. She had supported me through many career changes. She was also one of the most influential people in the leadership team, and she could help or hurt my career. After I heard her feedback, I felt as if I had been hit by a truck.

Chapter 1

Just stay calm, whatever you do. Don't say something you will regret. I tried to think of a brilliant response to say in my defense. What I said came out all wrong, though, and I realized it would be better if I just stayed quiet. I was ashamed and embarrassed. All I wanted to do was get the hell out of there. I felt like an animal trapped in a cage with no way to escape. *Is she right? How did I miss this? They told me I was a top talent and that I was in line for a promotion. Obviously, that's not up for discussion now.* My mind raced through all the possible effects this news could have on my career. It was sinking in quickly for me that the foundation I stood on, and thought was so solid, had shifted. Through sheer will, I found a way to hold it together long enough to say thank you for the feedback. Then I left the meeting to figure out what to do next.

I knew that there were other people in my organization who received feedback that they needed to be “more visible.” That wasn't me, though. That was the feedback senior management gave to those “other” people. *I am a top talent! They chose me to be in the leadership program. How did the rules change so much, and I had no idea?* I'd assumed that I was doing what I should, since I hadn't received this type of feedback before. Everyone always complimented me on how much I had accomplished. Clearly, though, the hard work wasn't enough this time. The only thing I could think was, *Does she want me to be one of these people who talk incessantly in meetings and brag all the time? Those are the people that we all roll our eyes at when they begin to talk. I don't want to be one of those people. That isn't my style at all.*

As it all started to sink in, I knew I had to look at the feedback more objectively. I knew that when I got defensive, there was a reason. In this case, it was because deep down, I had to admit

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

that she was right—but I didn't want to be called out for it. I had thought I was visible, but it wasn't enough. I had trusted that I was a top talent and become complacent. I had never faced failure in my career before, and Kathy's comments devastated me. I wanted to hide, which was, ironically, the opposite of what I needed to do. *How on earth will I face everyone at work again?*

I don't remember the drive home, but when I got there, I went straight to my bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed. My husband was sitting in a chair nearby as he played a video game on the TV.

He looked at me and said, "What's wrong?" I lay back on the bed and shared all the feedback I had received earlier that day. He sat quietly while I let it all out. Then I finally said what I had thought about all the way home but had been afraid to say out loud before.

I began slowly. "I don't know if I can stay at the company. The feedback I got today means that I need to do some major damage control to change how I'm perceived. I don't know if it's possible to fix, and I don't know where to begin. I may have to leave the company."

My entire identity was tied to Kraft Foods. I had been there about twenty-three years, and always imagined that I would retire from the company. At the time I started to work, after college, it was still what everyone did: worked at one place for their whole career and then retired. That was the plan I was supposed to follow. Now what? I had put my heart and soul into my work. I had sacrificed sleep and my family more times than I could count to get the job done. The company had been a part of my entire life. I couldn't imagine not being there. Both my grandpa and my mom had worked at the company

Chapter 1

more than twenty-five-plus years before they retired. I felt this unexpected family responsibility to be there to uphold their legacy with the company. Although they were no longer here to witness it, I still didn't want to disappoint them.

My brain was in a fog and I couldn't think straight. This wasn't the best time to make a life-changing decision about whether to stay or leave. I knew that I needed to take some time to process what I had heard and figure out a plan.

My husband left our bedroom and went out into the kitchen. I lay there for a few minutes more to pull myself together. I didn't want the kids to see their mother fall apart.

I found out later that my husband was worried about me. He reached out to one of my good friends from work and said, "I have never seen her this way before. I am not sure what to do or say." It was true. He had never known a time when I didn't have all the answers or wasn't in control. I had always created the appearance that things were great, but that time had passed. No matter how much I tried to hold it all together, I couldn't do it. The small cracks in the dam had grown larger and I had given up the fight to keep the dam from breaking. The water began to spill out. My energy was gone, and it was time to admit that I just couldn't be what everyone wanted me to be anymore. It was time to retire the crown of perfection that I wore every single day. I needed to figure out who I was and learn what "being visible" meant for me.

Brené Brown Enters My Life

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET? I will admit to you that I am a bit of a fangirl when it comes to Brené Brown. No, I haven't met

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

her yet, but “meet Brené” is on my bucket list! I love her work on vulnerability and shame. She makes the research she does in these areas accessible for people. If you haven’t heard of her, she is a Houston, Texas girl, researcher, author, and speaker. In 2013, she collaborated with Oprah to create a virtual class based on her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*,² the first book of hers I read.

Millions of people from all over the world joined her class on Oprah’s website. It included videos from Brené, instructions to create an art journal, and interactive discussions. One of the most impactful activities she had us do in that class was take a stand against our attempts at perfectionism (remember my crown?). She gave us the permission to accept ourselves wherever we were in that moment. We could continue to improve in certain areas if we wanted to, but we didn’t *need* to. There was no reason to see ourselves as not good enough anymore.

As I looked at the thousands of people who were in the virtual class with me, I realized that they struggled with the same issues I did. It wasn’t just me. Brené had given all of us a way to have a conversation with ourselves and others that would help us see that we were worthy. The message was clear: It was time to stop the thoughts that we aren’t enough, but instead focus on how we could be greater than we ever imagined. I had struggled to see myself as artistic since I was a child, so I was impressed when I looked at my art journal at the end of class. My creativity had come out of the shadows, where it had been hidden away all my life. Sometimes we need to try to get out of our comfort zone to show others a different side of our capabilities, but it also helps us see ourselves in a new

way. Can you think of anything that you have kept hidden for years? Is it time to see if you can bring it out of the shadows?

Avoid Criticism

I LEARNED FROM BRENÉ BROWN that perfectionists do whatever they can to avoid criticism. Before I learned that fact, I thought that perfectionism was a good thing. If you have this trait too, you know the amount of energy it takes to maintain perfection. It is an enormous weight to bear, and you can never let your guard down.

I avoided criticism, but in the case of my conversation at the start of this chapter, I knew that Kathy was right. That whole experience was pivotal for me. I am a big believer in signs that give you direction if you pay attention to them; this sign from Kathy blinked in bright orange neon, so I wouldn't miss it! It was the sign that I needed at that time in my career. I think I knew deep down that I had more potential, but to hear that I didn't take advantage of it was painful. It was a bittersweet gift that gave me the push I needed to make some changes. Although Kathy didn't have to, I am so grateful that she had the guts to tell me the truth. It set me on a new path that got me through that situation, and it gave me the motivation to help others who might struggle too.

How Did I Get into This Position?

AS I EXPLORED ALL THE possible reasons behind my actions, it always came back to fear. The fear of failure was big for me, and I did not want the spotlight shone upon me if I messed

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

up. I didn't want to tarnish the "Sweet Perfect Sue" image I had created and lived by my whole life.

I was the firstborn, and felt since I was a child that I had to maintain that perfect image. Back then, it was a different time, and girls were supposed to follow the rules, be agreeable and keep quiet. Some of the comments from relatives and friends of my parents were, "Susan is always such a good girl," and "We just love having her visit, she is so responsible." I used to watch over my younger sister and cousins when our families got together. It was my first opportunity to try out some basic leadership skills that I would depend on and develop more of later in life. I fit into the role of the perfect, responsible daughter and it made my family proud.

So, I started this perfection habit as a child. Did you notice that I called it a habit? That is what it is. It is a habit that can be stopped or changed with focus and intention. You may seek out perfection now, but you don't have to if you decide you want to change.

I carried the Sweet Perfect Sue image through all my years of school. I did what was expected to receive praise from the teachers. If you are a perfectionist, this might sound familiar to you. A great example of this occurred when I was in fourth grade. I attended a Catholic grade school, and my teacher that year was Sister Loretta. She was about five feet tall, with short dark hair and glasses. She didn't wear a traditional habit, only the black veil with a black dress and a short black jacket, and looked much older than I believe she was. Sister Loretta was a strict teacher who didn't smile much and was always serious. She didn't seem to have much patience and dealt harshly with

Chapter 1

students who broke her rules. I didn't want any part of that, so I followed the rules to stay on her good side.

Our school, St. Martin's Catholic grade school, had eight classrooms on the main floor and was connected to our church. We didn't change rooms for different classes until fifth grade, so we were in that same fourth grade classroom all day long except for recess. Its windows overlooked the area behind the school. Our desks were turned away from those windows in rows that faced the blackboard so we wouldn't be distracted. My desk was at the end of the row closest to the bookshelves, which held encyclopedias, a dictionary, a globe and, close to where I sat, a black, cast iron bank similar to an old-time cash register. The bank was very heavy if you tried to lift it. It had slots for the different coin sizes and a metal lever that you pulled down to push the coins into the bank. On top was a little display window that showed the total amount of money inside. Sister Loretta encouraged us to bring in coins and put them in the bank for charities and those who were less fortunate. It fascinated me to watch when money was inserted and the lever was pulled. (Maybe this prepared me for future slot machine activity in Las Vegas someday, I can't be sure.)

I loved to put coins in that black bank every day just to watch it work. This daily donation activity was soon noticed by Sister Loretta. She praised me in front of the whole class as an example of how to put others before oneself. Her public praise only reinforced my behavior; from that point on, I felt an obligation to put money into that bank every single day. It also solidified my perception that, in her mind, I was a good girl. Little did I know that she had also planted the seed

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

in me that other people's needs were more important than my own.

I brought my “good girl manual” from school into the workplace and continued to be Sweet Perfect Sue as an adult. The voice in my head said, *It has always worked, so why change?* Perfectionism had become an ingrained habit. One of the rules in the “good girl manual” is that you must be liked and praised. The best way to do that is to agree with people. You don't want to have any conflict or drama, so you bury how you really feel deep down inside. That was the way I operated for so many years. It accomplished the goal that I thought I wanted to attain: I was liked and praised, and avoided any criticism from others. The fear of a call-out in public was huge for me. I lived with a lot of fear, so I walked a tightrope between my comfort zone and any unnecessary attention.

My Belief about Hard Work

I WAS RAISED TO BELIEVE that if you work hard and follow the rules, it will pay off. That belief was so strong for me that I made any sacrifice necessary to get the job done. I'm not proud of this at all, but I was a workaholic; in many situations, work would win if there was choice to be made between it and time with my family and friends. It sucks to say that, but it is the truth. I identified with my job and, to be honest, it made me feel important in front of others. It fed my ego to the point that it took over my common sense at times. People seemed impressed by my extensive travel for business trips and the projects that I worked on. Recognition and praise from other people fed my ego, and I craved that more than I want

Chapter 1

to admit. I lived with a steady monologue in my head that said I wasn't good enough, so these compliments made me feel better. It was a roller coaster of highs and lows that I dealt with every day.

I had a great team of people who could have done more of the work if I let them, but I felt this huge weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I had to control the situation and make sure I was available should I have to step in. My job required a lot of hours, and there was always some work phone call I needed to be on when instead I could have said no and chosen my family. Being on those calls, though, made me feel important and needed. Nonstop work was part of the ethic that had been instilled in me, and I thought I would someday be rewarded for it with a promotion. I tried to be Superwoman to save the day for the team and myself, but I couldn't see that this approach wasn't good for any part of my life.

My hard work had been recognized and rewarded many times before with promotions that eventually put me at a higher level than I had ever dreamed of. However, each time I reached a new level, my competitive side would show up and I wanted to go to the next one.

Fear of Failure

THE FEEDBACK SESSION WITH KATHY was a pivotal moment. It was the catalyst that led me to start this journey toward finding the meaning of visibility and how to improve it. Back then I wasn't sure where to start, so I knew that it was time to ask for help. I talked to mentors and peers for advice, and they shared some of the bold moves they had taken in their own careers.

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

I met with people I trusted to give me guidance because, in my eyes, I was a failure. I felt as if I was the only one who had this issue and that everyone else knew what to do. I hoped my mentors would tell me that my situation wasn't that bad and there was some easy way I could fix the predicament I was in. They told me that it would take a lot of work on my part to change, and for people to shift their perception of me. Their advice was both honest and consistent.

My first steps involved finding opportunities to speak up, sit at the table with senior leaders, and spend time with influencers in the organization. I felt a bit nauseated as I thought about these new approaches—my physical reaction to fear. I knew how to get stuff done behind the scenes, but I wasn't sure how to be out in front of people and speak up. What if I said or did the wrong things? This thought brought up my fear of failure in a huge way. I would have to take risks to show up differently, but the work to get past the fear in my head was the bigger battle for me. I knew that the advice I'd received was right; it was up to me to figure out how to take it.

My confidence was shaken and, if I wanted to progress in my career, I had to get it back. As I write this, I can remember how it felt in that moment that I lost my confidence. Anyone who worked with me will be surprised to read how I felt at that time. The girl with the crown of perfection never wanted to show that she didn't have it all together. I hid everything from everyone and kept the brave face on so no one would know that I was a mess inside. Although I had advice from mentors to try, I was still so discombobulated. My thoughts were all over the place. *Can I recover from this? What if I try these recommendations and I fail?*

Am I the Only One?

I SHARE MY STORY WITH YOU so you know that playing small can happen to anyone, and that you are not alone if you have felt that it was safer for you to stay in the background although you wanted to play bigger in your career. I bet that, just like me, you work hard every day, try to do it all, and assume your manager knows what you do. Let me be the one to tell you the truth. Your manager has a ton to do and doesn't know what you accomplish from day to day. The rest of the organization may not be aware of what you do either. Have you felt that you must work harder, and then they will notice you? I lived with that mantra for so long. I put on the brave face and kept it all inside. That is a lonely place to be. I felt embarrassment, shame, and frustration—stuck, with no way out.

If you see yourself in any of my stories, you know that you need to try a new path. Let me help you become your own best advocate. You have to find ways to share what you do in a way that works for you. As an executive coach, I help people with this every day now. And though years ago I thought I was the only one who had this fear of speaking up for myself to show the value I bring, the people I work with experience the same challenges. When I write about my experiences in my blog or speak at events, I attract clients with similar struggles.

Here are a few examples of the challenges that hold leaders back from bigger opportunities:

- They work hard, but don't stand out and are not talked about for promotions. They are stuck and can't figure out what they need to do to move up.

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

- They do what they are asked to do, but then receive feedback that what they do isn't enough, and they need to take additional steps to be noticed. They don't know how to address the challenge of how they are perceived.
- They are in a new role as a manager, and aren't sure how to manage a team. They don't know how to lead people, lead themselves, or manage up to gain visibility for their team. (This is the toughest transition a leader can make.)
- They receive a promotion, but don't shift their approach; they continue to do what they have always done. This transition from one level to the next requires that they show their leadership in a bigger way than before, but they don't know how to do it or choose to avoid it.
- They move to a new company, but struggle to establish themselves and build credibility fast enough. (A new employee has about ninety to one hundred days to demonstrate leadership and capability, and to show the company that they made the right decision in hiring them.)
- They may get feedback that sounds similar to this: "You are doing great. You just need to work on these two to three actions and then you will be ready for the next level." This happens repeatedly so they doubt themselves and feel as if they will never be good enough to get a promotion.

I have taken my clients through my visibility process that I call RISE to address these challenges with great success. You will read some of their stories in this book. Know that you will not go through this alone. I will be with you every step of the

way. This book will give you easy-to-follow steps that will help you stand out in the way that works best for you and build the confidence that you thought you couldn't get back.

What Is Visibility?

LET'S STEP BACK FOR A moment and talk about how visibility is defined. *Merriam-Webster* defines visibility as “the quality or state of being visible.”³ You become visible when you stand out from the crowd, when you say or do something that puts the spotlight on you. Does the spotlight seem too scary and uncomfortable to consider? If it does, then you may make the decision to stay in the background. Fear is strong. It can overpower you and keep you behind the scenes. You may not realize on a conscious level that you chose to stay out of the limelight, but your actions have showed others that you do not wish to be seen.

Believe me, I had the exact same fear. Anytime I put myself out there in front of people, it was uncomfortable for me. I lacked confidence, so I didn't think that I could be the visible leader my management wanted me to be. However, as I learned more about fear, I understood that what I felt was my brain's attempt to keep me safe. Did you know that your brain can't tell the difference between real danger and a nonthreatening situation that creates anxiety and fear? It is the same fight, flight, or freeze response that showed up for me earlier in this chapter. The critic in our head says a lot of negative things to keep us safe, and sometimes it is not very kind. It makes us feel bad about ourselves and keeps us from taking action, limiting our

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

growth and development. If you believe its messages, you won't do anything. You will stay where you are right now and miss out on some great opportunities.

James Allen, a British philosophical writer and the author of a book titled *As a Man Thinketh*, said, "All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts."⁴ Following that logic, if you believe you will be a success, you will have success—or, if you believe you will fail, you will fail. What if you stopped for a moment, when some of these negative thoughts showed up, and questioned them? What if you realized that the thoughts were made up of others' beliefs and experiences—things that other people told you—and made the choice not to believe them? If you chose not to believe the negative thoughts, would it change what you did next? James Allen also said, "...the outer conditions of a person's life will always be found to be harmoniously related to his inner state."⁵ Imagine what you could do if your inner beliefs changed. What if your thoughts were focused on what you wanted to create in your life instead of the old fears that hold you back?

Let People See Your Value

I INVITE YOU TO LET go of the negative thoughts about yourself that take away your energy. They will hold you back and no one will see you at your best. Imagine how you would feel if you took away the negative, self-doubting stories and replaced them with positive ones in which you succeed. A focus on what is possible gives you the confidence to be brave and bold enough to put yourself out there. I believe that anyone can shift their

Chapter 1

mindset if they put their energy toward it. I have done it myself. That doesn't mean that I am without doubts, but that I make a conscious choice to see a positive view instead. I want you to believe in your own capacity to make this happen. Trust that if you do the work, you can shift your mindset, too.

Do you think to yourself, *I could do more if someone would just tell me how?* I bet that, deep down inside, you want people to see you so you can show them what you can do. You want to sit at the table instead of at the back of the room. You want to progress in your career and rise to a higher level. You want to use your voice and have people listen to what you have to say.

The Visibility Factor and the process within will show you how to be seen in a way that is authentic to you, and I will be right by your side as your virtual coach. You will learn how to make choices to be visible, and experiment with shifts in a way that is authentic to you and how you want to be perceived. You will create a plan based on where you are right now and choose from a list of tried-and-true visibility actions that have been used by me, my clients, and many of the leaders I have interviewed for this book. You will create a plan of your own that will put you in front of the right people and show your value.

You may be skeptical and think, *But I work harder than anyone else. Don't they already see my value?* Maybe they do, but not all of it. Let me use a movie theater analogy to explain. Your friend plans to meet you at the theater to watch the show. What if he runs late and only catches the credits? He's missed the entire movie, including all the good stuff. He has no idea what happened before he walked in. That is what happens for

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

managers every day. They only see glimpses of your day and not the whole picture.

Most of them have the best of intentions, but they can't be everywhere at once. They don't have the time to watch the whole show. You have to put the highlight reel about you and your team in front of them, in a consistent way that works best for you. That is how they will know what you do and what your capabilities are for future roles. It is important that you are the person your management thinks of first when it comes to future projects or promotions. I made too many assumptions that my management would see what I did every day. Why should I spend the time pointing it out to them? I was stubborn and thought I knew better. I was wrong.

Maya Angelou, author of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, poet and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom said, "Do the best you can until you know better. When you know better, do better."⁶ That quote resonates so much with me. I didn't know any better. Though it was out of my comfort zone, I had to learn—the hard way—that it was important for me to be in front of decision makers. I had to give myself some grace; I grew up at a time when it seemed hard work was all you needed to do to succeed, but things changed and I didn't know it (or maybe I chose not to see it). I focused on the work and results, but I didn't talk about what I accomplished with anyone. I was taught to be humble. I felt like I would be known as a braggart if I talked about what I did, and I didn't want that. My hope is that you can learn from my mistakes and see that this is a great opportunity for you. I promise that you can be in front of decision makers in your own way, and it is so much easier than you think!

What Does the Research Say?

OVER SEVERAL YEARS, THE CENTER for Creative Leadership did a study on the “Realities of Management Promotion” with three major companies. They found that in 73 percent of cases, the determining factor in a person getting a promotion was that the person had visibility with the decision maker. The study concluded that managers focus on the one candidate they know and trust who has the capabilities to do the job.⁷

Your leadership needs to be consistent so management throughout your organization can see you. When someone mentions your name, you want them to talk about the strength of your leadership and the contributions you have made. This may be hard to believe, but your management wants you to be visible. You have answers and a perspective that your senior management does not. Please don't underestimate what you know, or put them on a pedestal. They are humans. Treat them as though they are your equals. Be yourself and share what you know. From my own experience, and that of the leaders I have coached and spoken with, the research is right. If you don't take those opportunities to get in front of decision makers, you won't get the promotion or new responsibilities that you want.

After the feedback from Kathy, I had to find my own way to stay top-of-mind with my management team. It was all new for me and I wasn't sure where to begin. I felt a bit overwhelmed, but I watched what other people did to see how I could learn from them. I saw them take credit for their accomplishments and offer to take on additional projects or responsibilities to help them look good to management. How many opportunities

did I miss out on to get in front of people for myself and my team? It wouldn't help to look in the rearview mirror to see what could have been. I had to take steps forward to change myself. Are you ready to do the same?

The Path to Transformation

I DID NOT ASK FOR help back then. I had long held the belief that you should solve your own problems, or your management would think less of you. (What is the old saying—"If I could go back in time, knowing what I know now"?) I didn't want anyone to see that I didn't have it all together. I thought that I needed to maintain the Sweet Perfect Sue image everyone had of me. I had not yet learned the importance of vulnerability and that it was okay to let others help me. This caused my transformation to take a lot longer. I compare it to a walk in the dark without a guide or a flashlight to help me figure out the path toward my own authentic way of being visible. In hindsight, I know that if I had allowed myself to be vulnerable and ask for more help, I could have shifted my perception much sooner. But at the time, I was worried about my optics with management and lived with the limiting belief that I needed to solve everything on my own.

Every time I attempted new actions to increase my visibility, my doubts would surface and hold me back. My perfectionism and fear of failure showed on a regular basis and kept me from taking those actions. *Do I have what it takes to be successful? Can I show others that I'm different?* As I said in the introduction, I am a huge reader. So I looked for books on how to overcome the

fear and become more visible. I was sure that others had been through this and I could learn from their stories. However, I found limited information, so I knew it was time to ask for help from someone I knew had been through this before.

There is an old saying: “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” This has been true in my experience. One day, an executive coach did a lunch-and-learn presentation for our IT group at Kraft. I knew that I needed a coach, but had not felt a connection with any of the others I’d met. This coach had a down-to-earth style, approach, and authenticity that led me to have another conversation with her. I talked to her about my situation and about the problem with how I was perceived. I hired her to help me get my confidence back and turn that perception around. In our first session, I created an action plan that would get me in front of my management team the next day. I felt so motivated and excited to try out these new ideas. Although it still seemed scary to move out of the background, I now had a coach in my corner who believed I could do it. My teacher had arrived to help me navigate the journey. Though I was still scared to make a mistake or fail, I borrowed her confidence in me to experiment with this new approach to stand out.

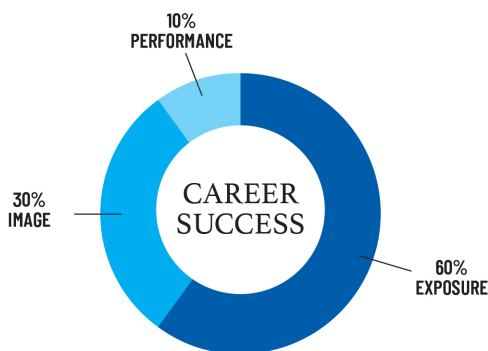
Empower Yourself

HARVEY COLEMAN PUBLISHED A BOOK called *Empowering Yourself: The Organizational Game Revealed*. He came to speak at our company and shared a presentation about his book. As I sat in the auditorium with many of my peers, I had a big aha moment. Coleman’s message was that your success is

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

based on your performance, image, and exposure, a.k.a. PIE. Performance is the day-to-day work that you are responsible for delivering. Image is how people see or perceive you, also known as your personal brand, and exposure is who knows about you and what you do. Up until that point, I believed that performance would drive the highest levels of success for me; my aha moment was that it is the complete opposite.

Coleman shared that “performance drives only 10 percent of success, image drives 30 percent and exposure drives 60 percent.”⁸



I couldn't believe that performance was only worth 10 percent of what it took for success. Now I understood why I had been stuck. I was focused on the wrong thing. I needed to move from performance to exposure, and I had to do it now.

Performance of your job is what we used to call “table stakes” at the company. This term comes from the gambling world. Table stakes is the minimum amount of money that you need to play poker. It is what gets you into the game; after that, you need to win so that you can stay in the game. In the business

Chapter 1

world, table stakes are equal to the capabilities you must have to get the job; to continue to work there, you have to perform well.

Your performance can be broken down into two parts: the what and the how. Think about the “what” as the things you deliver and accomplish as part of your role. The “how” is the way you work with others and the interactions that you have.

You may be great at what you do, but if you don’t work well with others, it can diminish your work and give you a reputation for not being a team player. As you progress into higher-level roles, it becomes more important that you focus on your relationships within the organization. You never know when you will need to lean on those relationships. A performance that exceeds expectations in both the what and the how is the minimum needed to be considered for a promotion. However, your performance is not all that is needed to get you to the next level, if that is your goal. Your image is a critical piece as well.

You may have heard image referred to as “your personal brand.” This includes your appearance, credibility, confidence, behavior, communication, and composure. To gather insights into your personal brand, pay attention to the compliments or constructive feedback that you receive. How does the feedback line up with what you expected to hear? What did you want them to say about you? For example, if you want to be viewed as bold, then you have to take actions to be seen that way. Show the capabilities that align with the role you want to increase your opportunities for advancement.

You may have performance and image handled, but your success may be limited without the third piece, exposure.

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

The goal with exposure is to find opportunities that will help others get a view of who you are and what you can do. Your involvement in different projects or activities may allow others to see new skills and capabilities that they may not have seen in you before. They need to see you in different environments and positions to know if they can envision you in future roles with more responsibility. This is one of the biggest areas to focus on for success. Remember the research you read earlier in this chapter about the top reason people are promoted? It is because they are visible to their management. Put yourself out there so your management can see the value you bring, and they will think of you when opportunities arise.

Exposure also means being bold enough to share your career plan with your management. How would you feel if you weren't considered for the perfect role because you never mentioned that you were interested? This is the time when you want to use your voice to ask for what you want in your career. It demonstrates your confidence in yourself and your initiative to drive your own career plan. It also creates the space to have a candid conversation if your manager doesn't feel that you are ready for the next role. This isn't an easy conversation, but a necessary one to help you understand what you need to change to be ready for an opportunity.

Doubt and Fear

YOU MAY ALSO ENCOUNTER THE opposite situation. Everyone else believes in you and wants to see you move to the next level, but you don't believe in yourself enough to see that possibility. In my situation, everyone else had so much more faith in me

Chapter 1

than I had in myself. I was viewed as a success by others because of my hard work and performance, but I didn't believe that I was ready for the next step. No matter how well I did, I would diminish my success and find ways to attribute it to someone or something else. I had the opportunity to speak at a few technical and business conferences about the work we had implemented. Other companies sought us out afterwards to ask for advice on what we had completed, and we won awards internally and externally in the industry. I was interviewed by reporters for online articles after my presentations. I received the highest rating of my career on my performance review that year. Sounds impressive, right? It still wasn't enough to convince me that I was a success. I didn't take the time to celebrate my accomplishments. What was wrong with me? The belief that I was not good enough and my perfectionism needed to shift. My coach and I chipped away at my limiting beliefs and focused on my self-worth and the confidence that I had lost. I wanted to believe that I could change, but I was skeptical. It was hard for me to see that possibility.

At some point, I tried to blame my lack of career progress on someone else. I told myself a story that I worked hard; it must be someone else who held me back. It can be easy to fall into a victim role without realizing that it has happened. However, that story was false. I was the only one who had the power to hold myself back. If you are similar to me, the frustration is huge, because you know that you can do so much more. However, you can't seem to figure out how to get past the fear in your head that holds you back. I had to start with small steps, and it helped me shift my thoughts to see what was possible and move past the fear.

The RISE Visibility Framework



WHEN I BEGAN MY JOURNEY to stop being invisible and stand out more, no checklist of steps existed for me to use. I had to build those for myself and create my own plan. I thought about what was needed to achieve the outcome that I wanted and created a list of questions to ask myself:

- What is my motivation to be visible?
- What do I need to do?
- How will I do it?
- How will I know if I am successful?

Over the years, I have refined these pieces into a framework that has four easy-to-follow steps. I named each step with a word that forms the acronym RISE to make it easy to remember. I picture it as a staircase that you climb as you complete each step to achieve the goal of visibility at the top. Although RISE is an acronym, I also see it as a metaphor. If you follow this method, you will feel empowered to rise above whatever has held you back from your goals. Everything that you do will

Chapter 1

help others see you in a new way. Your management will take notice and pay attention.

The RISE framework walks you through each step to help you create a unique plan that will work for you. You will learn more about the framework in Chapter 5, but here is a brief introduction to give you a preview.

REFLECT

Reflect is the initial step in the process, and it is necessary for you to assess where you are and why you want people to see you in a new way. This step allows you to figure out what has held you back and what your goals are. This is an opportunity to look at the possibilities that exist for you once you achieve the plan. My clients have shared that this step was one of the most impactful for them as they went through the framework.

IDEATE

The second step, ideate, allows you to generate ideas that you can use to raise your profile. I have created a list of ideas for you to review, but you may want to add your own. Observe what others do and what you can adapt to try out. This step gives you a creative approach to visibility and encourages you to be open to any ideas that will help you shine in front of management.

SELECT

The third step, select, helps you decide on the best ideas and actions and determines how you will measure your success. It

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

is important that any idea you select fits your style and allows you to be authentic, but also pushes you out of your comfort zone. The details you include give you a game plan to follow to help you be intentional and focus your efforts each day.

EVALUATE

The last step, evaluate, helps you measure your progress. You will have captured feedback and other data to gauge your success with your plan. Assess the ideas that you implemented and their effects on how you are perceived, and modify as needed.

What Is Your Mindset?

YOU WILL HAVE TO MAKE changes to old habits and start new ones, and that will challenge you to think in a different way and push you out of your comfort zone. If you follow the path laid out in this book, you will walk away with an actionable plan and the additional resources you need to raise your visibility. Your mindset is important to the achievement of success when you try something new and uncomfortable.

Let me show you a quick example of how your mindset can change your perception of an experience. I led our IT supplier management team at one point, and our outsourced teams for IT were in India. I was asked to attend one of our annual trips, but I was nervous to go there. I had not traveled with the senior executive team before, and I put them on a pedestal. Would I say or do the wrong things while we were gone? Would I get sick because I ate or drank something that I wasn't used to, as I

had heard many others do? My coach asked me, “Can you look at the trip in a different way? Could you see how much fun it might be instead?” I never would have imagined that such a simple shift would change so much for me. From that moment on, I looked at the trip with a new perspective. I got excited about going! I loved the trip! I met so many wonderful people and learned so much about their culture. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget, and I am so grateful to have gone there with a mindset of abundance and positivity.

If I had not shifted my mindset, I have no doubt that my trip to India would have been very different. What type of mindset do you have about your plan for more prominence? Are you excited or skeptical about what you will do and whether it will work for you? I ask you to be open-minded, or you will sabotage yourself before you get started.

Your Own Personal Coach

I KNOW THAT YOU CAN do this! This is a tried-and-true approach that I have used myself and now use to help my clients. I had to do this on my own, so I want to do what I can to support you as you go on this journey. Imagine me as your own personal coach to support you along the way.

With practice, your ability to promote yourself will become second nature for you and with each consistent action that you take, your confidence will grow. You will become the leader that you were meant to be, and everyone will see you that way.

I leveraged so many teachers to help me learn these lessons about visibility. I feel very blessed for the help that I received along my journey. It is my honor to pass on what I have learned

When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Appears

to my clients and now to you. It's time to let others know how great you are! Let's get started!

Actions

ARE YOU READY TO SHED the limiting beliefs that you have carried around with you? There is no need to hide or hesitate anymore! When you believe in yourself, your confidence will be apparent to everyone else.

1. I invite you to create a statement in the present tense that speaks to the leader that you want to be. An example could be "I am a visible leader" or "I am a bold leader." State it in the present tense so your brain believes it is already true. Write it down and put it where you can see it every day. Say it to yourself when you need a reminder of the leader you want to become.

When Kraft went through massive changes, there were so many unknowns to manage and make decisions on. It took my peers and me some time to learn how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. We had buttons made that said, "Ambiguity Is My Friend!" You can't see anything that is your friend as truly bad, right? When we looked at it from that perspective, ambiguity didn't seem so hard anymore. We learned how to manage through it.

2. Can you think about visibility the same way we thought about ambiguity? Write down something that would make you uncomfortable to do, but that you could see in

Chapter 1

a new way and even have fun doing? Is there something that someone else does that you could adapt to your own style?

If you are ready to commit to taking your leadership to the next level and playing bigger, then join my Be Bold, Be Visible, Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be Facebook group!⁹ I can't wait to meet you and see you become the leader you were meant to be!

Notes
