IS YOUR CAREER STAGNANT? PERHAPS YOU WERE a rising star, landing one promotion after another and then—BAM!—you slammed into a brick wall. You’ve been stuck, while others advance. What happened?

You failed to work on your PVI (perception, visibility, and influence). These attributes propel you to the next level—and to the top, in three sequential steps:

Step 1: Take control of how others see (perceive) you. This is about controlling your actions. First, determine how your behaviors are perceived within your organization. Then focus on behaviors and actions that build a positive perception. Observe and emulate role models.

Some behaviors may be holding you back. To learn how you are viewed by bosses, peers, and employees, ask for feedback—then use it to enhance your perception by modifying your behaviors.

Positive feedback helps you determine your strengths and opens up opportunities. Creating a favorable perception will result in more opportunities and increase your chances of receiving raises, promotions, and bonuses.

Step 2: Increase your visibility. Stop lurking in the shadows—make yourself known. Once your promotions become more about leadership than job skills, you’ll have to promote yourself and take some risks to become more visible. Volunteering for difficult assignments is one way. Seek to get involved in projects that are important to your boss. Take an active role—the role of team leader if possible—and do your best work on the project to gain visibility and respect.

You can also increase your visibility by communicating more with your boss and other leaders. Provide frequent e-mail updates. Show them how much you are contributing. Also, beyond getting noticed, find a way to make yourself memorable—to be so impressive that people can’t help but take notice. You must show off your talents and skills so others recognize the value you bring.

Step 3: Exert your influence. Perception and visibility drive influence. If you are perceived negatively or ambivalently, no one will want to follow you—so you’ll have no influence. If you are not visible, no one will know about you—so you’ll have no influence. You must have both perception and visibility to gain influence and make things happen. Leaders inspire others to achieve great things. They get them to embrace their ideas and views and gain the support they need to complete projects and goals.

You must learn to exert your influence in all directions—up, down and laterally.

• To influence upwardly, learn what is important to your bosses. Make your priorities their priorities. Interact with them and earn their respect by telling them about your accom-
Creating a positive perception builds respect; visibility ensures that you are known; influence enables you to lead. Combining all three elements gives you a fast-track advantage. You become a leader who is valued and in demand, stands out, and is seen as capable and credible. Your confidence grows as you take on key projects. You can maximize your potential as you soar to new heights.

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ACTION: Gain more power to influence.