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## Don't Stay in Your Lane: The Secret to Developing Your Career

Want to get the most you can out of your career? Learn what self-advocacy looks like.

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When it comes to **developing** our careers, we often focus on exterior sources to help us get ahead, depending on **recognition** from others to propel us forward. But we often overlook one of the most powerful **tools**: self-advocacy.

In the book *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*, author and executive coach Joel Garfinkle's PVI model, which stands for perception, visibility, and influence, is a practical way to think about self-advocacy and break down the barriers. First, know your perception -- how peers at all levels see you. Second, increase your visibility. This magnifies the third point, your influence.

But what does it look like on a day-to-day basis? Here are some examples of tactics for self-advocacy.

**Own your voice.** When I was in my early 30s, I once answered a call from a telemarketer who immediately asked to speak to my parents. I was surprised and annoyed. Why did he think I was a child?

A few weeks later, I happened to replay a voicemail I had recorded earlier. I was horrified. My voice was high-pitched, I talked much too fast, and I rambled when I should have been succinct. It was a wake-up call. From then on, I made the conscious effort to speak from the diaphragm, end my sentences on a lower inflection, and slow down. I made my voice catch up to my age, experience, and abilities.

Sometimes, owning your voice simply means sharing it more frequently and strategically. A recent client of mine, Brian, a talented middle manager for a global sports brand, gave the impression of being quiet and disengaged at work, despite being accomplished at his job. In meetings, he would only comment on technical details.

Together, we worked on the goal of making his voice heard. Brian did his homework, thoughtfully anticipating and preparing contributions he could make during meetings. He practiced linking his comments to someone else's, which lets colleagues in on his thought process and builds bridges in conversation. As Brian practiced these skills, he became more comfortable jumping in and making his voice heard. By adding his perspective to the conversation, he added visibility, which changed others' perception of him and increased his influence.

**Raise your hand.** As leaders, we must learn to raise our hands and make ourselves more visible. We must not wait for others to pick us, invite us, or give us permission to be involved. We must also become comfortable with telling people what we want.

One of my clients, Yvonne, a Chinese woman from Hong Kong, works for a global luxury brand in Japan. Her manager is an Italian man with a very dominant personality. He used to often interrupt her and cut her off in meetings. Over time, she became more and more quiet and very unhappy. She was passed over for promotional opportunities, and started to even feel invisible. When I coached her, she was in tears and on the verge of quitting.

I encouraged her to speak up and find her voice. We devised an action plan, which started with talking to her boss. We created and practiced a script: "I want to develop my leadership and I need your support. At meetings, please do not interrupt me or cut me off. I have a lot to offer.

Can you support me on that?"

Her boss was impressed. He changed the way he behaved in meetings. She also raised her hand to present at a global meeting, representing the Japanese marketing team. It was a big success. She has found her voice and got her mojo back. By finding and using her voice, she enhanced her visibility, influence, and perception of her abilities.

**Find a mentor or sponsor.** A guide, in the form of a mentor or sponsor, is one of the most powerful tools for growing your career.

What is the difference between a mentor and a sponsor? A mentor offers professional advice to someone younger in their career who benefits from the guidance. It is often a one-way relationship.

A sponsorship goes deeper. It involves an established leader investing in someone younger who shows promise. The sponsor opens doors, offers coaching, and helps develop his or her career. In return, they learn something from the person they're sponsoring -- whether it's generational perspective, a new technology skill, or a new way at looking at a particular business problem.

Both sponsorships and mentorships can be invaluable resources. But how does one go about finding a sponsor or a mentor? Start by looking for opportunities to be involved in, projects that allow you to make a contribution, do an outstanding job, and build relationships with senior leaders. Once someone sees your talents and appreciates what you have to offer, raise your hand and ask for that mentorship or sponsorship relationship.

Without that established relationship and evidence of your promise, finding a mentor or a sponsor can be an uphill climb. So don't stay in your own lane. Find opportunities to speak up and add value.

**By owning our voices, raising our hands and asking for what we need, and being proactive in finding mentors and sponsors, we can advocate for ourselves and take more control for our destinies.**