**HOW TO RAISE YOUR PROFILE**

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**Why?**

The Civil Service is shrinking and competition is high for posts and promotion, so you need something to give you that edge in your applications. Before you begin to take action on raising your profile, you need to work out yourself WHY you want to do it. It's not all about achieving promotion, it can also be to make sure you get the most interesting jobs for your grade, work in certain departments or get access to some of the most exciting discretionary work across government on a topic you are passionate about.

**How?**

You can raise your profile in a number of ways – all at the same time. Options include building a network, getting a couple of mentors, carrying out discretionary work, joining professional organisations relating to your functional specialism, signing up to local or cross government networks for gender, social mobility etc. It's also about doing the best you can at your job – in today's world doing a brilliant job is no longer the single best way of raising your profile, but it's an essential part of your plan. Remember that if you focus all the time on building this network and putting your head above the parapet and then fail to deliver on your objectives more people will know. Conversely, if you are renowned for doing a great job, embracing change and offering yourself up for discretionary work the positive impact that has on your image is tenfold. And don't be afraid of going for the jobs others think are too hard – it's often these that are most rewarding in terms of profile, and I speak from personal experience on that one.

**Getting Started**

Before you trek off and join every network and forum you can, start stalking people in corridors and volunteering for loads of outside work you need a plan! So, going back to the ‘why’ point – sit down and really work out what your priorities are. The next step is work out who can help you achieve those.

This is where you need to understand the difference between mentors and networks

- **Mentors** – you can have a few, these are the people that can help you work through the confusion using their experience. They are not there to tell you what to do, but to help guide you through your own thought process so you can work it out for yourself. They can be anyone and don’t always have to be more senior than you. Reverse mentoring is beginning to take off with senior leaders to help them formulate their thinking on how to shape vision and strategy. You can get them through formal departmental processes, mentor match and recommendations. Take time to reflect during your career as to what kind of mentors you need at that particular time and mix the genders. Women are great for understanding how the female mind works, but it’s good also to have a male mentor who tend to be more direct. I have both and I use them for different things. Also be a mentor – whether formally or peer-to-peer. Do you have a talent that others come to you for? Offer it generously.

- **Networks** – these can spring up from anywhere. Start with ones that relate to what you currently do and grow from there. Your confidence will increase as your network grows and you find it easier to communicate with new people. Learn to love coffee – growing and maintaining a network takes time – at the start it seems like a full time job, but it does settle once it becomes an integral part of your working life. Keep growing your network – I will give you some tips later on how to manage it once it gets large. And remember – your network isn’t there just to raise your profile – it’s there to help you with complex work challenges and it’s there to help you build a strong team when you are in a leadership role. Everyone in your network is equal, regardless of grade – you never know when any one of them could help you.
Once you have worked out what type of network you need to start building and where your mentors will come from and why, there is another step before you throw yourself out there. You need to be confident in yourself to get out of this exercise what you want and come across as authentic. Spend time working out who you are – are you an extrovert or an introvert, do you need to do some work on building up your self-belief and self-esteem, do you like big social events or online communication? Don’t set yourself up to fail from the outset by not developing your strategy to suit you as a person.

Spend some time working on your elevator pitch – a 90-second spiel about you. If you have this, then your confidence will increase as you no longer have to panic when introducing yourself. Develop a half page biography – this not only helps you understand yourself, but it builds your self-esteem as you reflect on your achievements and will come in useful as you contact people as it gives them a snapshot of you. Do the same in due course with your CV as some people will ask for that depending on what you are connecting with them about.

**Making Contact**

So, you have now reached the point at which you can start.

You can approach people in all different ways, depending on what you want to get to know them for. If it’s for a mentor, an email or a diary meeting could be a good first start. Be clear on why you are asking them. Flattery is good – but it needs to be authentic. Perhaps you admire the way they are as a female leader in a man’s world, perhaps you want help with changing functions and you know they have done that themselves. Ask for a short meeting and also offer them the get out clause that if they feel they don’t have the capacity at the moment, perhaps they could suggest someone who could? Double bonus – you have recognised their time limitations, you have got your name in front of them and if they do pass you onto someone else, you have two contacts for the price of one!

With networks, join things that interest you such as professional groups, specific interest groups etc. Find out what cross departmental courses are open to you. At work, utilise meetings to grow your network– listen to both the topic and what people do as a job and what they say. Is there someone around that table who has a job that sounds fascinating? Tell them that in the margins of the meeting or email them afterwards! This is also where your preparation with an elevator pitch comes in useful. Networks are two ways, never stop thinking about what you can do for others – how you can be of service.

Look for discretionary work that interests you – and see if you can get onto some departmental or cross government working groups. But know your limits – don’t take on too much or your work will suffer and that can have a negative impact on your profile.

With Senior Leaders – if you just want to get on their radar then try and do this through your network by building one that includes their staff. Do a good job and try and get more facetime with the leadership and aim for the senior leaders that have something you want to tap into. Be prepared to give your elevator pitch – you genuinely may meet them in an elevator and have the chance to say hello! Find out what they do so you can talk to them if you get the chance (“I saw your blog on gender equality and I found it fascinating”). Don’t just gather names as that will do you no good. Anyone can drop a name into a conversation. It’s better to have a few senior leaders who know you than lots you have spoken to for 5 minutes.

It all comes back to authenticity. Trust me when I say, people can see through those individuals that just want to know you so they can name drop, or just want to flatter you to get you to do something.
Tips

These don’t just apply to raising your profile, they will benefit you at work and personally too.

• **Get yourself on LinkedIn.** Make an effort to fill it in so it’s an ‘all-star profile’. Connect with others and look what they put on there – connect with me and look at mine. Invest some time in your social media presence, it shows others you are serious about your profession.

• **Learn to love coffee.** Change your mindset and realise that meeting up for a coffee with someone on a professional basis is an essential part of success. It doesn’t need to have an agenda; it can be just a meeting of minds. It takes time, build this into your day as its important and if you have a management chain that doesn’t appreciate the benefits then tell them! Good leaders know that building relationships is the main route to success for both the individual and the team. If you want to be a good leader, then prioritise this so your team will do the same.

• **Write your future biography.** Write it as if it was five years ahead, what would you want it to say? This is called visualisation and has been proved to increase the chances of you achieving your goals. Stephen Covey in his book ‘Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’ suggests writing your eulogy to focus your mind on what is important to you. – what would your eulogy say about you?

• **Accept it’s not comfortable.** I describe myself as an introverted extrovert – once I am comfortable and confident in an environment then there is no stopping me but in a new environment I start off pretty quiet. Set yourself a challenge and then give yourself permission to stop or leave. For example, if you are at an event where you don’t know anyone then set yourself a target of speaking to two people before you leave. You will be surprised how much easier anything is when its broken down into achievable goals.

• **Prioritise and Communicate.** Your network will get quite large in due course so at some point you will need to prioritise. A good way of keeping in touch is through large scale emails on holidays, LinkedIn updates, twitter, events or alumni group catch ups.

• **Be curious.** Remember at school when someone new came into your class? You wanted to know everything about them – when we are young we ask questions, but strangely as we get older we stop. Don’t think you look better because you nod despite not having a clue – be really curious about people and you will find out allsorts – so find the common ground, find the person who can help you with something, find out how you can help someone else.

• **Practice active listening.** We all sit in meetings and just scribble blindly in our notebooks or practice what we are going to say whilst someone else is speaking. It’s an art but try and learn it – active listening will help you identify people, roles, synergies. Ask at meetings if there will be notes so you don’t have to focus on scribbling in your notebook, record lectures or meetings on your phone – anything that makes it easier to stop and be present.

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1 COVEY; Stephen R. 1989 *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
My personal thoughts

- **Follow up with me.** If you have emailed me for a chat or some help and I email you back then follow up on that and quickly. Equally it’s always nice to receive an email afterwards to say thanks. Good manners will always make me more inclined to help.

- **Be authentic.** I will know if you’re not! Have confidence in yourself and don’t put on an act. If you are nervous it will show regardless so don’t try and cover it up – I’ve been there too during my career so I can empathise. Don’t pretend to be what you think I want to see, just be yourself.

- **Tell me why you want to connect.** Be specific so I don’t just think I have received a generic email that has been sent to many others.

- **When you see me, say hello!** I am human, I like to chat. If I am making coffee and you just say hello and comment on the weather, I will notice you! You don’t always need to do the elevator pitch if you have no need to.

But ultimately, it comes down to doing what is comfortable for you, with just a little bit of stretch. Believe in yourself, your skills and that everyone has something to offer – including you. As Oscar Wilde said – be yourself, everyone else is already taken.

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Other papers in this series (please email for a copy)

- **Paper 2:** Retaining Your Authenticity
- **Coming in Dec 17:** Overcoming Imposter Syndrome