

Career reputation

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Purpose

This exercise provides a clear understanding about what a client needs to do. It builds a reputation that will gain them the profile they seek. It provides the client with a clear understanding of what their career influencers think about them and, if necessary, what they need to do to change their perceptions.

Description

Use this exercise if a client has stalled in their career, been turned down for a new role, does not know how well they are performing or they want to know how they can get on. The exercise will provide invaluable insight into what is stopping them from progressing forward in their chosen direction.

Process

- 1 Set the scene by describing the following situations:
 - Scenario 1 – Two people are sitting at their desks talking together quietly.
 - Scenario 2 – A colleague is sitting at their desk at 9am, reading a newspaper.

If you ask the client to describe the people/situations, typical responses you may get are as follows:

- Scenario 1 – gossiping, considerate about the people around them, depends on what they are talking about.
- Scenario 2 – lazy, came in early so having a break, depends on what they are reading, etc.

The point of the above exercise is to highlight just how quickly we make judgements of people, either positive or negative.

- 2 Ask the client: ‘Do the people who can influence your career have the right impression of you? Have they seen you in the light you want to be seen in?’
- 3 Brainstorm a possible set of skills/behaviours (up to seven) that the client wants to be known for. These should be those that will help them in their career development that they currently demonstrate or could demonstrate. (Refer them to their company’s competency framework, their current/desired job role and their manager for valued skills/behaviours). In this exercise, the client should ideally be looking for skills/behaviours that are/can be made a strength.
- 4 Ask the client to identify up to five people to give them feedback. These should not be their friends and they may be either well known to them or not, but they must have an influence on their career. Ask the client if you can send out the list of skills/behaviours to the feedback providers asking them to evaluate the client. In this way you will be encouraging honest responses with the understanding that the feedback will be discussed with the client as part of their development. Devise a rating scale to evaluate the client against their skills/values. Example rating scales are: 1 to 5 where 1 = demonstrates regularly and 5 = not at all; role model, work still needed, not known for. Add in a ‘Don’t know’ category as this in itself is telling and the client needs to work on making sure that their feedback providers are aware of what they do. Invite the feedback providers to add comments to each skill/behaviour they rate, explaining their score. Ask the client to rate their performance on their skills/behaviours and compare this with the feedback providers. Also, ask if there are skills that they want/expect them to demonstrate if they were to

see the client achieving the career development goal they have set. Table 4 presents a worked example.

- 5 When you have the feedback, look at the differences between what your client says and what their feedback providers say. The differences in opinions are where there nuggets of gold lie. This signals where work on changing perception will have the biggest impact on reputation.
- 6 Support the client to hold feedback conversations. For example, draft conversation starters with the feedback providers to identify and agree specific actions they need to take in order to change their perceptions.
- 7 Review actions that the client needs to take as a result of the conversations. If they need to get better at a skill/behaviour then they can use the next exercise to role model people who are perceived to do it well.

Pitfalls

A client may not want to ask for feedback from their colleagues.

Table 4 Career reputation exercise

Skills/behaviours	Client rating	Feedback ratings	Comments
Positively influencing peers on joint projects	4	Don't know	I have not seen evidence of this to be able to comment – manager
		1	Jo is great at influencing how we spend our time on projects we work on, especially when we have tight deadlines – co-worker
Time management for monthly progress reporting on financials	2	4	Jo can sometimes leave the report creation until the last minute and seems to spend too much time worrying about reconciling pennies when I am just interested in the big numbers – manager

Bibliography

Hodgson, S. (2005) *Finding Square Holes: Discover Who You Really Are and Find the Perfect Career*, Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing.