



TEMIN AND COMPANY

REPUTATION MATTERS

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING  
ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU'RE  
NOT IN THE ROOM  
AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO  
INFLUENCE IT

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# WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN THE ROOM –

## AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO INFLUENCE IT

“When you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu,” former Governor of Texas Ann Richards used to say. She may have been referring to politics, but this is equally true in the worlds of business, academia and nonprofits.

The biggest decisions about your career are often made when you’re not in the room. Whether it’s a decision about if you’ll be hired, promoted or fired; whether you are put forth by a headhunter to a selection committee and then asked to join a corporate board or become a university trustee; whether you make managing director or are passed over; are awarded tenure; or offered the CEO slot, your professional fate is often determined in closed rooms where people are talking about – and evaluating – you, without the benefit of your input.



### FIVE INPUTS THEY USE TO EVALUATE YOU

When you are not in the room, discussions most often center around performance, potential, leadership ability, flaws and the all-important, if fuzzy, concept of “fit.”

At GE, when I ran corporate marketing for GE Capital, we held what were called Session C talent reviews, an iconic talent review system started by Jack Welch. Group leaders, often all the way up to the business CEO, would meet privately for hours each quarter, evaluating every member of a team. In these meetings, we looked at the “Four Es”: Execution, Energy, Energizing – the ability to energize others – and Edge – the ability to make tough decisions. And of course, the individuals we were discussing were never in the room with us.

While each talent review or selection committee may look for slightly different attributes, these discussions include at least five different kinds of input:

1. Your reputation
2. Your “presence”
3. Your track record
4. The comments of those who support you and those who do not
5. The direct impressions you have made on the decision-makers in the room, in interviews, conversations, or other interactions

And sometimes, in high-profile searches, committees will ask you to take a battery of examinations, including extensive interviews conducted by outside consultants.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

But even taking into consideration all of these data points, the decisions are not always logical. Lurking behind them, of course, is unconscious – or conscious – bias, which has been discussed so much recently. And even though corporate America is awash in programs to identify and defend against bias, it still holds enormous sway. Whether you’re tall or short, male or female, a member

of a minority or majority, attractive, young or older, or fit into a decision-maker’s mental model of what someone in the role should be like, can outweigh more appropriate considerations.

Organizations are trying to mitigate against bias – such as musicians auditioning behind a screen so judges can’t see who is playing, or hirers seeing only resumes that do not reveal the gender of an applicant – with varying levels of success. (The best book out there on this topic is a new one by Harvard Kennedy School Professor Iris Bohnet, called [\*What Works: Gender Equality by Design\*](#).) But bias can be intractable, and not every organization is trying actively to root it out.

## WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

I am taking for granted a stellar track record and financial results here. But the question remains, what else can you do – in the present – to influence how you are evaluated by those in control of your professional career?

From my work as a leadership and communications coach to numerous high-profile leaders – men and women, as well as work as a reputation and crisis manager, and as the senior adviser to a number of corporate women’s councils, here are eight strategies that may help you get

others to see you, and judge you, in the ways you would wish.

## 1. Warmth and Competence

First, [compelling research has pointed out](#) that both women and men leaders are judged primarily on two criteria – warmth (likability, trust) and competence – in almost every situation. As authors Susan Fiske, Amy Cuddy and Peter Glick say: “People perceived as warm and competent elicit uniformly positive emotions and behavior, whereas those perceived as lacking warmth and competence elicit uniform negativity.”

This applies to career mobility just as well as it does to other sectors of life, though the particular balance of warmth and competence, or what exact behaviors constitute them, may vary. For example, when does too much warmth mean that a leader cannot be strong enough to fire a subordinate – an ability critical to competence? Or when does the ability to draw hard, unemotional conclusions from data mean that one does not have the warmth, emotional intelligence or empathy to be trusted and liked by customers?

However these traits translate in different situations or professions, it is clear that they reach far into the closed rooms where folks are making decisions

about you. Most professionals who have not sat in these meetings would be shocked to know just how informal and based on intuition, or “gut feel,” the decisions may be. And a large part of that gut feel may be based on perceptions of warmth and competence. So, the wise professional would be well-served to actively enhance both of these aspects of their professional selves.

## 2. Set a Strategy

Next, set a strategy for how you are perceived by key audiences. You can somewhat easily figure out who, or what kinds of professionals, will most often be deciding your fate. In a law firm, you can find out who is on the committee deciding who makes partner. You can also figure out the most influential executive search professionals in your industry, or even who the board members are on specific nominating and governance committees of the boards you wish to join.

Research them, find out what is important to them, who you know who knows them, and what kind of thought leadership they value.

Then create a plan to distinguish yourself in their eyes in the appropriate ways: Connect with them on a substantive issue, help them in their own jobs, promote them in general and

on social media, publish high-quality thinking in their areas of interest that shows you to be a subject matter expert, demonstrate leadership qualities, etc.

In fact, I would counsel figuring out exactly what you aspire to be professionally, and want to be known for (some call this your personal brand), as well as who your key audiences are, and then begin to make sure you engage in a steady stream of activities that are both true to your “brand” and impressive to your audiences.

This is similar to how you would create a reputation for an organization, but now, you are applying it to yourself. (More about this in a future article.)

### **3. Assemble Your Advocates; Enhance Your “Sphere of Influence”**

Create a strong network of supporters and relationships within your organization, and outside of it. Everyone needs supporters – those you can turn to in a crunch to recommend you, and further your work. The more advocates and relationships you have, the stronger your sphere of influence becomes, and the more their points of view will become common wisdom, even helping you weather moments of failure, or less-than-stellar performance.

And yet again, the best way to get supporters is to be a supporter of

others. Call it professional karma, or quid pro quo, the more generous you are to your superiors, peers and contacts – the more you care about them – the more generous and caring they will be to you, when it really matters.

### **4. Become Known For Your Visionary and Strategic Abilities – and Execution**

Vision is often highly underrated by those who are in the midst of doing a particular job. They can see it as superfluous, understood, or even distracting. But to those who are looking for real leadership potential, and the ability to inspire others and not just command them, vision is key.

Becoming known as a visionary leader, especially if you have the trifecta of leadership traits – vision, strategy, and execution – is a powerful aphrodisiac to those making decisions about your future. But you can’t fake them. So dedicating yourself to cultivating vision, strategy and execution skills over the entire course of your career is an essential component of successful ascent in job responsibility and position.

### **5. Put Your Hand Up**

Being known as the one who is always ready for a new assignment or a new

challenge is a powerful career enhancer.

Research has found that men are often more bold at volunteering for new assignments, even when they don't have all of the required qualifications, while women can hang back, not applying for a position until they have almost every qualification desired. So, sound advice for all is to go for it, if you want the position, with confidence that you can learn all that you need to know directly before or while you are in the job.

In other words, don't wait to be tapped – put your hand up and ask for an enhanced opportunity. And, when tapped, accept the new challenge with confidence. Once that becomes your reputation, you will be amazed at how many more opportunities come your way.

## 6. Balance Your Ego

Everyone is on guard these days for signs of the stereotypical millennial ego – someone who cares more about his or her position on the career ladder than the best interests of the company. So, it becomes important to make sure your ego is balanced in just the right way.

Be ambitious and high-reaching, but make sure you are always demonstrating how you can grow, as

well as how you can add value to your company. Be assured enough to go for the next challenge, but not so much so that you come across as being stuck on yourself, inflexible and too career-hungry to be a team player.

Show that you not only seek feedback, but incorporate corrections into your performance very quickly. Model how to recover and learn from setbacks, retain the can-do attitude of a winner and include others in your success.

Most importantly, make sure to show that it is not all about you, all the time. In today's world, collaboration and co-operation are important, even while you demonstrate that you are a natural and trustworthy leader. That is a fine line to walk. Learn to listen, to ask questions and to care about the answers – from your team, your bosses, your clients and your key influencers.

Management, evaluation and search committees are looking for leaders with a healthy, resilient ego – who can learn, grow, perform and spur others to do the same. They are looking for candidates who can collaborate, and show respect for those who are different from themselves, and who can, at times, put themselves second. All of these attributes can help you position yourself for first place in what will always be a highly competitive world.

## 7. Learn to Understand Unwritten Norms and Adapt to Them

Every organization has an unwritten rule book that is far more robust than its employee handbook. Culture, [the NY Fed tells us](#), can mean “norms that are communicated implicitly as opposed to rules that are communicated explicitly. These norms may include values, mission, competitive drive, risk-taking, entrepreneurial spirit, results focus, etc.” They can also encompass how you speak, dress, groom yourself, run a meeting, handle a problem, work with clients, introduce new products, run a teleconference, rebuke a subordinate and write a report.

Emotionally intelligent leaders can pick up norms and nuances quickly upon entering a new situation, and intuit correctly what kind of behavior is prized, and what kind of behavior is discounted. Then, instead of digging in their heels, and insisting upon their own way, they can adapt to the norms of their environment seamlessly. The diametrical opposite of being “tone deaf,” this kind of executive flexibility, and ability to find true north within organizational cultures, is a highly prized attribute. It is the definition of “fit.” Word gets around quickly that an executive or candidate “gets it” and can operate effectively in most situations. They therefore earn a premium, and

become sought-after and highly promotable leaders.

## 8. Be Able to Articulate the Value of Your Contributions Clearly and Easily

Sometimes decision makers do see your worth, and the value of your contributions, all on their own and promote you accordingly. Meritocracy certainly used to be the model, and we all fervently hope it still is. But today, as everyone is busier and more distracted than ever before, as career progression is a higher priority for more workers, and as competition grows fiercer, that model cannot be counted upon consistently. You have to remind them in just the right ways.

Today, you must be persuasive and articulate in representing your organization, product or service, as well as yourself. Not only are management committees evaluating candidates on their art of communication and dialogue, they are looking for individuals who can position themselves as leaders and winners effortlessly, and walk into any room and be crisply and clearly articulate about that positioning.

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Assurance, mastery, and a sense of authentic and unforced authority are all critical to success as a leader. This kind of leadership presence permeates

through the walls of the rooms where decisions are being made. And, when echoed by others in the room, it has the best chance of getting you exactly where you want to be – in the room yourself, setting direction for the organization, choosing others – and leading with wisdom, integrity, inspiration and break-through success.

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## About Temin and Company

Temin and Company Incorporated creates, enhances, and saves reputations.

Temin and Company also markets by leveraging the expertise, ideas and insight of its clients to produce differentiated intellectual capital and content.

The firm helps corporations, professional services firms, and other institutions define and strengthen their public image – and their bottom line – through strategic marketing; branding; media relations; thought leadership; social media; speaker, media and leadership coaching; financial communications; and crisis and reputation management.

Strategists, coaches, writers, and social media experts are available “25/8” to assure that every crisis is addressed, and every opportunity leveraged.

Clients include the CEOs and Boards of some of the world’s largest and most well-known corporations, financial institutions, portfolio companies, pharma and biotech companies, law firms, consulting firms, publishing houses, venture capital and private equity firms, authors, politicians, and colleges and universities.