

"An absolute must read for any aspiring corporate professional"

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VANESSA VALLELY

Raising your Profile

RAISE YOUR OWN PROFILE

“You are your own Chief Marketing Officer, go sell”
– Tom Peters

From a cultural perspective we are not taught to sing our own praises or talk about our successes. I would like to challenge a few aspects of that status quo within this chapter. I am often asked if raising your profile is also seen as boasting, and my answer is it depends on how you frame your profile-raising activity and the words you use.

What is profile? Is it the same thing as reputation or brand?

For me it's about three things:

1. What people see – The visual image of a person
2. What people hear – A verbal description of a person
3. What people say – The opinions of others

There are many ways of raising your profile. You could put your face up on a billboard or at a bus stop, but let's face it, not many people would be comfortable with that. There are also people in the public eye that have a great deal of profile, but they may also have huge PR teams behind them. The question is how can you do your own PR, raise your profile, and overcome what is probably the biggest barrier around this – feeling comfortable about it?

If by this point you have created a mission statement with your strategy and goals and tasks all mapped out, have a look over the entire thing and see where there might be opportunities to raise your profile in line with those activities. If you don't see the opportunities, this is a good time to involve friends and mentors to get their input. I bet there are lots, but the bigger question is will you take them up and maximise the potential that lies within those opportunities?

Promoting yourself in either a written or verbal format takes a bit of courage. The fear of being judged by others takes a while to get over, and because of this a lot of people choose to stay in the background. When you put yourself out there you are invariably opening yourself up for other people's opinions; however, it depends on how far you want to take your profile-raising

activities. For example, some people find it difficult just to complete their LinkedIn profile in any kind of detail, worrying that they will be perceived by their colleagues to be 'bragging', even when all of the achievements they'd include are absolutely legitimate. For me personally, I have turned down opportunities to be on television in the past, because I know that I wouldn't necessarily be comfortable with that level of exposure, even though I am totally OK with being present on the internet and on various social media channels in a significant way. Everyone is different.

People like to be recognised; however, without someone raising your profile for you, there is an element of it that you have to do yourself.

I still feel uncomfortable with certain aspects of it to this day. Every time I present my Power of Profile talk or other training sessions, my first slide talks about my awards and what I have achieved. I include this slide as the first one on purpose, not because I want to sing about my success, but because it enables me to share with my audience that no matter how many times I present this part of my session, there are times when I still feel uncomfortable talking about my success stories. I know, however, that it is important to establish my credibility with an audience on the topic of profile if I want to keep getting referrals to do more talks.

Therefore, there has to be an element of self-promotion if I want to achieve my goals and overall mission of getting my name out there as a subject matter expert in helping corporate women navigate their careers. If I don't establish myself as an SME in this space, it means my plan to exit corporate life by the time I am 45 (remember my mission earlier) won't happen, therefore I accept that there is an element of doing my own PR that I need to engage in to get ahead.

With women in particular, there seems to be an overwhelming urge to follow up every profile-raising or complimentary statement we make about ourselves with a self-deprecating comment. It must be something in our DNA. Have you ever received a compliment from someone about what you are wearing, and your response is: "Oh, this old thing?" or "It was the first thing in the closet." I was taught a long time ago by another coach just to say thank you and take the compliment, not to try to deflect it with a disposable sentence which can actually make the person giving the compliment feel a bit silly for having said anything in the first place.

One of my American friends has pointed out that this tendency to talk ourselves down may also be a particularly British trait, as Americans in general seem much happier to wax lyrical about their achievements, so don't

forget to factor in any necessary cultural overlays in your thinking on the topic too.

So if we have trouble taking a compliment from someone else, it's obvious how difficult we find it actually talking about ourselves in a complimentary way, but it is something you must learn to do if you want to raise your profile. I believe there is a way that you can overcome your internal barriers and raise your profile, but the importance lies in how you do it: what you say, when you say it and who you say it to. In today's world of social media, you also need to consider what tools are the most appropriate to raise your profile, as written text can be interpreted very differently from verbal conversation.

It is easier for comments to be misinterpreted in social media, especially on something like Twitter where the restriction on the number of characters you can use may mean that you can't explain something quite the way you normally would. My advice is that you should still leverage social media tools, but know their limitations and proceed with the appropriate level of caution.

Think of it like this. Every time you network, whether you do "that online or in the real world, you are effectively raising your profile. Every time you tweet or add something to LinkedIn and tell others what you are doing, you are effectively raising your profile. Every meeting you attend and every event you go to with other people is an opportunity to raise your profile. Every project you volunteer for is an opportunity to raise your profile.

Profile-raising is about being seen/having your name seen (eg. the networking piece) and it is about having your content heard (the profile piece).

From a career perspective, it is important that you learn to become more comfortable with the art of speaking up and telling people more about yourself and what you have achieved. In the corporate world, line managers change and whole jobs and departments get moved or disappear, in which case it is very easy to lose aspects of your story. It's important to use a variety of mechanisms to keep your story alive and ensure that key points of it are heard, or better still, repeated by others. This has become much easier to do on your own with the introduction of different social media platforms.

Using social media to raise your profile

How should you talk about yourself on social media? There is nothing wrong with posting an update to Twitter or LinkedIn, or Facebook for that matter, telling others what you are up to. It's more about knowing who your audience is on a particular channel and the way you word your update that counts. For instance, there may be some of your activities that your family may be really proud of, but do your colleagues and professional contacts need to know that you and your children won the Most Perfectly Decorated Easter Egg contest at school?

On the more professional social media tools liked LinkedIn and Twitter, it is more acceptable to talk about your professional achievements or for entrepreneurs to promote their products and services. I use both of these tools daily and am often speaking about what I have been up to. I intersperse my own updates with updates from other people in my network as well, which helps us both by making others aware of who I'm connected to while also supporting the endeavours of the other people in my network.

Here's an example. Let's say I want to post an update about an event that I am speaking at in order to raise my own profile around my public speaking. My client's name is pretty impressive and I am hoping that this speaking engagement will lead to more speaking engagements.

How would I proceed? Where would I post it?

Facebook?

Probably not, as my Facebook account is restricted to purely family and friends, there are no clients or colleagues connected to me on there. Would this update really interest them or lead to anything else for me? Unlikely.

Twitter?

Yes, as there could be potential new clients following "me, plus I know that my client also uses Twitter, and if they follow me, they will invariably see my tweet which shows that I am helping to promote their event as well.

LinkedIn?

Yes, as I am connected to a number of people from organisations I would like to speak at. But on the caution front, I have to be careful about what I say here, as I am also connected to the senior management team from my day job and I don't want them to think I performed this talk during work time.

Pinterest?

Potentially, but it absolutely depends on my audience for this particular talk.

The key here is considering what platforms to use and how to tailor your message for each audience. And if you can raise the profile of someone else before raising your own, go for it.

Using my previous example, that might look like this:

Twitter:

'Big thank you to @xxxxx for giving me the opportunity to speak to their fab audience this eve, really enjoyed it, gr8 org.'

LinkedIn:

'Great dialogue with the audience speaking for XX last night, if you want to find out more about this dynamic organisation, see this link.'

Pinterest:

'See link to fab event I was lucky enough to speak at (attach picture).'

With my various updates I have managed to tell others what I have been up to, and I have also managed to raise the profile of the organisation that hired me to speak. In turn, I feel more comfortable raising my own profile as I am promoting someone else's profile simultaneously.

What tends to happen in terms of these profile-raising activities is that they are then promoted by the individuals whose profile you have also raised. They may have wanted to do it themselves but felt too uncomfortable, so it is easier to spread something good that someone else has said about you rather than doing it yourself.

Going back to my example, here's what that looks like. I will tweet my thank you via Twitter, the organisation I have thanked will probably retweet my thanks to their followers, and then I get more followers as a consequence. People will notice my update on LinkedIn and potentially comment and share it with their network (if it's interesting to them). In addition, I may well have posted my update to the various groups I follow or own, which then leads to more comments and shares, all of which equals lots of profile-raising for the company I originally spoke for.

There are ways to raise your profile within your organisations too, even if your organisation is one which shuns social media use. You could set up a lunch-and-learn, attend as many internal networking events as possible, attend meetings in other areas as I mentioned earlier in the book, or get involved in charity initiatives or programmes internally where they are looking for volunteers.

There will be other ways as well, so be creative and, again, you might want to talk to colleagues to get some other suggestions for what might work in your firm.

If you can get your corporate communications department to be aware of everything you are involved in, that's even better – get stories on the company intranet or offer to speak at events that may be on their radar. The more you do, the more of a story you have to tell.

In addition to using social media, externally you could join and perhaps even volunteer to help out at a network (they are always looking for helpers), you could write your own blog or set up your own website. You could write articles for magazines or other sites. Most of the 300 writers we have on WeAreTheCity did exactly that – they wrote in to our site with a sample story and we gave them a profile by including them on our site.

I personally recommend having your own website. Buying your first name/surname domain (eg. vanessavallely.com) should be top of your list even if you never use it – who knows, in the future someone with the same name as you may become famous before you do and want to buy it from you for millions! Website domains have become really cheap and can be easily purchased over the internet. Setting up your website is important too, even if it is just a place for you to blog (I find WordPress to be the best tool for websites and blogs). A number of entrepreneurial networks run courses on setting up your website.

Top tips for raising your profile

1. Don't be frightened to tell others what you have achieved, just be conscious of how you word it
2. Ensure you have a strong LinkedIn profile, a good head shot and a bio (a shorter CV) if you require one
3. Invest time in LinkedIn and social media, tell others what you are doing, but again be careful how you word your updates – think about your different audiences
4. Use your network/mentors/champions to help raise your profile
5. Always promote the profile of others before your own
6. Buy yourself a domain name on the web and set up your own website
7. Get involved with internal activities within your corporate environment
8. Offer to write for websites, internal intranets or anywhere where you could add value with your subject matter expertise

