…become visible in your scientific network

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She worked for 10 years as a biologist in basic medical research, 3 years of which as a subproject leader of an immunology-related CRC. During this time, she gained her own leadership experience and supervised doctoral students as well as students and successfully acquired third-party funding.

After exploring approaches to meaningful and successful networking activities in previous issues of the jGfV newsletter, we now turn to important aspects of self-presentation. While networking is based on the WE, visibility is more focused on the ME. Self-presentation is not an end in itself – you won't present yourself in front of a lifeless mirror. It's never an unrelated monologue you're supposed to deliver. Instead it's an entirely social act that is neither easy nor self-evident perceived by people who you may encounter.

Most people are often absorbed by their to-do lists, upcoming meetings and deadlines, or are stuck overthinking issues from the past. A metaphor for this state of self-absorption might be that of a bubble inside of which that person finds themselves. In this inward-looking mindset, people are more inclined to perceive other people less in depth, assigning them into simple silos such as gender, age or race. This tends to project undifferentiated and generalized characteristics onto them. If you consider this and have a want to become visible to a person as individual yourself, you need to burst that obscure bubble to get their complete attention.

Ten years of employment as a researcher have also given her a comprehensive insight into the communicative, social and organizational structures of the academic system. Since 2008, self-employed as a certified online trainer, face-to-face trainer and coach. Her core topics are career development, visibility in networks, self-leadership, communication, supervision and leadership with a focus on competence orientation for people of all people working in academia.

Visibility xplained

Before we dive deeper into appropriate methodology and strategy for boosting your visibility in the scientific community, it is important to clarify what visibility actually means and with what kind of challenges it could be linked. Let's make a digression on basic human needs. While networking predominantly nourishes our aspiration and inspiring togetherness, visibility has a different focus. From as young as birth we need encounters with other people as a reflection for who we are through verbal and nonverbal signals. Depending on the quality of our relationships we may develop a realistic self-concept that is necessary to become an autonomous individual. That is why everyone needs experiences in which one is feeling:

- Seen;
- Heard;
- Taken seriously; and
- Valued for one's own uniqueness.

Only when all four aspects apply can we really be visible to our counterpart. We can immediately feel when this is happening. But it can only be realized when we are in a safe social space. Only then we can be self-confident and assertive in the presence of others. Depending on whether we have had either encouraging positive experiences or even disapproval or ignorance after venturing out and showing ourselves, it may be that we are less inclined to actively approach other people. In my experience having talked to many clients about these issues as a coach, I assume that most people have experienced rejection in their lives.

The different perspectives from years of coaching practice give her a complex informal knowledge of the special working conditions in the academic-scientific field. She conducts trainings and coachings in German and English.

Rejection leads to the feeling of shame, shame then makes us feel worthless. The consequence is not knowing exactly how to simultaneously protect this fragile and vulnerable part of our personality while also how to proactively approach others in order to become visible in the professional field.
So, what specifically can you do to become more visible in your professional network and feel fairly comfortable doing so?

Shift your perspective

A well-made self-presentation has many different facets and components – all of which are important – that can be strung together in different ways according to context, situation and the people we meet. A basic, yet useful, method when preparing to introduce yourself to someone is to shift your own perspective and imagine what might interest this other person. We all have the capacity to put ourselves in the shoes of another in order to imagine what this colleague, collaboration partner or even a coriphae of a scientific field could be interested in or attracted towards. A prerequisite for an attention-catching self-presentation is an in-depth preparation in terms of information about your personality. The corresponding buzz words here are **PROFILING** and **POSITIONING**.

Build your profile

Awareness for your own profile in terms of scientific expertise, competencies and values is essential. You need to:

- Figure out your scientific expertise take a look at the topics you have worked on so far. What is the thread that connects them all? Are you a specialist or do you do more work in an interdisciplinary or translational field of research? Consider asking a mentor for feedback in order to get an idea of what language is appropriate here.
- Learn about competencies look back at projects and challenges you have successfully dealt with. How did you proceed? What competencies can be derived from your approach? An in-depth training with a qualified coach will deepen your understanding of yourself and lead to a realistic self-view.
- Gain clarity about your values that are at the core of our personality and are aspects of what is important to you such as independence, fairness, creativity, meaningfulness. It can be helpful to search for appropriate value tests or lists on the Internet and to verify the corresponding findings in everyday life.

The profile of a personality is completed by its interests, hobbies and passions. This is where feelings and emotions become tangible for ourselves and others.

This detailed knowledge:
a) Serves as the basis for your narrative that you can now share with those in your network who are important to you. Story telling laced with authentic enthusiasm attracts most people.
b) Increases both your self-confidence and assertiveness. It's always helpful to have a set of suitable words handy when you coincidently run into someone who could be relevant for your career.
c) Functions as a compass with which you can explore who in your scientific community might be a good fit for you. This is especially the shared values that strengthen trusting relationships.

Position yourself

Perhaps you remember, from the preceding articles about networking, that it is important to be clear with the **GOALS** and milestones you want to achieve in your research career and aligning them with your network strategy.

When you get in touch with a selected "target person" by talking about your professional objectives, i.e. learning a new method, being interested in a collaboration or becoming a professor, will help them to relate directly to the situation you are currently in. Together with profiling this information will complete the image they perceive of you. It is also helpful to now specify the **PURPOSE**, as to why you are approaching this person, i.e. to receive information, feedback, insights into their expertise or an assessment of a situation

And now? Put things into action …

When you approach someone who already is important to you (i.e. your supervisor, a colleague or a collaboration partner) or may become relevant in your academic life, you:

- Share selected information about you;
- Emphasize the aspects you have in common with this person;
- Want to make the other person aware of your particularities;
- Want to catch their full attention;
- Aim for starting an engaging dialogue; and
- Want to deepen your scientific relationship with each other.

Proper self-presentation means to roll out the red carpet for another person by linking personal information about who you are and what you´re heading for, with what you specifically need from them. That is the occasion where you can make them feel seen, heard, believed and appreciated as the unique person they are. Your message must be crystal clear and easy to process such that the stakes are manageable for them to step on the red carpet. A low-threshold approach wherein it's easy for the other person to provide you with what you need, i.e. specific information, concrete feedback or subject-related advice, that will make it appealing to respond to you. Be aware of this opportunity to establish an exciting and productive relationship with each other. Perhaps you can sense this special energy that arises when the ME and the WE are linked. It´s the experience of an integration process.

If you have topics for the „how to" section we have not yet touched, please email to jGfV@G-f-V.org.