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It's a common feeling: while you are busy doing a good job, others seem to be advancing much faster in their careers. What's going on?

The answer in many cases is your contributions are not being seen and recognized. One important reason this happens is that people are simply not great at assessing competence — a [crucial trait for succeeding at work](#) — and *perceptions* of competence are just as important for success as actual competence.

But don't results mostly speak for themselves? They don't, even when it's all about numbers. Consider a salesman: his sales may rise, but they could have risen without his effort due to the superior quality of the product or marketing efforts that finally bore fruit. If sales go down, it could have been the result of increasing competition.

It's often difficult to disentangle actual drivers of performance, including how much luck and difficulty level played a role. Because of this, people tend to evaluate competence based on other factors, meaning you have to do more than produce results to convince them of your expertise. One way to do this is by demonstrating confidence in your abilities.

A pioneering study from 1982 explored this connection between confidence and perceptions of competence. Psychologists Barry Schlenker and Mark Leary asked 48 subjects to rate the competence (among other characteristics) of 60 imaginary people who were facing a tennis tournament or a class final examination. Subjects received two crucial pieces of information: they learned what the imaginary people predicted their performance to be — from very poor to very good; then they learned the people's "actual" performance. After that, they had to rate each imaginary person's competence.

Lo and behold, the person's prediction had a strong influence on how subjects perceived their competence: Observers evaluated those who made optimistic predictions as much more competent than their modest contemporaries — no matter how accurate those predictions were and how well they actually performed. Even with an optimistic forecast and a horrible result, they were still rated as almost twice as competent as those who accurately forecasted their poor performance. This seems to suggest that if someone asks how you expect to perform, you should give a positive, confident response. A negative forecast may lead you to be perceived as distinctly less competent — no matter how well you actually perform.

Over the last few decades, researchers have scrutinized the effects of projecting confidence versus modesty, gathering rather contradictory conclusions. But a recent replication of Schlenker & Leary's 1982 study supported those original findings. This found that projecting confidence does lead to positive effects, but only when it is non-comparative. In other words: praising your competence seems to be fine as long as you do not claim that others are incompetent.

But why do people view confident others as more competent, even when their performance suggests otherwise? One explanation is that we have a tendency to believe what we are told, and to confirm our beliefs by selecting information that supports them. The term for this is confirmation bias. So if you project confidence, others tend to believe you know what you're talking about, and they will then filter ambiguous information (like how much luck may have helped or hurt you) to fit their initial impression.

While it's unwise to project fake confidence when you *know* you won't perform well, being too modest likely won't serve you well either. As we saw in Schlenker & Leary's study, people tend to penalize humble actors by deciding against them and choosing the confident ones. Modesty is

regarded as [hedging against possible failure](#), an attempt to take the wind out of critics' sails. If the expert doesn't trust in his or her abilities, how could anyone else?

In order to convince others of your abilities, you should make it a habit to communicate that you are good at what you do — without any self-deprecation regarding your core competencies.

This doesn't always come easy. To feel more authentic demonstrating confidence, you may first have to convince yourself. Ask yourself: What am I good at? What was my greatest success so far? Why should others be led by me? What do I know that they don't? If you have a hard time answering these questions, you have a problem — how should you convince others of your expertise if you aren't convinced yourself?

“Praise yourself daringly,” the philosopher Francis Bacon said, because, as he continued, “something always sticks.” If you want to ensure that your achievements are recognized, think about how your manager and colleagues see you and your abilities. Do you think they have a good sense of your competence and expertise? If not, could you be demonstrating more confidence in your tasks? This doesn't necessarily mean praising yourself at every opportunity; rather it means projecting an optimistic attitude. By displaying more confidence in your abilities, you set yourself up to be recognized for your competence and your contributions.

Jack Nasher is a professor at Munich Business School and on the faculty of Stanford University, an international negotiation advisor, and the widest read business psychologist in continental Europe. His work has been featured in publications such as The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company and Forbes. A member of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology and a principal practitioner with the Association of Business Psychologists, he has spoken at TEDx and he also performs as a mentalist at the world-renowned Magic Castle in Hollywood.
