

IS YOUR CAREER IN DANGER FROM HYBRID WORKING?

**5 ways to boost your visibility
at work as we move out of lockdown**



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- *Are you worried that your career is going to be affected by the fact you aren't always going to be where the people making decisions are?*
- *Are you going concerned you won't reach your potential at work, when based more at home?*
- *Are you going to get, see or receive the same opportunities that you might have done if the world hadn't changed?*

What's changing?

There seems to be a consensus that work will never really be the same as it was pre-pandemic. A majority enjoy working from home at least some of the time and aren't willing to go back to commuting for 2-3 hours a day, every day. And numerous businesses have seen how productive their staff can be at home in a way they had never believed was possible; a level of flexibility that wasn't considered possible before, will likely be the norm going forward.

Which for me coming to the end of my career isn't a big deal. But for you it's a bigger problem. When I worked in the office, I could ensure that I bumped into senior executives in the kitchen or time my loo break to coincide with theirs. I knew what meetings were going on and could make sure that I was seen and heard outside of these to ensure I got invited to the ones that would allow me to shine.



In this new hybrid world, you may not have these opportunities and your senior executives, managers and colleagues may not always think of you when an opportunity arises. Both they and you will be working at home more and collaborating with each other less.

With the new hybrid working models being trialled, the changes in how we collaborate and communicate are going to pose their own problems with the day-to-day running of a business, but longer-term they may well have a lasting impact on your career.

How will that affect you?

I was recently speaking to a young executive who is frustrated that in the past year they have been overlooked for several opportunities by the very person who keeps telling them to raise their visibility.

This executive works for a multi-national company where all of the staff were working from home and which has embraced hybrid working for now and going forward. What hybrid working will really look like has yet to be decided, but for now they have returned with different teams in the office on different days, so the building is never full and it will be more difficult to be “seen” by others.

They and their colleagues are finding this new world much more difficult to deal with than when we all worked in the office or all worked from home; suffering from both FOMO (a fear of missing out) and a fear of pushing themselves on others.

It's a problem that many working mothers, the recipients of most flexible working to date, have been dealing with for years and one I think we will all have to get used to in one form or another.



The fear of missing out manifests itself in several ways. When working from home you worry about what is happening in the office, you worry about the conversations you are missing and that you aren't always top of mind when new projects come up. You're sure that others know things that you don't, and you fill in the spaces; making assumptions about what others know or are involved in.

Meanwhile the fear of pushing yourself onto others means that you don't contact someone because you assume they know you have an interest in the project already; or you don't include them in the call as they might see it as a waste of time. You assume that others will see your contacting them as either an intrusion or as pushy, so you think it's better to wait for them to call you.

What can you do about it?

Well, there really is only one solution to addressing this problem ... stop assuming you know what others are thinking ... because you don't!

The chances are that you're not being talked about at all when you aren't there and therein lies the problem. You don't want to be shouting "me, me, me" at every opportunity but if you want to be visible, you do need to ensure you are thought about when you aren't there. And only you can make certain of that.

So, how do you make sure that you are visible in a hybrid world at work?

1. Remember that different people like to communicate in different ways

And if you can, ask those that matter how they prefer you to communicate.

However, if you don't feel able to ask then take some time out to work out who likes what approach and make sure you use their preference whenever you can.



Are they a thinker or a doer? Do they say things like "let me think about that" or "I'll need to discuss it with X"? If they do, they are probably a thinker. If they say things like "Let's just get started" or "Let's suck it and see" they are more likely a doer. Once you have identified this you can start considering how best to communicate with them.

A thinker needs information upfront so they have time to mull the options over before they make a decision. A doer doesn't and if you send them the information, they won't read it before the meeting. A thinker can't make a decision on the fly but that's the best sort of strategy for a doer!

So, if you want to stay visible to a thinker ... make sure you give them the information they need to make a decision up front, in writing, with all the appendices! If you want to stay visible to a doer ... make sure you know all the information and have it to hand but just send them the management summary. That way they can ask you the questions they have.

A doer, will appreciate a quick call. A thinker might prefer an email inviting them to choose a time to speak. A doer will be comfortable with the idea of jumping onto a quick Zoom call. A thinker may not.

2. Ask to be included.

Hybrid working is hard work. Other people may not know, care or find out what you want to be involved in. You have to let them know. There are lots of ways to do this and you need to bear in mind how the other people like to communicate but the bottom line is that you need to tell them that you would like to be included in the project or next meeting ... or whatever.



The chances are, if they haven't asked, they have assumed it's not your role or you aren't interested. And if only you know, then you will get missed out often!

This is easier if you are able to network informally with your colleagues. Networking is a whole other topic but suffice to say that the more you are at events where you can talk informally with others (both within and outside of your company), the more opportunities will come your way.

So even if you are based at home part of the time, try to attend events, socials or lunch and learns whenever you can. Family responsibilities make this difficult but if you can juggle times for clients then make sure that you juggle times for your career too.

3. Use all the technology available to you.

Zoom fatigue is a thing.

I'm not disputing that being in on-line meetings is exhausting. Unlike off line face to face meetings you are facing everyone as if it is a panel interview. And you are on the panel too! There aren't many situations in the offline world where you have to face yourself ... constantly seeing if your hair is a mess, your background is tidy or you have something stuck between your teeth!

However, ... don't turn your camera off in the full team or company meetings. In fact, don't turn off your camera when you are in a meeting with anyone you want to remember you. That's exactly when you should have the camera on – you literally need to be visible!



4. Speak whenever you can.

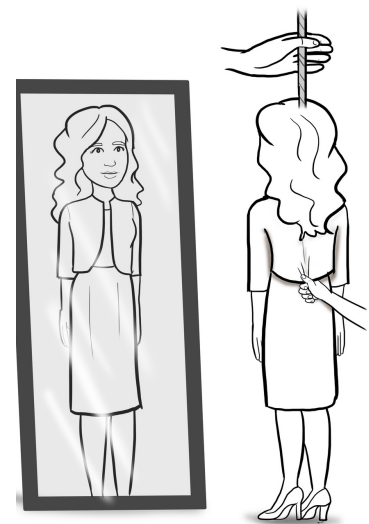
It can be daunting, particularly on-line but raise your hand and speak up as often as you are able. Again, if you want people to think of you when you aren't there you need to remind them of your skills when you are.

And don't forget your posture. You need to look and sound confident to instil trust into those around the table (or screen). Keep these 3 images in your mind.

Image 1: 3 points on your feet (big toe, little toe and heel). Whether you are sitting or standing keep your feet hip width apart and all 3 points on the floor. If you are sitting that may mean you can't sit right back in the chair but it is more important that you are "rooted" to the ground. You will look and feel as though you have authority in a way you can't with your legs swinging above the floor.

Image 2: A string running from the floor, through your core and up out from the top of your head. Make sure the string is in the centre of your head as it comes out as someone taller than you, pulls it. This will stop your chin rising. You want to maintain a level gaze while straightening your back.

Image 3: Now imagine you're wearing a Bolero jacket, the sort that Matador's wear. And someone comes behind you and gently tugs the bottom of the jacket at the back. This will pull your shoulders back slightly and open up your lungs (you need all the oxygen you can get to keep alert and think on your feet.)



If you keep your feet on the ground, pull your string and your bolero you will be standing or sitting in what we call a positive stance. This means that you look alert, interested and interesting ... and you feel more positive too!

Even if you don't have anything new to say, don't think you have nothing to add. You can support a colleague by agreeing with them and highlighting the value that they have added to the meeting and that will raise your profile with them and those watching. And if you want you can add your comment to theirs ... "I thought that X raised an interesting point and I'd like to add to their thoughts ..."

5. Prepare for difficult conversations.

Whatever you do there are going to be some difficult conversations. They may be with colleagues who are inadvertently (or intentionally) stopping you from speaking up at meetings or joining a project. It might be a manager who you feel isn't dealing with hybrid meetings effectively or a subordinate who isn't pulling their weight. The content is less important than the way you prepare for it.

Ideally you want to have the conversation in person. If you can't both be in the office at the same time then try to arrange it off site. Suggest a walking meeting. The advantage of walking is that you aren't going to be face to face but side to side ... and as any parent of a teenager knows ... there is less confrontation if you are not staring into each other's eyes!



If it has to be online then opt for a phone call or a Zoom call. There are advantages for both. The phone call can be less confrontational but you can lose more of the message if they can't see your body language and vice versa. It may well depend on who you are talking to and what you want to discuss but think about it before launching in.

These may all seem hard but you are less likely to have a long-term problem than if you opt for an email. In any written communication you lose the body language and the vocal tone, so think very carefully about this option. And remember that you will add emphasis where they will see none (and they will see emphasis where none was intended).

Whatever you do – don't use text, Slack, WhatsApp or any other messaging system. They are not designed for difficult conversations and will invariably make matters worse and make you visible for all the wrong reasons!

Flexible working takes more effort from you and your manager. As a manager you need to think about all those who report into you and how best to communicate with each of them. But as an individual you need to take responsibility for your career and how the next few months and years turn out.

No one else is going to care ... out of sight, often really is, out of mind!

About Sally

With a degree in Psychology & Drama and a Diploma in Management, Sally has spent much of her career in sales and client service roles. She has witnessed first-hand how poor communication can make or break a deal, a relationship or a business. Clients buy from who they like best, staff work late because of who asks them and colleagues work better with some individuals than others.



Since 2000, Sally has run Partners With You Ltd, a company that uses the skills of professional actors to help business people communicate more effectively and confidently on any stage or in front of camera.

Partners With You provides both in-house and open workshops around presentation skills, storytelling, team building. And it delivers impact & influence programmes for large blue-chip clients as well as small business/individuals looking for personal development.

Believing in continuous development, Sally has trained as an Enterprise and Career Mentor, an accredited Wellness coach and PRISM Brain Mapping practitioner. She combines her personal skills to mentor individuals and runs workshops on key topics to help you to 'step out from the shadows'.

Sally is a contributor to Steve Bridger's book Transform Your Communication Skills and writes a regular column for The Watford Observer and other Newsquest local papers. She is the author of Step Out from the Shadows; How to be seen and heard at work.

To find out more about Partners With You and the work that Sally does email her on sally@partnerswithyou.co.uk or [book a call with her now.](#)