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## **Do You Know How Others Perceive You?**

*You don't always need a formal 360 Assessment to see how others see you. Try this simple strategy to determine other's perceptions of you...*

By Libby Gill

When I was heading public relations for one of the entertainment studios, I hired a talented woman I'll call Victoria. She had an Ivy League education, impeccable references and an impressive résumé. Victoria had only been on board about a month when my staff discovered that it was her birthday.

A lively mix of marketing and communications folks, my team needed very little provocation to turn a staff meeting into a party. When Victoria walked into our meeting, she was greeted by a giant balloon bouquet and a gooey chocolate cake. Clearly embarrassed by the attention, Victoria politely refused a slice of cake, saying, "No thank you, I never eat sugar."

In that moment, her fate was sealed. Victoria never realized that her seemingly inconsequential decision to refuse to join the party, combined with her generally glacial reserve, gave her colleagues the impression that she was an ungrateful snob who was unwilling to be part of the team.

Before you blast me with angry e-mails, please understand that I'm not advocating that anyone pretend to be someone they're not or, heaven forbid, cave to dietary peer pressure. I'm merely suggesting that if Victoria had considered the impression she was giving others, she might have plastered a grateful smile on her face and accepted the cake, if only to shove it around on her plate.

As an executive coach, it's my job to tell my clients the truth and, no matter how blunt my comments, I've always been thanked for it. I've told people they were perceived as ditzy blondes, no-confidence lightweights, surly troublemakers, and more. I even told one executive who confessed that he was the only person on the research staff whose office was located on another floor that he was 29 and still sitting at the kids' table.

What about you? Do you have any idea how others perceive you? Maybe it's time to find out. So here's what you can do:

**Pick five people** from your personal or professional life, or a mix of both, who you think will tell you the truth.

**Tell them you're looking for honest feedback** and ask if they'd be comfortable answering some questions. If possible, have this initial conversation in person or by phone, not by e-mail. If they waver or decline, let them off the hook gracefully by thanking them and asking them to contact you later if they decide to participate.

**Then ask your participants** to tell you what they consider five of your strengths and five of your weaknesses. Add "on the job," if you're only interested in workplace reactions.

**Next, request some feedback**, about 10 descriptive adjectives, on ask them how they would describe you to someone who had never met you.

**Thank your participants** for sharing their thoughts with you and let them know you'll return the favor, any favor, whenever they want.

Although sometimes the truth can hurt, most people find this level of honesty quite refreshing and often are pleasantly surprised at the unexpected accolades they receive. I know when I asked for feedback and was told by a colleague that she thought I was an inspiring leader, I was delighted to hear that that was how she perceived me. I hope you do, too. And, if not, I'm sure I'll hear about it!

*Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications and PR for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting. Author of award-winning **You Unstuck: Mastering the New Rules of Risk-taking in Work and Life**. Her new book, **Hope IS a Strategy: Leading Through Change, Challenge, and Chaos** will be published in Spring 2018. You can learn more about Libby's work at [www.LibbyGill.com](http://www.LibbyGill.com) or take her career assessment at <http://www.YourCareerQuiz.com>.*

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