The Visibility Gap Isn't Always an Employee Problem

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When valuable work goes unrecognized, it's easy to assume employees need to speak up more.

They should advocate for themselves. Share their accomplishments. Be more visible.

Sometimes that's true.

But what if we're asking the wrong question?

What if the issue isn't that employees are failing to communicate their value?

What if leaders and organizations are struggling to recognize it?

The Self-Promotion Trap

When recognition is lacking, the conversation often turns toward visibility.

Be more vocal.

Speak up in meetings.

Share your wins.

Build your personal brand.

While these suggestions can be helpful, they place most of the responsibility on the individual.

The underlying assumption is that if someone isn't being recognized, they simply haven't made their contributions visible enough.

But that assumption overlooks an important reality:

Not all valuable work is naturally visible.

Some of the Most Valuable Work Happens in the Background

Think about the colleague who quietly prevents problems before they happen.

The manager who creates psychological safety.

The employee who strengthens relationships across teams.

The project lead who helps others succeed.

The analyst who identifies a risk early enough to avoid a costly mistake.

These contributions often have significant impact, but they can be difficult to see, measure, and communicate.

If an organization primarily recognizes what is easy to count, easy to observe, or easy to present, important value can remain hidden.

When Value Becomes Invisible

Over time, organizations can develop blind spots.

Recognition flows toward the most visible activities rather than the most valuable ones.

Employees become frustrated.

Leaders make decisions based on incomplete information.

High performers wonder whether their efforts matter.

Not because value isn't being created.

Because value isn't being clearly recognized.

This is what I call the **Visibility Gap**: the space between value created and value recognized.

A Leadership Opportunity

The Visibility Gap is not solely an employee challenge.

It is also a leadership challenge.

Leaders shape what is noticed, measured, discussed, and rewarded.

When organizations create systems that make value easier to identify and communicate, recognition becomes less dependent on who speaks the loudest.

It becomes more connected to contribution and impact.

Moving Beyond Visibility

The goal is not to encourage everyone to become better at self-promotion.

The goal is to create environments where meaningful contributions are easier to see.

This is one of the ideas behind the **Visibility Gap Framework™**, which helps leaders identify, communicate, and amplify value.

Because this isn't really about being seen.

It's about making value visible

Continue the Conversation

I'm Stephanie Marcus, founder of CanterPointe. I write about visibility, leadership, change, recognition, and organizational culture.

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