

Speak with Executive Presence

For many executives, the step up to the next level requires better presentation skills.

Executive presence is essential to standing out in your organization. It frames your other credentials. If you had a beautiful painting, it would be a shame to use a cheap frame, detracting from the wonderful artwork. Executive presence is like the frame because it can enhance or diminish. When an executive with presence speaks, others listen. Every time you are in front of your senior management, they judge whether you have what it takes to step up to the next level, not only your technical ability but also the very important aspect of projecting yourself confidently.

Paint stories from your data

One very common mistake seen in presentations is the data-dump. Executives, especially from finance or technical backgrounds, often cram charts and number-packed tables into their PowerPoint presentations. While there is no doubt that data is important, a key question is, "How relevant is it to the audience you are facing?" Senior management are usually pushed for time and want to get to the point, make a decision and move on. Instead of reciting this quarter's financial data slide-by-slide in great depth, step back and ask yourself, "What is the story behind these numbers?"

By all means, show charts and tables on a slide or handout, but while you are in front of senior management, elaborate on them. Use the questions to turn data into an anecdote: What are the implications of the numbers? What does this mean for the business in the next quarter or year ahead? What actions need to be taken? By answering those questions, you will move toward what the numbers mean for the

business. Help senior management see the trends, the big picture and the emerging direction. They will appreciate the extra clarity of your presentation.

Bring your message to the audience


One common complaint about business presentations is that they are dull. Many executives have a tendency to deliver content-focused presentations rather than audience-focused ones. Content-focused means a heavy emphasis on the material and is often accompanied by the presenter reading off the slides. Being audience-focused requires the presenter to bridge the gap between content and the audience's motivations. Invest time to learn more about the audience's needs, drives and trigger topics.

Does one person always focus on financial returns and another on resource deployment? Perhaps another always challenges you? You can use connecting phrases to address these motivations. Examples include: "Last quarter you expressed concern about our raw material costs. Here is the new picture." Another technique is to use connecting questions like, "Why is this important?" This rhetorical question allows you to then move onto the answer. "This is important to our business unit because..." This technique helps connect more with the audience by focusing your message on their motivations.

Memorize your content with taglines

Obama's speechwriters often use phrases that could be set to song. Aside from the obvious, "Yes we can," parallel constructions are used;

for example, "It's not because of this, it's not because of that." Executive speakers should adapt this approach for two reasons. First, it helps the presenter memorize the content. Second, it also allows the audience to quickly digest key messages without having to think too much – an important factor in short presentations. This is known as "taglining" your message. Go through your presentations section by section and sum up each part with a short sentence of no more than seven words. Try to make it catchy, like a billboard slogan. This process helps you go even deeper into your message and makes it appealing to your audience.

Executive presence is enhanced through face-to-face presenting to senior management. Ensure your next presentation builds your credentials in their eyes with these three tips: paint stories from your data-heavy content, bring your message closer to the audience through connecting phrases, and tagline every section in your presentation so that your message comes out crystal clear. A final test of whether you are ready to face your senior management is when you can stand up, without a slidedeck, and deliver a punchy impactful presentation. 

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