

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION COACHING SOMETHING MORE THAN THE FORMAL PRESENTATION

By Bill Young

Preparing For The Message

Organizations have missions, visions, cultures and rigorous requirements for their employees. Employees, those who bring life to the organization, have career goals, personal desires, cultural backgrounds and practical experience. Sometimes the two don't mesh. The first indication of a difference usually appears as a mix-up in communication.

The goal of successful communication coaching is for the one being coached to emerge from the experience with an integrated set of skills. The objective is practical dexterity, enabling an appropriate, intelligent exchange of information with the world at large. This means having an expanded understanding of oneself so as to choose what others receive and perceive as *the message*. In addition, the coachee learns ways to remain comfortable when faced with a situation that is unfamiliar and unexpected.

Developmental communication coaching is a radical—*at the root*— encounter with one's methods, styles and approaches for interacting with others. The four cardinal points of communication are analyzed, clarified and exercised so one can—*at will*—draw on actual experience to remain prepared, confident, flexible and poised under any circumstance. The four areas for development are listening, physical appearance, sound of the voice and verbal content.

Putting the Package Together

It all begins with listening. Skilled active listening will lead a discussion right to one's desired outcome. Everything everyone says is a response to how they've listened. Whether we are responding to someone's remarks or we're responding to our own internal discourse we are still listening. What we externalize as our spoken thoughts are always provoked, or preceded, by what we've determined important enough to be listened to. Listening either validates or invalidates another person's ideas, point-of-view and values.

Appearance sets the stage. Size, gender, ethnic background, clothes, shoes, accessories, personal grooming, posture, body language, and relaxed hands—all of these visually gathered impressions set-up expectations. As soon as one walks into a room, or immediately after the new head of sales takes the podium, we begin to create a narrative as to whom we think this person is.

The sound of a person's voice, not the words being spoken, but the actual physical tone provides the consistency of one's impression. We've all experienced that peculiar moment when someone has started to talk and the sound of the voice so contradicted the appearance that we could not get over the shock. Vitality, enthusiasm, physical and mental health, joy, *gravitas*, are all communicated through the life force heard in one's voice.

Studies have revealed that verbal content is the hardest part of communication to remember. Words mean different things to different people. The words we choose underscore, or caption, the combined impact of appearance and vocal sound. We can blow a great "first impression" as soon as we open our mouths to speak. This is what makes us all so nervous and full of butterflies before talking to our boss or delivering a formal presentation to a group of potential clients. Choose your words well. Be brief. Surround your main ideas with silence. Talk in terms that people can understand. Too much detail will annoy bosses, bore peers and go over the heads of subordinates.

Be careful of your speech, and blessings will remain intact.

Taoist Proverb

Strategically, most everyone will agree that there may be no personal requirement more critical to one's career rise than knowing how to communicate efficiently. Yet the debate shifts considerably when it enters the time-compressed world of today's global enterprises. A world whose mainstream moves so fast that it seems impossible to find the necessary space to allow a valued employee to bring his or her communication back in balance.

A coaching studio is a place where one can rediscover his or her fundamental abilities to connect. To apprehend that nothing in business is permanent; to realize that who we think we are and who others see might be vastly different; to allow "safe communication" boundaries to dissolve; to cultivate a view of ourselves that is free of negative judgment, comparison, competition and intense criticism requires a strong commitment by the company to the employee and a sincere wish on the part of the employee to change—it also requires an expert communication coach.

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