

Turknett Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights



Topic: "Executive Presence: Do You Have It?"
4/27/07

Presenter: Paul Aldo, Ph.D. - Founder & Principal, Executive Performance Solutions (previously Integrated Performance Systems (IPS)).

Dr. Aldo is an expert in senior management communications and development as well as workplace performance. He has worked with many of the F500 companies. Prior to his consulting career, he led Ernst & Young's Management Consulting practice; held leadership positions with GE in the US and Asia-Pacific; and was an adjunct faculty member at University of VA in the McIntire School of Commerce. In 2006, he joined the Professional Learning Programs faculty of Emory University where he teaches courses in executive presence.
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Excerpts from Dr. Aldo 's presentation and discussion:

In the mid-80's, I began to really think about the question: "Why do some people get ahead and other don't?" The answer I came up with is Interpersonal Effectiveness -- + of course technical competence / knowledge. Interpersonal effectiveness is that "special something" that makes people want to follow you and earns their respect and admiration.

Next question: HOW DO YOU HELP PEOPLE GET IT??? I wanted to develop vocabulary around "what to do, or not do." I came up with nine (9) Expressive Dimensions.

Expressive Dimensions: 3 are about people; 3 are about messaging; and 3 are how we engage with others. They are interrelated in real life, but they cluster into these 3 groups.

- 1) Passion, Poise, and Self-Confidence
- 2) Candor, Clarity & Openness
- 3) Sincerity, Thoughtfulness & Warmth

CANDOR: story about GE and Jack Welch and the "GE waterless washing machine." The value of being candid. Tens of millions of dollars were wasted on this project because people were not candid about what they thought could actually be done. After that, Jack Welch himself instituted CANDOR as one of GE's top values.

OPENNESS: We like leaders who are open to new ideas!

CLARITY: We usually speak from the "inside out." What we want to say to "them." We should start "from the outside in" – what do THEY want to hear / to know. Big picture thinking is better than getting mired in the details.

SINCERITY: People who are true to themselves, who know who they are. People know the difference when you're not sincere.

THOUGHTFUL: Thinking before speaking – before you get on your feet. People fail to rehearse what they want to say or convey. Leaders are expected to have well-formed, coherent ideas. Extroverts often think out loud (but don't do it when it's not expected or people may think you're not focused.) It's important to be attentive to other people when they're trying to talk to you.

There are only a few ways to create those 9 expressive dimensions:

- 1) Eyes
- 2) Face
- 3) Body
- 4) Voice
- 5) Pacing (of the message)
- 6) Architecture (of the message)

Inside = your intentions; but what people see is the outside, i.e., your behavior. We want people to understand our intentions but we're actually the only ones to know that. Other people simply see our behavior.

Example: Sec. Of State Condoleezza Rice – some people say she's not very warm. There's a video clip in which she had obviously "tried" to show warmth. But, people were not very forgiving. They said, "Oh she's faking it!"

EYES: we have 2 seconds to do something when we make actual eye contact (speak, acknowledge the other person in some way, look away, don't acknowledge, etc.) What we do is then interpreted by the other person. Think about being in an elevator with other people: what do people do? Eyes often convey to others that you either do or do not have SELF-CONFIDENCE.

FACES: a whole range of expressions that convey different things to other people. Example: impatience. It's one of the "great evils!"

BODY: Does how you dress really matter? Of course it does. How could it not matter. People look at video clips and make judgments as follows: male in suit = successful business man vs male in casual clothes, sandals = artist. Stereotypes. Clothes help us interpret. We also make up stuff when we don't know how to interpret something. We either ADD points or DEDUCT points to our "summary" of who this person is. We often form opinions simply by how someone is dressed. Posture, too, is interpreted, e.g., slouch = lack of self-confidence.

360: does a lot of 360 feedback with clients. It's not about us but our behavior, what people interpret about us. Example of woman described as self-centered. She said she wasn't - yet when she talked to people in her office, she didn't look or pay attention to them, she just kept typing on her laptop. She said she wasn't being self-centered, just busy and was multi-tasking. (NOTE: Multitasking is often very detrimental to interpersonal relationships!)

VOICES: convey emotional state / caring / interest. Not exactly what you say - more how you say it. Managing your voice - a lot to it. Conversation management really important. We think more about content of our presentations. Best way to improve is to practice presentations / speaking on video. And review it.

PACING: Typically - we're TOO FAST. If you don't remember anything, remember to SLOW DOWN. Speaking too fast trivializes your message. You want to use rhythm. If you lose them, you can just stop talking...and they'll come back! Writing and speaking - very different.

MESSAGE ARCHITECTURE: Need Big Picture Thinking. Big consequences. Structure: Main point first. At GE, sometimes they would "go to the last slide first." That was the real message. You've got to know what you want your audience to do / to think when you're done. Also, think about "what's the biggest obstacle for you to get what you want from the message you're presenting?" Deal with that early on. Remember:

- 1) There's a story in every presentation.
- 2) Keep it simple, don't make your audience work.
- 3) Never think it's about you; it's about your audience!

Gender: I think there's a gender neutral path to executive presence. However, I do not think that men are the best role models for women. Women are not allowed to do certain things that men can do and get away with...it's true. Women may have advantage with emotional intelligence!

Re the 9 dimensions:

In addition, you certainly need cognitive capacity (that's table stakes) but... YOU GOTTA GET THE INTERPERSONAL STUFF RIGHT or your executive presence will be much less than optimal.