

# Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP



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## EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS

Accessing Your Best Thinking ▶ 01/04/06

Richard had been CFO at a defense contracting company for four years when I met him. He was technically gifted, maintained strong relationships and was fairly expressive and intuitive. This guy was clearly succeeding. He wanted to work with me because he felt he wasn't a very strong presenter.

When I asked him to tell me about presenters he liked, he easily thought of three. When I asked him to identify specific behaviors that made those presenters powerful, he was amazingly articulate about what each one did to be effective.

"So what's stopping you from taking any of those behaviors and making them your own?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "I just never stopped to think about it before."

Gary is Senior Vice President of I.T. for an international finance company. Highly analytical and a gifted strategic thinker, Gary often forgot to manage his relationships. His boss complained that Gary wasn't managing up very well which is what got me into the room with him. When I asked Gary to self-prescribe corrective tactics, he thoughtfully listed a series of actions that were so insightful I wanted to cheer.

"How did you figure all that out so quickly?" I asked.

"Oh, I know this stuff," he said ruefully, "I just don't make the time to pay attention to it."

Over and over, the one thing I find people at all levels are craving these days is time. Time for reflection. Time to read what's piling up on their shelves. Time to attend courses and conferences that will help them grow professionally.

I've grown used to the first moment of a coaching session when a client closes the door and stands there relishing the stillness. The time clients spend with me is often the only time they get to silence the noise, turn off the phone, stop the email, and turn inward to access their best selves. If we treated our



employees like this we'd face massive turnover. But we treat ourselves like this day after day and still expect to deliver high results. Get real!

Recently, Dr. Bruce Heller, an expert at helping senior people develop top-level executive thinking skills, worked with a client of mine. After just one session, Bruce said my client didn't need new skills, he needed to dedicate time to himself. Here's the follow-up he wrote to the client: "In order to become more effective at executive thinking, you need to have the time. Schedule an 'appointment with yourself' on a regular basis. This time should be inviolate and uninterrupted."

You have goals for your personal and professional development, don't you? Well, I predict that unless you learn to schedule—and keep!—regular appointments with yourself for reflection and assessment, your goals will be much, much harder to achieve.

A variation on this theme: begin and end every day with planning. Before jumping into voicemail and email, take a few minutes to prioritize your day. You're not creating an inflexible contract; things happen. But your planning will guide you through the inevitable distractions and diversions. Then, before running out of the office at the end of the day, take a minute to assess how you did and what your day will look like tomorrow. Then in the morning, reassess. These moments of focus pay off exponentially.

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