# Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP

ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS

Tele 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

## EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS

Listen to this Podcast

### Assume Equality ▶ 03/13/08

Vickie's boss was eager to promote her. But because she performed poorly in front of senior leaders, her boss knew the review committee wouldn't approve her promotion.

I witnessed her self-defeating behavior first hand one day as we walked from her office to a conference room. A pleasant-looking fellow came around a corner and stopped to say hello. As Vickie performed the introductions, her bright, engaging self began fading: her chin lowered, her shoulders rounded and her eyes dropped to the ground, flicking to our faces only briefly. If I'd ever questioned whether Vickie's issue was real, I had my answer.

Later, alone in the conference room, Vickie explained that the guy was one of the executive vice presidents. She acknowledged he wasn't really intimidating but, she sighed, she just couldn't help herself. She started to go on, then suddenly stopped, lost in her own thinking. A display of emotions crossed her face, then she looked at me with surprised enlightenment. "This is what my dad used to talk about!" she whispered.

Her dad, she told me, was president of one of America's oldest and largest companies. Growing up, she watched people come to the house with papers for him to sign. Some were relaxed and friendly but others were nervous, even frightened. Her dad always said the people in that second group *came* to the house but never really *entered* it. Now, she realized she'd put herself in that second group; she was determined to stop it.

Clients regularly ask me to help them develop that elusive quality called "executive presence." Usually we focus on those times when the stakes are high and they feel less than 100% confident. This is when I teach them a belief I call *Assume Equality*. Let me use myself as an example.

The first coaching assignment I ever had was with a division president of a global financial organization. The chairman of his board wanted him to be "more presidential." I took the job because I'd been an award-winning director in theatre for many years and believed this would just be a variation of the work I did so well with actors.

ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS

Tele 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

But another part of my mind said I was way out of my league. My transition into the world of coaching and training had barely begun. I didn't have a clue about running a division or having direct reports or managing a budget. Heck, I'd never held a full-time job! Sure I had a respectable acting career—I wasn't parking cars or waiting tables!—but I wasn't pulling down whatever this president was making. It would have been easy to believe I was coming to a high-stakes table with my pockets empty.

But I'd faced my demons as an actor and knew it was all about attitude. So instead of repeating all the reasons why I was going to fail, I focused on the one reason I felt I would succeed: I knew something he didn't know. I knew how to act presidentially and I could teach him that.

That one idea, that I knew something he didn't, allowed me to take my place at the table as his equal—to assume equality.

Let's face it, there's always going to be somebody who has more power, more money, more authority, more influence, more *something*, than you. But you still need to be effective. So, when you're out-gunned how can you be sure you don't shoot yourself in the foot? *Assume Equality*.

Assuming equality means choosing to focus on your worth, not your deficits. Your worth might be product knowledge or experience with a process or your relationship with a particular population. That's valuable! Focus on that.

Besides, most senior leaders *want* you to add value. If you succeed, they succeed. It's rare that people sit back and hope you'll stink. They might not agree with you, but that doesn't mean they're setting traps for you, either.

Yes, you may have to face a bully who will try to elevate him or herself by diminishing you. At those times *Assume Equality* takes on a deeper meaning.

Each of us has intrinsic worth. We each have values that guide our lives. We make a difference in the lives we touch; people miss us when we're gone. We're all truly equal on this level and no bully can take that away from us. With that knowledge, I can face anyone with confidence: I may feel nervous but I won't feel diminished or intimidated.

What Vickie learned that day in the conference room was that her self-diminishment was completely her own doing. She was able to see that the executive didn't want her to diminish herself in front of

ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS

Tele 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

him, just as her dad hadn't wanted that from the people who came to his house. As soon as she saw that her self-diminishment did not make her more likeable in the eyes of the executives—quite the opposite!—she began to grow and change. She began to honor the parts of herself that were smart and talented and valuable. She found she could *Assume Equality*. And so can you.

Read related Executive Coaching Tips:
*Negative Self-Talk*
*Choose the Impression You Make*

---

To SUBSCRIBE or to CONTRIBUTE an idea for future Executive Coaching Tips, email us at:
info@essentialcomm.com

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts, click here.

To VIEW the entire archive of Executive Coaching Tips, visit:
http://www.essentialcomm.com/tips/execcoachtips.html