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How To Communicate Like A Confident Leader



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Confident leaders engage with great stories.

By Dianna Booher

As a keynote, when I ask audience members to call out attributes of executive presence, they always mention confidence. As I drill down on the topic, the audience agrees that they can see it, hear it, and sense it in many ways—often in ways not always apparent to the person being observed. Strong, seasoned leaders have naturally incorporated confidence into their communication style, while other professionals struggle to *appear* confident.

For the most part, confident action communicates a positive message. To be more specific about how to communicate like a leader, consider these actions:

Learn To Think On Your Feet: Whether giving a status report or responding to a question, stick to this formula: give an overview, elaborate with details, provide an anecdote to illustrate your point, and then end with a one-sentence summary. Brevity gives focus. And with focus comes clarity. Don't get stuck in ramble mode, circling and circling as you look for a place to land. Delivering a clear, concise compelling case in those high-pressure, high-visibility, strategic opportunities shows how well you think on your feet.

Engage With Great Stories: Storytelling is no longer considered an "art" mastered by only the few. It has become a fundamental leadership skill like writing, speaking, and vision-casting. As a communicator, you need to select and weave high-impact stories into your presentations, talks, meetings, and conversations to drive home strategic messages and engage others emotionally in your cause. Shy people rarely tell stories. Confident leaders do.

Display Confident Body Language: Words are never the whole story. An energetic tone of voice, firm volume, expressive face, strong eye contact, smiling, nodding, bold gestures, firm handshake, and relaxed body posture—all of these things tell others how confident you feel about the topic of discussion, your presentation, your goals, or the situation.

Prepare To Be Spontaneous: Conventional thinking leads speakers to believe that their off-the-cuff comments will be brief because they're unscripted. The opposite most often proves true. When speakers are called on to "say a few words" without having given the comments any forethought, they often ramble until they figure out what they want to say. Don't. If you'll likely be called on to comment at some event, think positively and prepare. Have a comment or two ready. Then say it and stop.

Translate From The Complex To The Simple: Less confident professionals often try to lead people from the simple to the complex, using jargon and inside terminology, to make themselves sound smart. Confident leaders break the complex down to the simple to make ideas understandable and easy to implement.

Share Information Freely Across Functional Lines: You have probably heard this common communication complaint: "Everyone's working in silos. Nobody knows what's going on." People hoard information for many reasons—from innocent to sinister. By definition, real leaders share strategic information. Because they focus on big-picture performance, problems, issues, and results, they understand that significant information doesn't "belong" to them. The more helpful information they share, the faster these leaders are considered "clearinghouses" for the latest thinking inside their organization—and often their reputation spreads outside the organization as well. The more information the share, the more "in demand" they become as the expert.

Lead With Strategic Questions: A statement of opinion frequently sets up either agreement or disagreement—often rock-solid disagreement, even hostility. A direct challenge to someone's idea can shut down discussion—and innovation—altogether. An ill-phrased question from a tentative-sounding

person may garner little or no response. But a confident communicator uses leading questions to advance a discussion and a decision. A well-phrased question generates thought and opens up new possibilities.

The essence of leadership is inspiring, clear, confident communication that moves people to action.

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