

Connection Matters

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How you relate to others matters when making a face-to-face presentation. What creates a connection with any executive, manager or peer, first and foremost, is strong eye contact. Sustained eye contact should begin the minute you walk in the door. With solid eye contact, you instantly appear transparent and confident. You project sincerity and demonstrate respect. However, remember that being nervous can cause your eyes to shift and dart. There is a big difference between glancing at someone and really connecting with them. Not only will poor eye contact make you appear unsure, but it may also result in you and your message being dismissed.

When you feel you are not on an equal playing field with others in the room, strong eye contact can narrow the gap. It can also help you to read other people's reactions. If their non-verbal messages are positive, it will help you to relax. If the feedback indicates resistance, you can adjust your explanation accordingly. The beauty of giving strong eye contact is most people will likely return it, almost as if there is an obligation. Consequently, you will keep even the most easily distracted attendee engaged and focused on critical points. Sustained eye contact typically triggers:

- Listening
- Acknowledgment
- Understanding
- Trust

It is a critical skill for effectively communicating and building credibility. Never underestimate its importance.

Another way to intensify the relationship with others in a meeting situation is to allow your spontaneous sense of humor and playfulness to surface during the conversation. However, many people feel it is too risky and inappropriate on the job. When you leave your sense of humor at the door, you are missing a powerful tool for achieving your communication goals. Humor creates rapport and makes even the most senior executive more

receptive to you and your message. A dash of humor can also help resolve difficult situations or defuse tension.

A lot of people think you have to be a comedian and tell jokes to convey a sense of humor, but that is not true. In fact, you should never try to be a joke teller. Rather, identify the types of things that make you laugh. For example, if you recently came across a funny quote, you might weave that into your conversation. If you notice someone appears confused, a humorous analogy or example may help clarify your point and alleviate frustration. Often times, real life is funnier than fiction anyway. An amusing story related to your topic rejuvenates interest when attention is lagging. If you poke fun at yourself, you convey that you are relaxed. The bottom line is people like to laugh. Business professionals are no different.

Connection also comes from being observant. If you know that someone in the meeting is devoted to family, a chocoholic or loyal New Yorker, the observant communicator would incorporate these observations into examples or analogies.

Lastly, those that know the importance of building a relationship use the person's name throughout the conversation and the pronoun "we" to draw commonalities that subtly suggest you are just like them. "We're both eager to see..." or "As you and I both know..." As the conversation intensifies, these little things matter.

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