

Tips from the Top— What One CEO Practices

By Judith Filek—President
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What do people remember? As a coach, you hope people embrace your suggestions and remember the issues they found challenging after the engagement ends. Periodically, I like to touch base with these business leaders as a double check. I had the pleasure of reconnecting with the CEO of large international company last week after not seeing him for a few years. From the start of our coaching, this executive was very open and willing to try the tools and tips being suggested, even though they were out of his comfort zone. His goal was to be known as a strong, engaging leader with excellent communication skills. He excelled because he practiced a lot and kept the endgame in mind. Every time he got up in front of an audience in his role as CEO, he consciously practiced one or two things. I asked him what he remembers from our work together when he speaks to people, whether one to one or one to 1001. I am sharing his top five because I think they are relevant to all of us.

1. **Each audience is different.** They are not all financial people. You have to talk their lingo, not yours. He consciously tries to envision who they are— their titles, responsibilities, locations and any cultural implications. It has made a huge difference to connecting with them.
2. **Know how you are going to start and how you are going to end.** He believes that if you are clear on the message you want people to embrace when they walk out the door, the rest of your ideas will fall in line and support your conclusion. Your opening and close will bookend your message. If you bore people or are unfocused at the beginning, you will lose them. He cautions that when time is running out; it's a temptation to end quickly. *"We're out of time, but if you have any questions, contact me."* You have to remind yourself to close strong by summarizing key points and any necessary action steps – and it can be done in one or two minutes.

3. **Look people in the eye.** Don't scan the room. Talk to your listeners as if you were having a series of one-on-one conversations. The people in the audience are the ones you are trying to influence or relate to. He said looking at his listeners, versus reading from his notes or the slides, took some practice, but now he rarely ever looks at his notes.
4. **Pause and breathe.** It's the one skill he has to consciously remember. His natural tendency is to speak quickly, but when he does, his breathing gets off and his voice takes a hit. Knowing this about his voice keeps his awareness.
5. **Stories make a difference.** It's difficult but important to let people see you are a human being with a family, hobbies and outside interests. At first, he wondered why anyone would be interested, but now he incorporates some stories each time. He says it still surprises him when people remember what he said about his kids or a family trip.

While it's true "C Suite" Executives are strong communicators because they have a myriad of opportunities to speak, you can be also. If you take the time to address the issues that might be holding you back, you will also excel. You will become someone the company wants to represent their views or distill ideas to others. Your star will also rise, and maybe even to the C Suite.

Question: Think about your own communication style. What is something you need to change in order to be better? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.

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