

# Three Cardinal Sins That Will Derail an Executive Conversation

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Most business people make presentations to executives, whether it is internally to senior managers for status updates or externally to clients or customers for purchase approval. Often, these are one-time golden opportunities. They require careful planning and flawless execution. Yet, surprisingly, instead of capitalizing on the moment, they end up sabotaging themselves. They commit three cardinal sins.

- 1. They show up unprepared.** The first error regarding Executive conversations is that people waltz into the Decision Maker's office unprepared. In fact, Decision Makers state this is their #1 pet peeve. They simply do not have time or inclination to educate their visitors on products, problems, or strategy. Their expectation is that the individual took the initiative to consult the website, speak to internal contacts or read what is in print about the company, its products and services beforehand.

Part of being prepared also means the individual anticipates the tough questions.

Executives are astute at zeroing in on critical issues. Knowing the answers to hard questions affects how an Executive reacts. Having the appropriate charts, graphs or financial data available demonstrates the individual has done the appropriate homework.

- 2. They present an unclear strategy.** Executives will tell you they deplore presenters who offer blurred or confusing strategies. Speakers must translate their message into words Executives understand. They must highlight key points with solid data and anecdotal evidence so that Decision Maker can evaluate the relevance of the information and see the ROI.

Simple strategies are obviously best. The more complicated the strategy, the harder it

is to see value. If ideas align with the desired conclusion, and if the speaker has stitched his ideas together with the finesse of a surgeon, it becomes a “no-brainer” for the Decision Maker to move forward.

- 3. They appear nervous.** Executives always notice when speakers lack confidence or are timid. Speakers with lots of “filler” words, “ums, ahs and you knows,” and speakers with scattered eye contact never make a positive impression.

Executives like doing business with those who seem on equal footing. Thus, it is critical to get the butterflies to fly in formation. A speaker's body language should not undercut how others perceive him or her. One's body language should engender trust and confidence.

It is a disservice to waste the time of a busy Executive with poor planning, an unclear strategy or a nervous demeanor. Executive conversations should not hinge on chance. Success depends on understanding the Executive's issues, developing a message that solves those issues and delivering it with strength and conviction.

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