

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP

By Tom Henschel



ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS



Listen to the podcast

The Generous Executive ▶ 10/03/13

Good news! Or is it?

Sarah saw her new situation as “good news / bad news.”

The good news was that Janet, her boss, had given a green light to a project Sarah had conceived of and proposed. The green light was a clear demonstration of Janet’s confidence in Sarah. Good news.

The bad news was that Janet told Sarah to co-lead the project with Will.

“I’ve worked with him before,” she told me during a coaching session. “He’s great when it comes to ideas but, man, he sucks at execution. I end up sweeping up after him and I’m tired of it. Besides,” she said, pointing angrily, “it’s *my* project! If any thing, he should be sweeping up after me!”

“You make it sound like a competition,” I said, “as if one person has to be in front of the other.”

She didn’t like the way that sounded. She thought for a while, then said, “I think I might have been fine if it were Anne or Stephen. I really think this is about Will.”

“If you feel competitive with Will and he’s going to be your co-lead, how will you deal with that?” I asked.

She laughed, saying, “Very carefully!”

Angry once again

A little over a month later, she was angry about Will again.

“He talks with people about the scope of the project, then dumps the information on me like any follow-up is my responsibility. It’s like he’s assigning me work!”

“And what do you tell him?” I asked her.



"I don't know *what* to tell him. I'm thinking of asking Janet for a little help."

"Before you do, Sarah, can we explore that?"

I asked Sarah how she thought Janet could make the situation better. She said she thought Janet could clarify Will's responsibilities versus hers.

"It's your project, Sarah," I said. "To me, that means it's your job, and Will's job, to decide whose responsibilities are whose. It's not Janet's job."

Protecting your baby

Sarah sat silently for a long time.

After a while, I went on, saying, "Sarah, I talk with top-level executives for a living. I can't tell you how often I hear these men and women say they hate having to settle squabbles between their direct reports. And believe me, this thing with you and Will is a squabble."

Sarah asked if I could help her settle the squabble. I said, yes, that was a perfect coaching topic. And that I had lots of squabble-settling tools. But first I wanted to talk about something else.

I wanted to talk about why this squabble was happening in the first place.

Sarah said she knew why—Will's lack of respect!

"I wonder if there are other reasons, too, Sarah," I said. "Is it possible you're trying to protect your project? This was your baby and suddenly someone's barged in and is co-parenting with you. You didn't ask for his help. And he parents really differently from you. I wonder if you want Janet to set boundaries around Will so he'll keep his hands off your baby."

She admitted that might be true, then added, "Sometimes it feels like this project of mine is getting invaded. So, yes, I want to put up boundaries to protect myself from the invaders. It's not pretty. I'm not proud of it. But I think it's true."

By way of answer, I asked if I could tell her a story about another client of mine.



**ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

Blood on the tracks

Lori and I had worked off and on together for several years. Over that time, she'd raised her profile with the senior leaders and was acquitting herself well.

One day she found herself in her first one-on-one meeting with Bruce, the COO. Usually Lori only saw him in meetings.

There, with just the two of them in his office, Bruce asked Lori if she would head a task force that would audit the ethics group. Bruce told Lori she'd have the freedom to suggest any changes she thought necessary, from personnel to procedures to budget.

"I understand that you don't know the group," Bruce had told her. "That's why I picked you. We're under intense scrutiny right now, and I need to be sure the ethics group is beyond question."

Lori asked about Vijay, the head of the ethics group. "I only know him a little," she'd said. "What does he think about me coming in with this task force?"

"I don't think he was happy about it," Bruce said. "But I didn't really give him a choice. I made it clear this train was leaving the station. He could either get on board or get out of the way."

Lori had a sense of dread. If Vijay was upset and resistant, the audit was going to be a bloody affair; no one was going to look good at the end.

Bruce went on. "If you say yes—and I hope you will!—Vijay is waiting for you in his office."

Lori told me she thought she was going to be sick as she walked towards Vijay's office. She kept imagining how pissed off she'd be if the positions were reversed. But she was a good soldier so she took a deep breath and knocked on his door.

To her amazement, when she entered his office, Vijay stood up, smiling, his hand extended, saying, "Lori, this is going to be great for the department. And I'm so glad you're the one who's going to be leading the task force. You're a great choice. I can't wait to get started."



**ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

An unexpected bond

"I stopped dead in my tracks," Lori told me. "My first thought was that he was putting me on. But he wasn't. He was totally on board. From that moment on, Vijay and I were thick as thieves. We ended up getting along so well, we were finishing each other's sentences."

Lori laughed and said, "Bruce kept calling us into his office. Always together. He'd never meet with just one of us because he didn't want to show any favoritism. He'd keep asking us, 'Are you two *really* okay?' Like he couldn't believe we weren't ripping each other's heads off. But Vijay only wanted what was good for his group and for the company, so it was easy to get along."

Lori was particularly proud of what happened at the next all-hands meeting—a worldwide event with tens of thousands of employees tuning in.

During his presentation to the company, Bruce gave specific recognition to Lori and Vijay. He called them by name and had them stand. "Their collaboration," he said, "was a huge success *not* because it focused on the ethics group. It was a success because it focused on what is good for the company. And Vijay and Lori focused individually on what was good for each other. Generous spirits like theirs are what's going to keep this company growing. We all need to strive to be like them."

When I ended the story, Sarah said, "Wow, Vijay is a real hero, huh? What an amazing attitude. He made it a real collaboration."

To which I said, "Yes, he made it the opposite of a squabble."

Sarah saw that squabbling with Will couldn't possibly benefit her with Janet or her peers or direct reports. A squabble could only make her look petty and territorial.

So we began to examine how she could emulate Vijay. What would it mean, we asked, if Sarah were to operate only in the best interest of the company and stop worrying about "her" project? Not surprisingly, as she considered that question every day, she began to change.

Where Sarah had wanted boundaries, she now found she needed none. One day she laughingly remarked, "I used to think Will was an invader. Now I'm opening the door and asking him to come on in and have a seat. It's really different." She shook her head. "It's weird!"



**ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

I think it's natural to want to keep your work to yourself; your work represents you. It feels like part of you. But resisting collaboration can't benefit you.

I don't believe anyone wants words attached to them like, "ungenerous," "uncollaborative," "territorial" or "difficult." Generosity and cooperation are crucial components of *The Look & Sound of Leadership*™.

Read related Tips:

[Act "As If"](#)

[Assertion Versus Aggression](#)

[Be Impeccable with Your Word](#)

[Disagree Agreeably](#)

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

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts (iTunes), [click here](#)

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts (RSS), [click here](#)

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

To CONTACT [Tom Henschel](#) or learn about the Essential Communications team, [click here](#)

To UNSUBSCRIBE to future Executive Coaching Tips, email us at:
unsubscribe@essentialcomm.com

"The Look & Sound of Leadership" is a trademark of Essential Communications. We believe you are receiving this email in response to a subscription request. If you are experiencing difficulties with the above HTML graphics, [click here](#).