

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP



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info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS



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A client recently asked if I knew any consultants with a particular expertise. A woman named Jenette leapt to mind. She was a perfect match. But I didn't refer her. Here's why.

I'd run into Jenette a few months earlier. We sat down to chat. As always, Jenette was engaging, entertaining and articulate. She told me about some exciting changes in her business and a new project she was involved in. Then she asked what was new with me.

I told her I was glad I'd run into her because a client of mine had a problem that seemed up her alley. As I began sketching the situation, she nodded her head vigorously. Then she jumped in and said, "Oh, I know exactly what you're talking about. Here's what I think is going to happen." And she rattled off a really smart solution.

Reflecting on the exchange later, I felt Jenette's insights might be on target but because she'd given her solution before I'd explained my problem, I didn't fully trust her ideas. Months later, that low trust kept me from referring her even though I knew her expertise might be what the client was looking for.

Here's a different story.

An executive vice president had her team at a resort for a three-day offsite event. I was facilitating Day One and Two. On the first day, we all retired for lunch to a lovely patio with an ocean view. For the next seventy minutes she talked about her lessons learned with the executive committee, the direction the company was headed and the opportunities she saw for the group in the coming quarters. All interesting and valuable information. She didn't ask one question of any of her people nor spend any time listening. At the end of that day, she told me privately she was disappointed that the group had seemed so cautious during the afternoon. I, in turn, shared my observations about her behaviors at lunch.

A third variation on this theme is about a global software company. The sales team is a group of bright, outgoing and outspoken young men and women. Their standard Power Point deck is thirty slides long and every one of them is about the company and the company's products. There isn't one slide oriented toward their customers' needs or problems.



The common irritant in all three of these stories is self-orientation.

In their compelling book, *The Trusted Advisor*, David Maister and his co-authors construct a “Trust Equation” showing the relationship between the different qualities that build trust. It’s a powerful model. And self-orientation is the quality that outranks and influences all the others. They write, “There is no greater source of distrust than advisors who appear to be more interested in themselves than in trying to be of service.”

I believe distrust is also generated by leaders who appear more interested in themselves than in those they lead and by companies who appear more interested in their own gain than in their customers’ needs.

The Trusted Advisor is packed with insightful lists of behaviors that either enhance or diminish trust. The section on self-orientation alone has three powerful lists: first, the threats to client focus and the temptations for self-orientation; second, behaviors that display high self-orientation (which is not good); third, behaviors that demonstrate a *lack* of self-orientation (which is the goal).

Two behaviors in that final list are simple to comprehend yet difficult to execute.

The first is to let the other person fill in the silences.

At times in my coaching I engage clients in an exercise in which they have to interview me for fifteen minutes. Many executives have lost their natural curiosity about other people and after the first three or four minutes they find this task almost impossible. At a certain point in the exercise, I’ll deliberately fall silent. Almost without fail, the executives will forget their role and jump in to fill the silence.

What’s your relationship with silence? If you’re like most people, you experience silence as uncomfortable and probably rush to fill it in. Consider this: your discomfort with silence is all about you. Filling in silence is an indicator of high self-orientation. Next time a pause falls, let it be. Focus on the other person and wait.

The second behavior is actually a mindset. Trust your ability to add value *after* listening rather than trying to do so *during* listening.

How often during the day do you listen with half an ear while assembling your thoughts for when it’s your turn to speak? Most likely one reason you’re successful is that you’re a fast thinker. Turning off



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all the ideas constantly firing in your head is tough. But be honest. While you're waiting for your turn to speak and thinking all those thoughts, you are not focused on the other person. You are self-oriented.

Low self-orientation is powerful in leaders. It draws followers like a magnet. Put it high on your development list.

If you'd like to see "The Trust Equation" from *The Trusted Advisor* along with the three lists of behaviors about self-orientation, [email me](#). I'd be delighted to share them with you.

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