

# Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP



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## EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS

Creating Clarity ▶ 10/13/05

### FIVE QUICK TIPS FOR CREATING CLARITY

The Big Idea: Speak Simply.

As leaders we often feel the need to impress our listeners. We want to sound expert. Unfortunately, the impulse to impress often results in behaviors that are the opposite of *The Look & Sound of Leadership*™.

Pay particular attention to the following tips if you:

- ▶ Have an advanced degree
- ▶ Add value through technical knowledge
- ▶ Are highly data driven
- ▶ Are highly artistic or intuitive
- ▶ Have achieved success by being a subject matter expert

#### 1 Get to the end of your sentences briskly, without digressions

Interrupting yourself with parenthetical phrases and digressions, a style that can be followed fairly easily on the written page because the punctuation helps us see the subordinate clauses, is usually a strain on our ears. (Imagine hearing that sentence spoken. It would be a challenge to follow!) If you currently do this, stop.

We're hearing your thoughts for the first time. Complexity of sentence structure doesn't add value; it usually obscures meaning and intention. Present your ideas with simplicity. If you need to clarify something, add a separate sentence. Don't jam your clarification into the middle of your main thought.

#### 2 Use simple words

Multisyllabic words often cause intellectual discountenance. (Did reading that sentence slow you down? It was supposed to. Don't do that to your listeners.)

The point is, talk simply. Long words confuse our ears. When you throw in a complicated word,



we have to stop and define it in our heads. You're still speaking but we're back searching for a definition. In short, we're no longer listening. Not a good trade-off.

### **3 Pause between sentences**

Speaking without pauses creates continuous sound: the effect is like a drone. Butting your spoken sentences up against each other would be like me writing this Tip without any punctuation or capitalization. It would still make sense but, boy, it would take a lot of effort to figure it out!

Our brains need pauses. A pause allows us to digest what you've just said and get ready for what's next. Plus, pausing sounds confident.

### **4 Eliminate connector words ("and," "so," "because," "but," etc.)**

Connector words added to the beginning of every sentence is analogous to writing unwieldy, run-on sentences. Few people write this way but connector words are rampant in peoples' everyday speech.

You can put "so" on the front of almost any sentence, but it doesn't add meaning or enhance the sentence. Connector words are just another way of not pausing. We are tuned to listen for cues which say your thought has ended. Connector words obscure those cues.

### **5 End sentences with downward inflections**

Save upward inflections for actual questions. In our society we are currently flooded with the questioning inflection at the end of declarative sentences? Every statement sounds as if it's an inquiry? When people do this they sound very junior? As if they're in their early twenties? It's not a flattering habit? I hope you know what I mean? Don't do this.

Don't baffle your audience.

Simplicity is powerful.

Good luck.

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