

MASTERING COMMUNICATION WITH THE C-SUITE



Learn the key strategies to successfully engage senior leaders and drive business impact

In today's fast-paced business environment, effective communication with C-suite executives is crucial to advancing ideas, securing buy-in and driving organisational success. However, many professionals fail to connect with senior leaders because they don't understand the unique mindset and expectations of executives.

Carrie Beckstrom, CEO of PowerSpeaking, has dedicated years to studying how to bridge this communication gap. Her insights come from decades of research and interviews with top leaders.

What she discovered highlights a crucial need: most people are unprepared for effective interactions with decision-makers. According to executives themselves, at least 60% of presentations fall short of expectations.

This disconnect often stems from not tailoring the message to the executive's concerns, which include tight schedules, a focus on bottom-line results and a need for strategic, concise communication.

This article explores the key strategies that will help you succeed when presenting to C-suite leaders, from preparing for meetings with an understanding of their priorities to structuring your message for maximum impact.

With the right approach, you can



enhance your influence, gain support and build stronger connections with the senior leadership in your organisation.

Q: What's the most important perspective you uncovered from both rounds of interviews?

A: It's that most people are ill-prepared to communicate effectively and persuasively with senior decision-makers. Executives have said at least 60% of presentations made to them fail.

Q: What is one of the top reasons for that failure?

A: Not understanding the executive mindset and the world they live in. They're time-pressed and focused on the big picture and bottom line. Their span of control is enormous, so they are responsible for understanding and overseeing many aspects of the company. Their decisions, right or wrong, can affect the stock market.

So when it comes to executive presentations, success isn't defined by you getting what you want; success is defined by helping executives reach the best possible outcome for the business.

Q: What's a key factor for successfully communicating with executives?

A: Lead with your bottom line and a few key supporting points. Don't do a deep dive into more detail unless they ask for it.

Starting with your ask is counterintuitive for many people. We tend to take a chronological approach when laying out our business case or recommendation, as that's intuitive. But it will not work in an executive setting: you need to have the courage and the confidence to lead with your



bottom line. For example, "I'm here to ask for an investment of \$1 million for XYZ, and here's the positive impact it's going to have on the business."

Q: Since executives are so time-pressed, brevity must be important?

A: You must be extraordinarily clear and concise. Offer only the key evidence that supports your ask and be concise in answering their questions. Don't overwhelm executives with too much detail.

Q: What else makes executive presentations different from most others?

A: Decision-makers want a dialogue, not a one-way presentation: they want to interact with you, not your slide deck. Many presenters, even at the manager and director level, don't do this.

Structure your talk to allow

time for discussion and be flexible. If an executive wants to go deeper on a topic, you need to pivot. The trick is to gauge how long you should let that discussion go on, and then diplomatically bring them back to the purpose.

Q: What about delivery style and interacting with executives?

A: It requires a unique blend of confidence coupled with humility. You should be confident enough to stand behind your position, yet you don't want to cross the line and get defensive if there are objections to your point of view. One thing that came up much more during this newest round of interviews is the importance of authenticity and transparency, which is very refreshing. Gone are the days in which "executive presence" defines a particular stereotypical persona. You will

be more effective if you show up as your authentic self, while, of course, conveying competence, confidence and respect.

One great example of being authentic and transparent with executives is being willing to say "I don't know" when you don't know: it's perfectly OK. Don't let it rattle you or feel like you need to have excuses. People at that level have a very keen b.s. meter, so if you try to fake it, you'll lose credibility.

Q: What other insights is this newest round of interviews yielding?

A: Interestingly, most of the advice we heard in the first round of interviews back in 2001 to 2002 still holds true. However, a few new developments emerged. As I mentioned earlier, execs don't want a one-way presentation; they expect a dynamic, strategic conversation. Managing that dialogue is a delicate balance – staying in control while demonstrating respect, flexibility and the confidence to create space for discussion. In today's virtual-first world, this challenge has only intensified. Reading the 'room' and sustaining engagement requires a new set of tactics, sharper intentionality and heightened adaptability.

Q: What parting advice would you offer to our readers?

A: If you're a woman who wants to make a greater impact on the organisation, maybe even scale the leadership ranks, you must learn to speak their language, understand their mindset, reset your own, and become a skilled communicator and facilitator. Now more than ever, we need women who are clear, confident and courageous. Get the training and skills you need to be your most powerful self, and then you can truly make a difference! 

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