



Want to develop a more charismatic leadership style? Debra Benton, a noted executive development coach and author, wants to help. In each issue of Chamber Executive magazine to be published in 2008, she will answer your questions.

Q. Has a colleague ever made the same point you made earlier in a meeting, but suddenly he or she is getting all the credit for the “great idea?”

Most of us have experienced this at one time or another. If people don't hear what you have to say, you may have simply spoken too softly, too quickly, without clarity, or in an uninteresting way for anyone to hear, understand or care.

Speak up, slow down, be clear and concise and be interesting. With many tasks in a day and not enough “day” to accomplish them, we frequently talk faster to get it all in and assume people know what we mean when we say something. Speed in speaking suggests nervousness and lack of conviction and maybe even lack of importance. If what you have to say is worth hearing, then say it in a way that it gets heard—literally and figuratively.

To make it interesting, memorable, and more likely to be heard when you suggest something, give a brief illustration, or short story to help them take note of who is saying what and why. Here's an example. You could say “We could install a kiosk at the mall for Chamber announcements.” Or you could say, “When I was in Toronto last week, I saw small crowds gathered around kiosks posted with information on Chamber activities. They were information centers but also socializing

posts. Very effective. We could install a kiosk at the mall for Chamber announcements.”

And, consider your timing—both in speaking up and in the way you speak up. Sometimes you can speak before your listeners are ready to hear your idea or thoughts; or too late after the discussion about that topic has taken place. And, don't “bury the lead” as the say in journalism—but, don't wrap a 10-minute speech around a 10-second idea.

If, after slowing down your speech and speaking with confidence and competence, and getting the timing right, you're still not given credit for an idea, I'd suggest this. Later in the conversation or afterwards, insert a comment like “You know, Joe, when I brought that up earlier in the meeting....” Or, “I originally suggested this idea last week because of the work I've done on....” You may not receive recognition or credit for your ideas in the timeframe you'd like, but you'll be able to get heard over time.

Q. How do you balance work and family without always feeling like you have to apologize for having a family?

I hear this more from women than men. Caring for aging parents and going to your son's soccer game or school play are legitimate reasons for taking personal time. I'm generalizing here, but women tend to say too much about the reasons behind the time off and foster a perception they aren't as dedicated to their job; men, on the other hand, can judiciously brag about going to their daughter's recital and are “given credit” for being a good father. Although, sometimes when men share this information, they are perceived as being wrapped around their wives' fingers. So, it can cut both ways.

Man or woman, the real issue here is whether the work gets done, well, and on time. As long as you do the job, you don't have to explain every minute of your day. You only need say “I have another appointment,” or “I'm taking some personal time this afternoon.” The fact is that you do have another appointment—your botox appointment!

The main thing is not to leave work undone, leave it for someone else, or put someone in a bind because of your brief absence. And be understanding and non-judgmental towards others when they do the same—regardless of their gender. ☑

Debra Benton heads Benton Management Resources, an executive development and career-counseling firm with clients in 18 countries. She is the author of the bestsellers EXECUTIVE CHARISMA and How to Think Like a CEO as well as being a much sought-after speaker. She can be reached at debra@debrabenton.com or (970) 484-4687. Visit www.CEOWhisperer.com for additional information.

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