

Making the Executive Connection

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Connecting with Executives doesn't happen automatically. It takes understanding what is important to them and learning how they think. In the years that IMPACT Communication has worked with those at the top, here are some of their comments on what makes a difference.

"A lack of preparation is always obvious." Our Execs stress that preparation is critical. Their advice is to do your homework thoroughly. Understand what is going on in their world right now. Learn all you can by talking to your contacts and by checking the website for press releases or analyst reports. **Tip:** The Company's 10 K always outlines how the Exec is remunerated. Those typically are the key things the Exec wants to accomplish during the year or over the next 5 years.

"If you want to play in my sandbox, you cannot seem nervous." You must look, sound and act confident. The Exec will hesitate or delay if your body language does not back up your message. **Tip:** Practice your conversation ahead. Make sure your posture is open and you lean into the table. Be sure to sustain eye contact for a full sentence or thought. Pause for a breath at the end of your thoughts. Envision your success!

"Set the context for the meeting. I may have forgotten." The Exec has a lot on his or her mind. They may have forgotten the purpose of the meeting so be sure to define the issue and its impact. **Tip:** Execs appreciate knowing what you ultimately want them to consider. State your "ask" upfront.

"Be brief and then be gone." Execs have a lot on their minds. They run from meeting to meeting. Time is very important to them so get to the point quickly. Do not go into unnecessary details. If there is an analytical base that is necessary, email it to them in advance for review. **Tip:** Focus on what the Exec needs in order to make a decision. Have any supplemental information, charts, graphs, extra slides etc. at the ready.

"More words are not an indication of more thought. Often, it is just the opposite." Keep your points simple. Do not over-talk an issue. Be very concrete and very specific. The simpler your points, the easier it is for them to make a decision. **Tip:** Execs always want to know the risks and the scope of the opportunity.

"I appreciate just having a conversation. I am not a fan of big slide decks." If slides are not critical, do not use them. Slides that are your speaker notes diminish your impact. The more slides you have, the more things can go horribly wrong. Remember, anything that is on the slide is open for discussion. Your slides must tell a complete story. **Tip:** Execs hate when they have to dig to find the story. **Tip:** Your transition statements from one slide to the next are critical. They provide context for what you are about to say.

"Expect pushback." Execs don't want to make a mistake. They typically will have questions or need more information to help them decide. You should not be thrown by questions but rather view them as an opportunity to demonstrate your conviction or commitment to an idea. They are not trying to trap you or derail you. **Tip:** Make a list of the questions you think the Exec will have ahead of time and determine how you will answer them. Try to figure out what is key to the decision. That is where the bulk of the questions will come.

Making that Executive Connection takes time and effort. Your Executive level conversations are a moment of truth. If you do a good job, you advance your cause and the perception of you as a leader. If you do a poor or mediocre job, you fall into the abyss.

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Question: *Think about your last conversation with an Executive, whether internal or external. What did you wish you had done differently? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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