

# LEADING BUSINESS TIPSHEET NO: 23

As you progress in your career it will become increasingly important for you to be able to present to and influence colleagues and senior stakeholders including executive teams and boards. Successful people expert, manage and influence a variety of stakeholders, get their recommendations approved and, ultimately, get things done.

To build your reputation and career it is important that you take advantage of every opportunity you have to make a positive impact. Whether in a presentation, a meeting or a conversation, or an email it is important to make the most of your time by using it to continue to build on your reputation and for them to understand what you are communicating.

Let's assume that you are the subject matter expert and your role is to share information you know to be critical so that your audience is equipped to make the right decisions for the business. Remember the following. There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to effective communication which is why we share principles or a checklist to consider rather than a "template" of how to present.

## 1. BE CLEAR

Get straight to the point and start with the summary. Present your points clearly and succinctly at the beginning of your presentation, then use the rest of your time to present the supporting data and insights that will give the audience the confidence to support you.

When it comes to the 'ask', ensure that your audience knows exactly what you want them to think, feel or do, and why.



**COMMUNICATING  
WITH IMPACT**

## 2. BE RELEVANT AND NECESSARY

Ensure the information you are presenting is relevant and necessary for the audience in order for them to make or approve the decision or recommendation.

In the words of Winston Churchill, 'If I had more time, I would have written you a shorter letter.' It is easy to leave all the information in a document or presentation 'just in case'. What is difficult is editing your idea, concept or presentation to share only what is important and essential.

Do not spend time sharing information that is not important as you will lose them in the detail.

## 3. MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Let the audience know the agenda and what to expect. For example:

### Today we will:

- Present our executive summary and recommendation/s
- Share the supporting evidence, research, and data
- Have 10 minutes for Q&A
- Canvas final questions and make a decision.

In the executive summary it is recommended that you give an overview as to why this recommendation or approval is important and outline any time restrictions or imperatives.

## 4. MAKE SURE YOUR SLIDES ARE INTERESTING, INFORMATIVE AND EASY TO DIGEST

Do not include the detail on your presentation slides. This information can be presented in the appendix and viewed as required by the audience. You may choose to create 'detail slides' that can be drawn on if needed but keep your main slides direct and engaging. Use infographics and visuals rather than too many words.

Keep slides to a minimum. The rule of thumb is a slide a minute – slides are only a backdrop, not the main show.

## 5. PRESENT WHAT THEY ASK FOR, NOT WHAT YOU THINK THEY WANT TO HEAR

When presenting, especially when presenting to a senior audience for the first time, there can be the tendency to present excessive information to show the audience that you are knowledgeable, have conducted research and have all the answers.

Wherever possible spend time with the stakeholders to understand and confirm the specific information they require. Better planning always leads to better results.

## 6. LISTEN INTENTLY

Pay careful attention to what is said and what is not said by your audience. Observe their body language and their tone when decision-making note the questions that are not asked. When asked a direct question, give a direct answer. Don't overcomplicate or overanalyse your answers. Get to the point!

## 7. PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE

Over time you will find your rhythm and style but until then, practise. Practise in front of a mirror, with a trusted colleague, or record and review your presentation. Ask for feedback and apply it.

## 8. UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM. WIFM?

To communicate effectively, and especially when you want a decision to be made it is critical to understand what the key motivations, concerns or areas of interest. Can they answer the question “what is in it for me?” If one stakeholder is concerned about the cost, make sure you cover this, if another is concerned about the impact on workload, cover that. If you are able, reach out and connect with stakeholders before a meeting or presentation to find out their critical areas of focus. Ask for their feedback, opinions and points of view. Understand their priorities and trigger points, their concerns, values and key decision making criteria. Research their decision-making processes and past decisions, and consider how these might impact current decisions. Fulfil your commitments – do what you say, on time, in full. Or if you cannot, let people know in advance.

## 9. TELL A STORY NOT A SPREADSHEET

Share the vision, tell the story and build commitment. Data is valuable to support the story, but data alone rarely gets the ‘yes’. Use data sparingly and strategically for evidence, not to bamboozle the audience. Draw the insights and the foresight from the numbers.

## 10. PICK YOUR TIMING AND READ THE ROOM

Often, we are on a deadline to get a decision and move forward but it is critical not to allow a sense of urgency to stop you from reading the room. If an important decision needs to be made but you can sense that the mood may not be conducive, or the meeting is running behind and you may not get the airtime, use your discretion and be confident enough to reschedule. Ensure you are able to present your case to the best of your abilities – don’t feel pushed to fit it in just to get a decision. Too often the desire for a quick answer backfires as there is insufficient time to tell the full story or share all the facts.

## 11. PRESENT RECOMMENDATIONS, NOT OPTIONS

When presenting to senior leaders, executive teams and boards, present your recommendations, not only the options. Executives want to know what you think, not what you can brainstorm. By presenting options rather than recommendations you may appear indecisive or lacking in confidence or conviction. Of course, have options prepared for discussion, if required, but always step forward with your best foot first.

## 12. SHOW THEM THE MONEY!

In business, we are here to make profit. Even not-for-profits must make a surplus to thrive. Show the outcome and the results. Simply, show them the positive return or benefit to the organisation if they make this decision!

## 13. REMEMBER, THEY ARE JUST PEOPLE

These executives may have bigger responsibilities, titles or pay packets, they are still only people. Be confident in your skills and your preparation going into any conversation, meeting or presentation, knowing that you can only do your best. Trust that you have the experience and knowledge to present this opinion or recommendation and then do it.

## 14. GET FEEDBACK

Irrespective of the outcome, but especially if your recommendation is not approved, ask for feedback. What was clear, what was unclear and what could have been improved? You may find it helpful to use the old tried-and-true model of ‘Stop, Start, Continue’.



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