

10 Tips for Working With Executives

At some point in your career, it's inevitable that you will discover the opportunity to work with executives. Whether it's a joy or a trial is up to you.

It could be an executive in your organization, the executive of a customer or maybe even a big donor in your non-profit.

No matter the situation, it might throw you off if you aren't informed that these unique organizational animals seem to function a bit differently from you.

I bring this up because so often, in working with clients, the whole boss/authority/executive thing is a block to taking some action in the workplace. Often people are intimidated by executives and are not sure how to interact with them.



No matter your role or theirs, it will help all aspects of your career if you learn to work effectively with executives.



Working with execs is not like having a conversation in your team meeting, or even working with your boss.

Learning how to engage with, and respond to them, will enhance your credibility (and viability) in the organization. It will also help you

develop more confidence.

As a manager, I had think carefully about what people on my team were appropriate to put in front of executives, and which were not.

From that experience I can tell you this: Not being “executive-capable” could be a career limiter for you.

So let’s talk about some of the key attributes of executives, and how you can best develop your “executive-facing” skills.

1. Executives fly at a different altitude.

As with any group or individual, you’ve got to understand your audience to have the most meaningful conversation.

Execs see across the whole organization, and connect the dots from top to bottom. You need to understand how your piece fits into their worldview to connect most effectively with them.



2. Execs are experts in issue triage.

They have learned how to quickly dive into the heart of an agenda item, dissect it, and ask scathingly good, on-point questions.

Try to anticipate what questions they might ask, and prepare a response. They may not need you to “ramp up” to the conversation and give them all the background data. Be ready to get to the heart of it.

3. They expect their scathingly good questions to be answered, directly and succinctly.

One of the biggest gaffes I see in executive conversations is *failing to answer the question*. You may get so excited about what you have to tell them, that you aren’t listening for what they want to hear.

Prepare accordingly, listen, and respond. Be concise, clear, and direct. Err on the side of less vs. more. They can always ask more questions.

4. They can smell BS a mile away.

Don't do it. And if you choose to do it, don't say I didn't warn you.

5. They want to know you believe in what you are saying.

Conviction about what you say to an executive is as important as the message itself.

I had one manager who struggled with this. We'd send him in to an executive meeting with program information and this caveat: Whatever you do, don't blink. One time, he blinked. It wasn't pretty.

You must believe in what you are saying and have conviction that it is the right solution for the organization. *Executives will test for conviction.*

6. They can cover a lot of territory relatively quickly.

Think cheetah, gazelle or quarter horse. They'll move quickly until they pull up to focus on an issue. They will drive this, not you. Be deliberate, but prepare to move fast and flex the conversation accordingly.

Just because you made all those pretty slides it doesn't mean an executive wants to look at them.

7. If there's a flaw in your logic, numbers, or content, they will find it.

And they will point it out to you.

Know your back-story and your numbers, and the logic behind them. Have someone with content expertise review, poke, prod, and test your content – and you – ahead of time. Don't risk destroying your credibility with bad numbers, or worse – a guess.

Do. Not. Guess. Ever. Say you'll look into it and come back.

8. They're impatient. They may be abrupt. Don't expect a group hug when you leave.

If you're presenting something, don't expect flowery kudos when you're done. They're moving on to their next agenda item while you're gathering up your stuff.

9. They remember what you told them.

So don't tell them anything you don't want them to remember and remind you of later. See point about not guessing.

10. They don't subscribe to buzz words.

They want facts, solutions, numbers, and conviction. Spare the likes of "paradigm shifts," "open kimonos" or "eating your own dog food" and stay on topic.

Here's another tip for you.

They have Executive Assistants who know them very well, and who have already figured out how best to wrangle them. Ask one for help and insight if you have trepidation for

Freaked out? Don't be. You can do this. It's a matter of developing the mindset and doing the footwork. The more prepared you are, the more confident you'll be. And, it'll make you better at everything else you do.

And when you're in there, remember, they were all in your shoes at some point too!

Here's what I want you to do next:

- If you found this material helpful, do me a favor and **share my 10 tips with one other person** you know is struggling with executive interface.

Here's the link to the [10 Tips for Working With Executives](#).