



The Signature Voice

the quarterly newsletter for clients and friends of Isis Associates

The Four C's: Inspiring Others' Confidence in You

Much has been written on the topic of self-confidence and how to develop the inner strength and conviction it takes to be a senior leader. However, more than not, our career progression does not occur in a vacuum. The reality of the corporate world today is that the more senior you become, the more others' weigh into key decisions around your gaining advancement, making it into the senior ranks, or being considered in the succession planning process. A large part of developing as a leader thereby requires asking not only what drives your own self-confidence but also what impacts your ability to inspire others' confidence in your leadership potential?

Confidence: The first pillar in inspiring others' confidence is your mindset about yourself as a leader. Take, Leslie, a principal in a global professional services firm for many years. It seemed Leslie was always on the brink of being put into the partner election process of her firm but each year the partners hesitated – always just enough lack of confidence in Leslie in terms of her readiness for the next step.

However, it was clear upon meeting Leslie that she herself was also unsure if she deserved a seat at the table. Leslie had to first change her view of herself to one of believing she was a peer and trusted advisor to both her clients and colleagues. She had to understand and see the unique value and distinction she did add to the firm before others could begin to see this as well.

Communication: How we communicate is a big part of how others' perceive us and thus can enhance others' confidence in us as well. Critical to gaining credibility includes our ability to be clear and crisp in our point of view while also being able to read and influence different audiences and stakeholders. Further, others judge our reliability and initiative based on how well we strategically inform, update, or make direct requests of others.

In Leslie's case, she realized that she often got "lost" in her client work and did not inform her internal colleagues in a timely manner or was not proactive in following up or teaming with others on business development and firm activities. This "void" or lapse in communication left her colleagues with questions around if she could be fully relied on or if she had the initiative it took to be a successful partner in the firm. As one managing partner described, "when partner election takes place, you ask yourself, if I went on vacation, would I trust this person with leading my best client account while I was gone?"

Composure: In addition to what we say and how we communicate, others look to leaders to provide a sense of calm and composure when the stakes get high. A leader's ability to stay anchored and composed during these situations lead to a tremendous amount of credibility and respect from others. In Leslie's case, high stakes or stress situations often left her visibly anxious, defensive, or appearing harried. Through coaching, Leslie learned new practices and skills in time and energy management that helped her to remain more centered and composed in the face of change or challenge.

Consistency: Finally, others appreciate a leader's consistency and reliability, building a track record and "bank account" of confidence with others. Consistency of a leader's "personal best" gives clear evidence of leadership potential as well as offers the leader the "benefit of the doubt" factor when something doesn't go as smoothly as planned. Ultimately, through consistency of personal best, we inspire confidence not only in others but enjoy the virtuous cycle and additional confidence we feel in ourselves as well.

-Amy Jen Su

Adapted from Isis Associates' Signature Voice for Leaders Program

Quarterly Reflection: What impact do I make?

“To build effective leadership at all levels, organizations need to identify leadership candidates early...potential is not fixed. We believe in human beings’ ability to grow...”

--Leadership Pipeline, Ram Charan

Reflection Questions:

1. How do others in my life experience me as a leader when I am at my personal best? What’s the impact I make? How consistently am I at my personal best?
2. How do others in my life experience me as a leader when I am under stress or not at my personal best? What’s the impact I make?
3. What could I change about my confidence, communication skills, or composure that would inspire others’ confidence in me?

Quarterly Book Selection: Managing Your Boss

What dog-eared, highlight-filled books are on our bookshelves that we find ourselves turning to time and time again and frequently recommending to others? Here’s our book selection for this quarter:

Managing Your Boss (Harvard Business Review)
By John J. Gabarro and John P. Kotter

This quarter, we present one of our favorite articles rather than a book. “Managing Your Boss” is an article we have recommended to many of our clients who recognize the importance of managing up in their career development and fulfillment. To manage your boss, one must realize that the boss/ employee relationship involves "mutual dependence between two fallible human beings," the article says. Beyond that realization, one needs to work towards (1) a good understanding of the boss and oneself regarding strengths, weaknesses, work styles and needs and (2) use this information to develop and manage a productive working relationship. As you work toward these goals, you are on the path to effectively managing your boss.

From the Coach's Corner: Shaping your Organizational VOICE

From the Client:

"I am a senior director at a rapidly growing organization. In my role, I am one level away from the c-suite and work on projects critical to the success of the organization's future. That said, I find it difficult to gain visibility to the executive team. I find that my peers get their projects through the pipeline at a more expedited pace than I can. Likewise, it appears that my career development is at a slower trajectory than that of my peers. I hate self-promotion and believe strongly that my work should speak for itself. At the same time, I know I need to do something different. What can I do?"

From the Coach's Corner:

First, let's drop the idea of "self-promotion". If it causes such a visceral reaction in you, thinking about doing it is just going to get in the way of you actually getting yourself out there. Yes – your work should clearly speak for itself... AND you need to speak for yourself as well. So instead of self-promotion, let's approach this from the perspective of having a VOICE in your organization.

V – Vision: At your level, it is critical that you have a vision for your work that ties strongly to the bigger vision of the organization. Your sole responsibility is not to tick through your long list of "to dos". Rather, you must invest energy in articulating to yourself and others where you are going and how it will contribute to the organization's future success. Even if you are not required to pull together a business plan for your division, just do it!

O – Office "Walk Around": Staying heads down in your work all day long and never coming up for air will not do much to help you gain visibility. While I can understand how jockeying for a seat next to the CEO at the next executive committee meeting might seem abhorring, you do have to be visible (and audible) to have a voice in the organization. People – in this case, senior people – need to see and hear you. The more touch points you can have with them, the better. One of the simplest ways of achieving this is through the "office walk around". It is quite self-explanatory: get up and out of your office and walk around the halls at least once a day. It only takes 5 minutes and you never know who you might see. When you see the CFO, do not just give a quick wave and rush by. Stop and say hello, ask a question or let him/her know about things that you are working on that will impact the quarterly financials (hopefully, in a positive way!). The key is to be seen and heard beyond the formal meetings. Our clients who have practiced the "walk around" say it is one of the highest ROI practices of their development.

I – Inform and Include Others: Part of having an impactful voice in an organization comes from informing and including others in the process of planning and decision making. We once had a client who would always wait until his executive committee meetings to present his results and plans. We called this the "big reveal". Often, the executive committee members would aggressively challenge him because they were processing the information for the first time. Instead of a "big reveal", inform others in advance a little at a time. Ask for their thoughts and input. This will help have a softer landing when the time comes to present your plans and decisions.

C - Communicate Results: Learn to speak the results of your work. When asked for an update of your work, remember to focus on the accomplishments and achievements rather than the long list of to do's that you had to go through to get to the deliverable. Making a positive impression on those more senior than you requires that you "helicopter" up to their level and communicate what matters most to them: results.

E – Explore Agendas: Making your voice heard organizationally is not only about speaking... it is also about listening. Take the time to learn what the individual agendas are on the executive committee. Go deeper than what may appear at the surface to really clue in to what keeps each person up at night. By exploring the agenda of others, you will soon be able to communicate in a way that demonstrates your ability to understand and respond to your stakeholders needs.

Taking these steps will put you on the right path of having an impactful voice in your organization.

-Muriel Maignan Wilkins