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The Introverted Communicator



Inevitably, workshops and coaching on executive presence raise the question of innate skills. People often ask me if those who seem natural at communication have always been so. And the answer is no.

While many seasoned leaders have honed their skills enough to develop good habits and consistency in how they show up, everyone I've ever worked with says it takes practice.

In recent years, I've noticed this question usually comes from someone who considers himself or herself an introvert. And, I know that it starts from a place of hoping there's some way to deliver on communication responsibility without having to feel as vulnerable and as exposed as our coaching can initially feel. Many introverts hope that words will be enough, but that's just not the value or the goal of spoken communication. While I have great empathy for the hard work it takes to learn to communicate well, my answer is always the same. Spoken communication is less about what's happening with you, and all about what's happening to your listener.

That's a tough message to hear if you'd prefer to sit in the back of the room rather than stand in the front of it.

I've worked with many self-labeled introverts over the years, and none of them were eager to step into the limelight. But, understanding both the intention behind communication and the listener's perspective around impact has helped hundreds of the more quiet leaders find their voice with communication.

Here's a quick overview of every listener's expectation. We call the attributes of presence the three C's.

Confidence: Listeners use words like knowledgeable, credible, comfortable and intentional. A sense of confidence is conveyed with the body and posture. It takes a settled stance, an open core and a more forward posture to literally pull the listeners' focus to you.

Commitment: Listeners use words like involvement, passion, energy and conviction. Commitment is conveyed through the voice. It takes voice articulation and projection to make your words sound as if you mean them, and you want every listener to feel impacted by what you say.

Connection: Listeners use words like trust, sincerity, honesty and authenticity. Connection is more a feeling than a technique, and it focuses on the desire to go beyond the body and voice to use nonverbal cues and expressions to connect with listeners.

It's a tall order, and while some people have good habits in a particular area, everybody has something that needs to be strengthened in their executive presence.

For the introvert, some of these concepts are more overwhelming than others. Here are some key thoughts I've used to help many leaders get comfortable with the spotlight of communication.

I See Your Discomfort. It's true! The body and your posture establish over 55% of an impression. When someone is uncomfortable being looked at, you can literally see it expressed through their body language. There's no easy solution except to push through it and learn how to deliver on expectations for a settled and open body. And, there are some misconceptions about how to get there. While some communicators combine high energy and movement to their body language, it isn't necessary and sometimes it's even inappropriate. Every leader can learn to project a settled body and a calm and open demeanor.

Energy Is Exhausting. It certainly can be if you have to speak to a large group or for an extended period of time. Energy is hard for more introverted personalities, and there are creative ways to add energy to a talk without exhausting the speaker. We often use video, additional speakers, audience participation and group exercises to help a less dynamic speaker still carry a room. Projection can be less about activity and more about intention to help anyone understand how to drive impact with a group.

Everyone Wants A Piece Of Me. Connection as a leader isn't just about a public speaking scenario. Most leaders say that small group meetings or even one-on-ones can feel exhausting as well. While some may seem like Energizer bunnies, many leaders say the demands on their time leave them feeling like pulled taffy. And, my coaching is always this: You don't always have to be available, but you do always have to be present.

You don't have to be available to everyone, every minute of the day. But, you do have to be able to focus on those you give your time to, so that they feel seen and heard. Leaders need alone time during the day. Some get this by getting up and walking around. Others schedule 30 breaks after a series of meetings to be sure that they can recharge and refocus.

As I've worked with people who worry about the energy required to lead, I've learned that different people get their energy in different ways. Some people find talking to a large group energizing; others find it exhausting. Some feel pumped at the end of the day; others feel drained. Some people can't enter a room without touching everyone in it; others need to be coached on how many touches are enough before they can leave the event.

It's all a part of developing as a leader and understanding that introverted habits can be modified to drive compelling communication.

If you consider yourself an introvert, we'd welcome a chance to help you gain confidence, commitment and connection with any group. Who knows? Your presence could be a little more compelling than you think.

Call us when you need us!



Sally Williamson & Associates
3050 Peachtree Rd NW Suite 520
Atlanta, GA 30305
404-475-6550
www.sallywilliamson.com

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