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How Your Personal Brand Makes an Impact

Understanding the Importance of Performance, Image and Exposure

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Impact...you know it when you see it.

In its mathematical form:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Confidence} + \text{Competence} + \text{Credibility}$$

To have impact, you must consistently deliver exceptional results by connecting dots and showing how the big picture relates to tactical execution; demonstrate intimate knowledge and expertise of the subject matter while exuding confidence but not arrogance; and maintain your composure and effective management skills through a crisis while presenting information clearly and concisely. The art of charts, interaction and the ability to communicate at all levels of the organization will also come in handy. *(Definition derived from "5 Steps to Professional Presence" by Susan Bixler and Lisa Scherrer Dugan)*

Impact and "Executive Presence" are concepts that most people can identify but have a hard time describing. If we watched someone with Impact and Executive Presence, what behaviors would we observe? The individual in question would project an image of confidence, competence and credibility.

Each of the three C's builds upon one another. **Confidence** is derived from being comfortable with who you are as well as having a working knowledge of the subject matter. **Competence** is a reflection of how comfortable you are with a particular topic, and you typically display more **confidence** the more **competent** you are. **Credibility** comes when, through your **confidence** and **competence**, you are able to deliver what you have committed to. When you are **credible**, people believe you because your "Say/Do Ratio" is equal- i.e., what you say you are going to do = what you actually do.

You can increase your confidence, competence and credibility by doing the following:

- Consistently deliver exceptional results** – Everything starts and ends with the ability to produce exceptional results on a consistent basis.
- Connect the dots** – Be a clear thinker who connects the strategic picture to tactical objectives with accountability. Clear thinking is one of the main traits of a growth leader.
- Demonstrate intimate knowledge and expertise** – This is where many people can gain their confidence, as expertise is also a growth leader trait. Each of us should develop functional depth on a subject related to our position. You gain this knowledge through varied experiences and a compilation of skills. It is important to realize that you shouldn't act like you know something

when you really don't. It's OK to say, "I don't know" if you commit to finding the answer.

- **Exude confidence, not arrogance** – Be confident yet humble. Don't act like you have all the answers and know everything. And do not be prideful, arrogant or boastful. Leaders with impact are open to feedback and opposing points of view.
- **Maintain composure** – We all have crises and emergencies. Leaders with impact are calm and collected as they manage the issues. In other words, they understand the magnitude of the issue, put emotions into perspective, create an action plan and communicate the issue and plan to stakeholders.
- **Present information clearly and concisely** – Here there are two equally important concepts: preparing the pitch and delivering the pitch. You must construct your presentation so the message, call for action and next steps are clear and flow well throughout the pitch. This includes the use of charts, colors and graphics. Once you have created the presentation, you must deliver it with the appropriate use of gestures, voice inflection, audience interaction and eye contact.
- **Interact and communicate at all levels** – Leaders with impact can interact and communicate with exempt, non-exempt and hourly employees. It shouldn't matter what the person's title or job responsibilities are. Leaders with impact display respect and consideration to all. This is consistent with the inclusive growth leader trait.

Note that we can use the phrases "Executive Presence" and "making an impact" interchangeably. Making an impact means understanding that our economy is a meritocracy. The United States is a place where performance and execution count the most. Your drive, determination and commitment to succeed are part of the image you project.

The PIE model (based on "Empowering Yourself – The Organization Game Revealed" by Harvey Coleman) is a framework for success that lays the foundation for personal and professional growth. It comprises performance, image and exposure.:

- **Performance:** This is your entry ticket and reputation-builder. It begins your legacy – the common denominator in the promotion process. It also confirms your ability to take on more responsibility, helping you to stay above the bar as it is continuously raised.
- **Image:** It is the message that you send before you speak, whether intentional or not. It includes attire, confidence and demeanor, and develops early in your career. Every interaction counts, so make sure that all are positive.
- **Exposure:** This lets others know of your performance and makes you visible to those who can influence your career. It can be enhanced by a strong network of mentors, bosses and champions. Exposure is a double-edged sword; if you perform well and obtain exposure, you can score a home-run. If you perform poorly and obtain exposure, you can strike out.

Performance is key. Your performance is the foundation of your brand, and developing a reputation for delivering results can only enhance your personal brand. Take the "hard job," err on the side of the

bigger challenge, and manage projects with a sense of urgency and a drive to win, all while making decisions in the best interest of the company. Take risks and present new ideas, but always relate them directly to current business needs. Early in your career performance is crucial. If you don't perform, you don't gain anything by managing your image and exposure. As you become more experienced, performance is a given (you would not have been able to progress without it) and image and exposure become more important. Performance is the foundation. Without it, you cannot make a positive impact.

Reputation counts. It is your track record that is developed over time based on your ability to perform. It is how your behaviors are perceived by others. It is the legacy that you leave once you have completed a project or job. Your reputation is within your control; decide what you would like to be known for and then conduct yourself accordingly. Remember that delivery is key – be mindful of what you say and how you say it. Also note that your reputation speaks louder than your elevator speech. Do not expect to verbalize your reputation. Rather, let it speak for itself.

Image is what you project and others see. The elements of image are demeanor and posture, appearance and dress, eye contact and handshake, and communication, including verbal, non-verbal and written.

Demeanor – Demeanor is the way you behave; this includes your attitude and character. People with impact are a pleasure to be around because they have a positive, realistic attitude, use humor appropriately and behave with outstanding character.

Posture – Posture communicates how confident you are in yourself. A posture where your head is up and shoulders are back conveys you are confident and have a sense of urgency. Posture with your shoulders slouching and your head down conveys a lack of confidence.

Appearance and Dress – You should always be aware of the formal or informal dress code with your organization. In addition, you should be mindful that dressing at, above or below the dress code will send a message regarding your image. Regardless of the dress code, your clothes should be appropriately sized, clean, washed, ironed and tucked in. Hair and facial hair should be properly groomed and maintained.

Eye contact – Be mindful that different cultures have different norms about eye contact. You should first understand if there are any cultural distinctions. Direct eye contact can be a powerful tool in establishing trust and rapport. Used effectively, eye contact can convey confidence as a speaker and respect as a listener (*Words taken from “5 Steps to Professional Presence” by Susan Bixler and Lisa Scherrer Dugan*).

Handshake – Again, different cultures may have varying norms about handshakes. The handshake is typical for meeting and greeting people in a business setting. In some cultures, the handshake is the only form of physical contact that is appropriate in the business setting. Handshakes should be firm – not so firm that you hurt the other person's hand and not so limp that the other person feels as if they are holding a wet fish. Your handshake should not be a statement of power or pain. When done together, a firm handshake and friendly direct eye contact are a powerful way to make an impact.

Communication – Impactful communication is verbal, non-verbal (i.e. gestures, posture, eye contact and facial expressions) and written (letters, memos and e-mails). When it comes to verbal communication, surprisingly, the words of the message are the least important part of the message [relatively speaking]. Body language is the most important. If your words and body do not match, people will hear the message that your body language is sending. The tone of voice that you use also contributes to how others perceive what you are saying.

Exposure – How much is enough? Is your work visible? Do you understand the connection of your work to the overall goals of your organization? division? company? Attend networking events, know the hot topics both internally and externally, be positive and energized or the game is over. Understand the overall business strategy and initiate a discussion. Good things do not come to those who wait. Work the whole room. One and two layers above you are more important than the top leader. When networking with senior leaders, use each leader's time wisely, stay in your knowledge zone and be ready for their follow-up. Know senior leaders' key metrics and how you impact them.

After recognizing the importance of performance, image and exposure, it is also imperative to understand the role that feedback plays. Feedback is a gift. Always thank people when they provide you with their thoughts and suggestions even when their comments are developmental in nature. If you do not understand the feedback that you receive, ask for clarification.

Remember, there is no such thing as status quo. You must constantly develop, improve and grow your personal brand regardless of your organizational role.