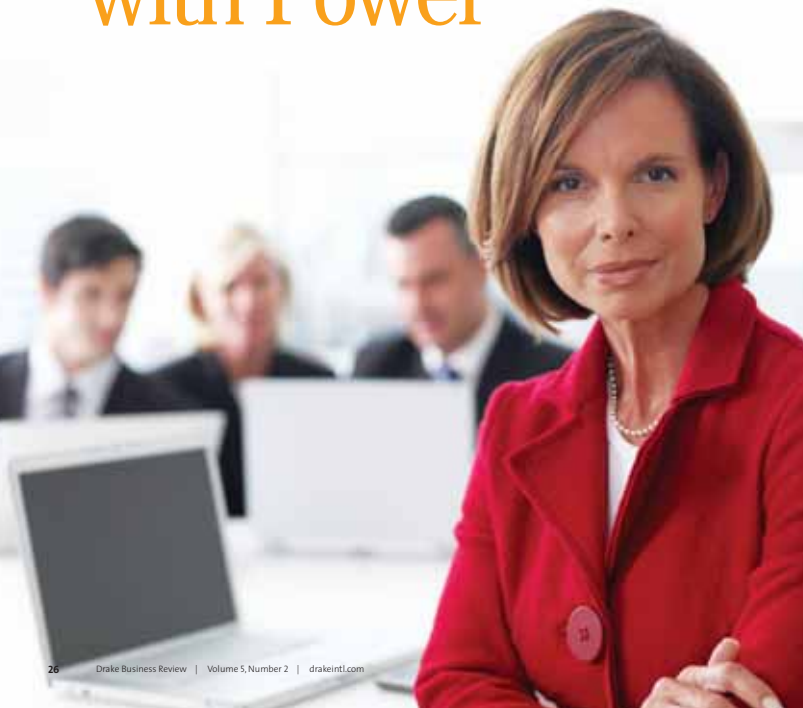


PUT LEADERSHIP ON PARADE:

# Communicate with Power



**M**ANY OF THE DEFINING characteristics needed for effective leadership — vision, integrity, commitment, resilience — are innate. Fortunately, another quality as essential for success as the others can be learned — the ability to mobilize a fire-in-the-belly effort among employees to help the leader realize ambitious goals. Leaders can acquire this ability by observing and learning from the behaviours of other leaders who use these skills, by being coached, or by incrementally stretching employees beyond the norm to generate the needed commitment.

The power of the leader's position alone cannot command enthusiasm and dedication from today's workforce. Instead, employees must be convinced that the leader's objectives are achievable, understand that meeting the goals will provide a personal payoff, and be inspired to make their own full-force contribution. To generate the needed support from everyone in the organization, leaders must put their leadership on parade: They must be visible and crystal clear in their message and take every opportunity to demonstrate — live and in person — their passion for their goals. Unless they show how deeply they care, few others will care, and their plan may be seen as just another flavour of the month.

## **MAKE IT PERSONAL**

Some leaders believe it is sufficient to communicate their goals to the workforce through the organization's internal media, such as employee publications, intranet, or videoconferencing — the more sophisticated the technology the better. Many have become enamoured with blogging because it makes instant communications with large numbers of employees possible — assuming they make the effort to log on. This is useful because it allows for repetition of the leader's message, which is essential for making an

impact. But using media is not a substitute for interacting with employees face to face. Media cannot convey the leader's intensity of feeling for their plan nearly as well as human contact does. The very fact that the leader is there and has left the comfort of the office to communicate with employees gives the message importance.

Leaders must make their case loudly, clearly, and consistently. They should seize every opportunity to speak from the heart in personal engagements with their employees, thus allowing them to express their message with absolute clarity and address any concerns the employees may have about it. As an additional payoff, the workforce's views about other company issues will come through unfiltered. (Reporting of bad news at these meetings should be encouraged because it can be dealt with on the spot and not spiral out of control.)

Personal interactions with the workforce can take many different forms. Leaders can make presentations before large groups in auditoriums. There can be smaller, more informal departmental or function-focused meetings where participants will feel freer to ask questions or present problems. Leaders who appear at these meetings without the usual retinue of direct reports signal that they are approachable and welcome interaction.

Leaders also can meet with a cross-section of employees in skip-level meetings, conduct spontaneous walkabouts to fill in the time between planned events, have lunch in the organization's cafeteria, and drop in on the back office, the factory floor, or a remote office where employees may never have seen them and will be particularly impressed. When leaders give employee awards at presentation ceremonies, the awards become particularly special. Praise from an

employee's direct supervisor is a strong motivator; from the organization's leader it is even stronger. Effective leaders are generous with their praise whenever it is deserved.

## **PRESENT WITH POWER**

Putting leadership on parade does not come naturally to some leaders, particularly those who have led primarily by issuing directives. But presenting with power is a skill easily learned. Once learned, it becomes a habit, and each presentation becomes increasingly effective. In any meeting, large or small, the effective leader captures the listeners' attention immediately, holds it for the duration of the presentation, and creates the kind of energy that generates action.

The leader should organize the message so it is clear and compelling, appealing to both heart and head. Stories involve the audience and reveal the leader's humanity, essential for establishing trust. They paint word pictures with characters, settings, and action. The leader makes deliberate use of wording, voice, posture, movement, and timing.

The most powerful communications tools are the eyes. Steady, warm eye contact conveys credibility. Failure to make eye contact can signal unease, defensiveness, or perhaps lack of candour. When talking with one person, the leader looks at the other's eyes, then moves away to avoid causing discomfort. With a large group, the leader makes everyone feel included by making eye contact with one person in the audience for as long as it takes to express a thought, and then moves the eyes to someone in a different part of the room.

When a leader can zero in with eye contact toward one audience member, surrounding audience members benefit, too. Studies have shown that all the audience members in the

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area around the person being addressed feel they're being spoken to directly. Using the eyes this way also alleviates whatever anxiety the presenter may be feeling because speaking one-to-one to an individual comes naturally. In contrast, nervous speakers scan the audience, never finding one focal point, which increases their anxiety because the brain has too much information to process.

An academic study by faculty at the University of Akron's School of Communication in the US showed that using the eyes appropriately is the single most important factor for communicating effectively.

### GET OUT FROM BEHIND THE LECTERN

Effective presenters do not use a lectern, a barrier that separates them from the audience. They have no need for lecterns because they do not read from a written text. They understand that presentations that are read are considered old news and, as such, detract from the spontaneity that creates energy in the audience. Doing without visuals can be particularly effective when the presentation is intended to inspire the audience rather than convey information.

Effective leaders showcase their passion by putting their whole body into the presentation. They support every statement with an appropriate gesture and make large body movements to underscore important points. They further accentuate these points with dramatic pauses or by raising or lowering their voice. Their choice of language demonstrates they are sincere because they avoid euphemisms, jargon, and office-speak.

Although their presentation may appear spontaneous, they have carefully rehearsed it. They've put aside extraneous content. They've identified questions that may be asked and prepared succinct and persuasive answers. Though an initial presentation like this may require serious rehearsing, the process becomes easier as the leader seeks out opportunities to continue presenting. Seasoned speakers who get a deep sense of pleasure from presenting can become encouraged to present their views about significant issues on the national stage. This further helps cement leadership positioning.

### KNOW YOURSELF AND THE ORGANIZATION

The "leadership on parade" process begins with leaders honestly assessing how the workforce perceives them and how they in turn view the employees. Mistaken impressions can hinder communication and, with that, the leader's effectiveness.

Leaders may misunderstand the workforce's values, particularly if they are new. They may have come from a company whose employees value making lots of money, but their new culture emphasizes a concept like "do no evil". Judgments from trusted direct reports will be needed because even a small change that runs counter to the culture can have large repercussions.

The workforce may not have a good understanding of the leader either. The leader may have served for many years but not been very visible. Unknowingly, the leader may be sending out contrary signals. Is the leader shirt-sleeved or double-breasted Occupying

a walnut-pannelled corner office or at the centre of the floor? Each is making a value statement. With these and other choices, leaders must project their true selves.

This is not a call for leaders to improve their "image"—a mere artifice; honest, effective communication is authentic.

#### DBR

Reprinted with the permission of Kevin Daley, an authority on communications and presentations skills. He has personally coached 62 board chairmen, 320 company presidents, 3,300 sales managers, as well as a broad range of political figures, sports and media people. He is a globally recognized expert at helping executives present more effectively, handle themselves with greater presence, and think more clearly under pressure. Contact Kevin at kdaley@kdspeak.com or visit <http://kdspeak.com/>

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