

REAL SOLUTIONS

Soften Your Hard Edges To Speak Convincingly

To sell your ideas, you need to think fast, radiate enthusiasm and cite evidence to support your point. You also need a healthy dose of self-awareness.

As you amass power and authority, you may become less aware of how you come across. This can stymie your persuasiveness and lead to what Joe Takash calls "blind spots."

"The higher up you go, the less honest feedback you receive," said Takash, president of **Victory Consulting**, a performance management firm in Chicago. Many of the senior executives he advises have no idea how their peers and employees perceive them.

To sharpen your communication skills, forge an emotional bond with others. If they view you as considerate, attentive and open-minded, they will assign more value to your ideas and opinions.

To lay the groundwork to persuade, engage in friendly banter and let others drive the conversation. This may not come naturally to hard-charging businesspeople.

"How often do you talk with others when you need nothing from them?" said Takash, author of the forthcoming book "Results Through Relationships." "It's when you have no agenda that you make a personal connection."

After you spend a few minutes asking about their children, hobbies or weekend plans — and showing genuine interest in whatever they choose to share with you — retain what you learn. As soon as you part company, take notes on what they told you.

"Write it down afterward so that you collect data on others' passions," Takash said. "This helps you remember so that you can follow up with them later."

Another way to connect emotion-

ally with others is to monitor your voice tone. Many people lack awareness of how their speaking style can drive away potential allies.

In his training sessions, Takash videotapes execs giving presentations. He finds that they're almost always mortified at how they sound.

For example, a superintendent at a big construction firm told Takash he was "aghast" at how stern and unapproachable he seemed on videotape. So he learned to smile more frequently, speak in a softer tone and make friendly eye contact. Radiating his newfound warmth as a

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Joe Takash, president, Victory Consulting

speaker, he delivered a winning sales pitch for a major airport construction project, Takash says.

Conveying warmth and connecting with others gets tougher when you face resistance. Instead of arguing or restating your needs or concerns aggressively, ratchet down the tension by adopting what Takash calls a "productively confrontational" approach.

Respond to inflammatory statements by saying, "Help me understand why you're so upset" or "What is it about this issue that makes you react that way?"

"Step back and address the problem, not the symptom," Takash said.

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