



Facet: Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness: Giving Your Team Enough Voices to Create a Chorus

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Sep 9, 2015

Have you ever worked with a leader who has an 'A' team? Perhaps you're one of those leaders, like "Nate." "When everything hits the fan, I always turn to my 'A' players," says Nate. "Although I realize I'm tapping them to do extra work, sometimes after hours, I know I can trust them. **I have several other people I'm not sure I can count on to deliver.**"

In our research on executive presence, the facet of Inclusiveness is sometimes misunderstood. **We define it as "actively involving others, welcoming diverse points of view, encouraging ownership in mission, and empowering initiative."** But who should be included? And who should not?

Inclusiveness certainly has a positive ring to it, but, like all of the facets of executive presence, there is a Goldilocks quality to it: You can have too little or too much of it, **and we want to make sure we end with a "just right" amount.**

Nate had received low ratings on Inclusiveness and wanted to better understand this facet of executive presence. At our Executive Presence **Mastery Program, he shared an example of a crisis when he turned to his 'A' team.** As the other Mastery attendees listened and offered their advice, Nate began to realize the impact of his behavior on the whole team. In short, he was creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: By excluding several members on his team from key projects, he was perpetuating their inability to rise to the occasion.



While having enough inclusiveness is a challenge for leaders like Nate, it can also be an over-strength for other leaders. One leader we know had the best of intentions: He wanted to make sure everyone on his team felt involved. The result was many large meetings where all sorts of people got **invited... and quite a few of them ended up wondering why they were there! It wasn't a good use of their valuable time.**

Inclusiveness is about getting the *right* **people to the table... and making sure** that each of them believes that they have a real voice in the proceedings. And this is true both in formal meetings as well as informal interactions.

How about other instances of “too little” Inclusiveness? There can be other reasons this is challenging for leaders. Those who have a more top-down style, a lot of experience, and feel they have all the answers can come across **as the “smartest guy in the room” to the point where others come to believe** the leader thinks they have little of value to offer. **Here's the interesting question that we sometimes ask such leaders: “What's the impact if you're conveying to others that you're the smartest person in the room?”**

The obvious answer is that people will, over time, become passive, less engaged, deferential, and sometimes resentful. If they defer to you, operating **under the assumption that you invariably know best, you're not getting the** best from your team, or taking advantage of your valuable resources – smart people. They are more likely to less likely to become good at problem solving **and to develop into ‘A’ players. As Nate realized, it's a self-fulfilling** prophecy.

Through our **“wisdom sharing” process at the Executive Presence Mastery Seminar**, our coaches and the leaders around the table helped Nate come up with a solution that he felt he could embrace, one that would still help him feel safe as he encouraged people outside the **‘A’ team to participate**. Could he choose some lower-pressure situations that would provide low-stakes **opportunities to test the ‘B’ players to develop new capabilities**—getting them to the point where they could be trusted in a future crisis?



In a follow-up coaching call, he and the coach talked about creating micro-goals—baby steps he could take to help monitor the progress of the people he **was trying to turn into ‘A’ players.** Nate was able to think of several appropriate situations, and he felt energized to adapt his thinking and behavior.

When you get to that “just right” level of Inclusiveness as a leader, you’ll notice that the energy—and execution—of your team noticeably picks up as you give them more of a voice. Inclusiveness means that communication is more than **the work of a lead singer; it’s an aligned chorus.**

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