Speak Like an Executive

Presenting to busy company leaders and clients requires us to shift our style of speaking from "details and conclusion" to "executive summary". In a traditional Executive Summary in a business case, business plan, or white paper, the writer presents the key findings (or the conclusion or the "ask") in the very first line of the document, followed by the salient facts and details -- only the salient details. This is also the perfect guideline for your *spoken* word with busy executives.

Busy company leaders and client executives have little time and patience for details -- and, really, they don't need all of the details because those details are typically your job, and they count on you for that. Executives won't and can't take the time for a long presentation from you, full of details and reasoning followed by a big reveal at the end. And you won't be invited back to the table if you develop a reputation for long-winded presentations. Here's our advice to you: speak in **Executive Summary** style. Get to your point in the first 30 seconds and don't speak longer than 5 minutes. Reveal the conclusion or your compelling idea up front, with only the most relevant of persuasive details. Think of this as your recommendations and call-to-action followed by a very high-level review of your findings and results.

What to Say

Start the conversation by saying something like, "In the next 5 minutes, I will summarize our recommendation about the XYZ issue and provide you with a high-level overview of our findings, and then we'll take some time to discuss, if that is your preference." Even the busiest of executives can respect that structure!

How You Say It

Say it with compelling language and interesting voicing. Use facial expression and gestures that show your confidence in what you're saying. Be succinct and clear. And then stop talking. Wait for them to ask questions or seek details. Then, and only then, should you provide supporting data, relevant facts, and key points. They're smart people who often do not need or want all the details. They make tough decisions based on your compelling summary.

How to Support It

If you're asked to create slides, keep these high level also. Create no more than 5 slides for your executive summary. You can provide data and resource slides as an appendix in the back of the slide deck. This method keeps your compelling recommendations up front and puts the data for those who love details in the back of the deck. Of course, follow our guidelines for creating those high-level compelling slides, remembering that slides are merely the visual support to you as the Subject Matter Expert (SME). Slides are not intended to stand alone as a white paper.

Prepare Before the Meeting

Finally, remember to allot time in your schedule to practice out loud the delivery of your message. Record it so you can play it back. Is your message clear and concise? Are you using inflection and interesting voicing? Do you sound like the SME you want them to experience? Do you look "leaderly" -- are you speaking with a smile and facial expression that shows your words should be believed? Do your gestures look strong, making you look and feel confident? Have you burned off the excess energy (aka "anxiety") that might cause you to fidget or pace?

Your succinct content and compelling delivery is key to you being asked back to the table where decisions are made. Prepare for this important meeting and show them who you really are!