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# **Speaking to Power: 5 Tips for Success**

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## Overview

Leadership is not easy. There are times when what is clearly needed isn't in your control or portfolio, and you must engage the one who has the power to make the change. The 'powerful one' may be senior to you, could be a financial manager, or may just be someone who has something you want or need. Bringing forward a 'clearly needed' change to the one who has not made that change, or even seen the need for it may entail some personal risk.

We often hesitate to speak to power. Common fears are that the person is 'too busy', won't agree with you, they may agree but do nothing, they may be unfriendly, critical, or simply not have the vision or understanding necessary to make the change. What is the stance to be taken when there is risk involved in presenting a new idea to someone who has the power to say 'yes' or 'no' to an important initiative?

Prepare yourself; understand the natural physiologic responses that are felt and seen when moving into what may be a risky situation.

Prepare the approach with a leader's / decision-maker's / executive's perspective in mind. In general, people in power (like us) are always looking for new ideas and ways to make positive progress. People with power want to work and collaborate with people they can trust, who are reliable, who deliver and who are easy to work with. If you can be that kind of person, and approach the issue with a variety of perspectives including your own, success is more likely.

## Objectives

After this presentation, participants will:

1. Identify the physiological responses to challenge.
2. More effectively engage power structures and people.
3. Outline important action steps needed to prepare, engage in, and follow-up to opportunities of speaking to power.

## Important Teaching Points

- A meeting is not about sharing information, but about moving toward an action / outcome.
- Research the person you need to approach (values, motivations, goals, fears, etc).
- Identify compatibilities shared in terms of goals and ambitions, and which might be in conflict.
- Powerful people have fears such as embarrassment, not being perfect, fear of failure, dissatisfaction, loss of reputation, fear of bad decisions, legal action, etc.
- Figure out how you can help them be successful in their position, and meet your common needs.

- Identify any personal assistant or member of the leadership team who has the ear of the person you want to approach. Become an ally.
- When meeting with powerful people:
  - Get to the point in one minute.
  - Talk about the future.
  - Vision before details.
  - Lead with stories, not data.
  - Overcome your fears and theirs.
- Have a one-page summary of critical key facts ready that you can leave behind to support your position(s).
- Executives (decision-makers) live in the future not the present, so talk with them in terms of what the situation will be like in 2 to 5 years.
- Bring an appropriate colleague (someone who will give your moral support) to provide a second perspective on the meeting and to be a bridge for you during the meeting.
- Plan the conversation and include some preparatory role-playing.
- Remember you have your own power, too, which you bring to the meeting.

### Resources / References

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