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5 Ways To Gain Credibility With Executive Leaders

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By Dianna Booher

Few things are more frustrating than identifying a problem, developing a viable solution, hearing accolades from coworkers only to have your executive team question the very premise of your recommendation.



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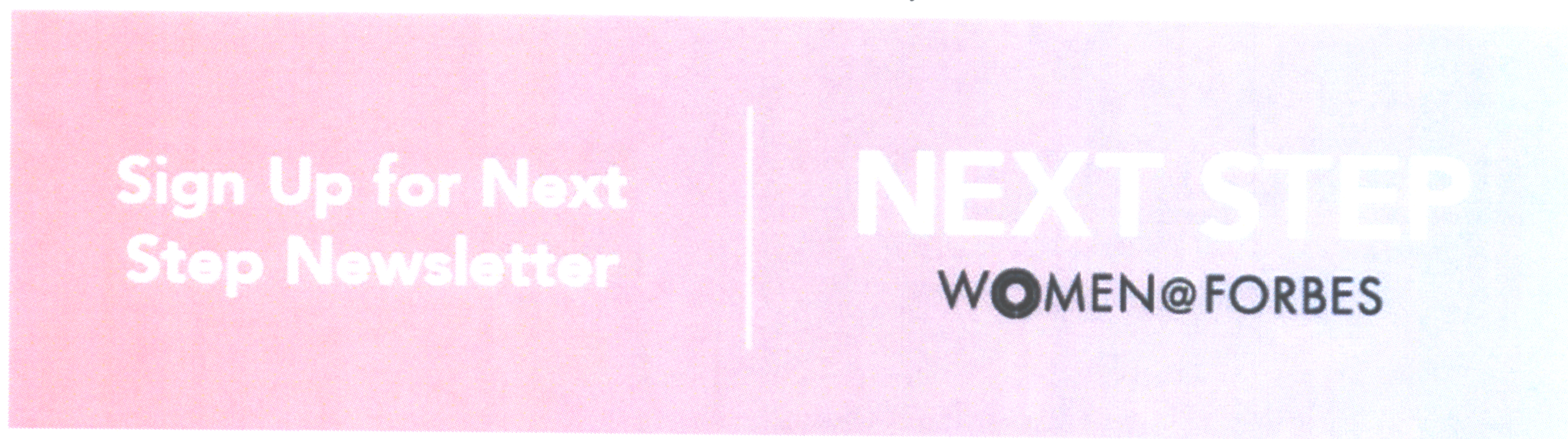
See how to communicate with credibility. [+]

Rather than being greeted with gratitude and confidence, in their presence, you feel as credible as Bernie Madoff offering stock options. So how do you gain credibility as a trusted advisor whom your executive team calls for opinions and solutions?

Consider these five ways to build a solid relationship through your strategic communication:

1. Speak Their Language

Executives expect accommodation. Translated, that means executives trust advisors who understand which problems they're trying to solve: How do we lower our cost in building X? How do we increase market share over the next three years? How do we decrease the cost of recruitment and retraining? What can we do to move more women into executive management positions? How well is our performance feedback system working in our European divisions versus in our U.S. offices, and how can we make the systems more consistent? Make their interests your interests.



2. Ask Provocative Questions

Aim to bring an outside perspective to the table. Add value to discussions by asking thought-provoking questions that could spark ideas for a new direction in your organization: New trends you've read or heard about at conferences. Results of studies in another industry that might have application to yours. Intriguing case studies about new products or services that your customers might want or need.

In short, make it a goal to initiate ideas, as well as just react to those raised by your leadership team.

3. Embrace Your Role As An Expert

Your CEO hires an attorney for an expert opinion. He or she may reject or agree with that opinion—but nevertheless, the CEO expects to hear an expert opinion from this legal advisor.

The same is true for someone in your position. Don't just play the part of an expert. Become the expert. Then document your expertise. Get the degrees and certifications. Speak at international conferences. Publish the articles, white papers, blogs, or books in your area of expertise. Deliver real results on the job.

Then when you pass along an opinion to your executive leaders, speak with confidence and authority. You're the expert in the room on your specialty.

4. Recommend, Persuade, Lead; Don't Shove

Never try to pressure an executive to sign off on a project or to take an action. You're not "closing a sale." As an executive, these leaders know how to decide and get things done. As a trusted advisor, your role is to understand the business goal, create a solution, or build a case for taking an appropriate approach or action.

If you've led well and built trust in your expertise, the executive will know how to follow up on your recommendation or opinion.

5. Keep Confidences

Once you've gained the ear of your senior executives, the temptation is to flaunt that access. Don't. Above all, make this your motto when communicating with your executives: What happens in the C-suite stays in the C-suite. Fail this confidentiality test, and you've made a career-limiting move.

Thinking and communicating strategically demands time and attention to phrasing and approach. Approach it like any other partnership of strategic importance to your career.

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 47 books. Her newest is [Communicate Like a Leader](#). She helps organizations to communicate clearly. Follow her at www.BooherResearch.com and [@DiannaBooher](#).

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