

Mistakes in Influence

By Shawn Kent Hayashi

As the first question in an interview, the CEO asked the highly qualified CMO (chief marketing officer) candidate, “What have you been doing recently?” The CMO candidate heard the question and despite 15 years of deep marketing experience he began talking about the past few months running operations for his company’s Hong Kong office ...since no one in the company could do that role, he was plucked from US marketing and shipped to Hong Kong with almost no notice. The candidate talked on and on about how successful he was at running operations and turning the Hong Kong office around after the General Manager there had been fired. Twenty minutes later, the CEO says to the candidate, “seems like you belong in operations.” From then on the CEO could not see the candidate in the CMO role and with out warning the candidate was dismissed from the interview early. The candidate left this interview stunned and unclear what had happened. While the literal question was “What have you been doing recently?” the real question was, “Why should I be thinking of you as a Chief Marketing Officer?” A potential influential connection was lost for both men. The “right” question was not asked and the intended focus was not clear.

A VP of Sales decided she was ready to look for a new position. She knew she had an entrepreneurial streak and would enjoy starting her own business in a franchise; yet for personal financial reasons she decided that would be too risky for her at this time. This Sales VP felt going into an organization as the number two person heading sales in a mid sized company would be best for her now and would give her a better lifestyle raising young children. At a networking lunch with someone who works closely with hundreds of CEOs and who would know of these type opportunities, when asked, “What would you be good at doing?” the Sales VP talked about owning a franchise. This did not resonate with her listener, in fact this listener was so disconnected that she literally interrupted the Sales VP and removed herself from the conversation for a few minutes. When she returned she focused her attention on another person at the table and never brought the conversation back to this topic. This Sales VP missed the opportunity to sound bite herself into a role that the person she was networking with could hear and feel like she could be helpful. The intention was not clear.

I’ve made this mistake myself too many times: Hearing a question and thinking that we are being asked the question as it sounds on the surface. In both of the above cases, the candidate would have been much better off answering the unasked question that was below the surface – “Why would I consider you for a marketing role?” and, “How can my network be most helpful to you in your job search?” The reason this happens is because we have not clearly thought through our message and how it aligns with the person to whom we will be talking. Instead we are thinking we will casually connect on a personal level, we get lost in our own unclear story and want the listener to take the time to figure it out for us, to connect the dots themselves. We let the other person lead and we relinquish co-leading. We need to be very clear in what we are wanting, focus on it and talk *only* about that.

Being in an exploration mode is useful and when we are there it is wise to say so. This may sound like, “I am not sure what the possibilities are that may bubble up from our conversation and I’d like to stay in the conversation long enough to really understand the options available to us.” Most of the time we do not say this or even realize that people make decisions very quickly. In the first 3 minutes of meeting someone new we’ve already made several internal assumptions about the new person. Remembering to hold the assumptions is not something that comes naturally in interviews and networking meetings.

When we are reactive to what shows up in front of us, we stop leading ourselves and instead we follow someone else’s lead. The CMO candidate needed to be so grounded in **MARKETING** that he did not get sidetracked with career stories that did not fit the future he really wanted to create. Focus on what you want; ask for what you really want now.

Another mistake I’ve made is letting someone else’s agenda be more important than my own such that I give up my desires.

Not taking the time to be clear with myself about what I want next dilutes my influence potential.

Mistakes can lead to learning if we are willing to let ourselves learn! Turn the situation into a “lesson for the day.” Write or talk about it to debrief and internalize the learning. Then move on. That is being resilient!