

LEADING WITH QUIET CONFIDENCE

How to stay composed in tense situations

Next door to me, two very large dogs — with questionable origins — spend their days traveling the perimeter of the 2-plus acres of their owner's property, making it clear to passers-by the borders of their domain. They strut, heads high, chests out. Alert and agile, they often dart toward the street when I'm out walking in the morning, stopping before the electric fence to stare at me, daring me to come into their yard. This is when I usually cross the street and risk my safety walking with traffic versus against.

If I didn't know their owner, I would imagine him to be a man of equal intensity and superior in size and strength. But instead, their owner is a she, a relatively small and somewhat elderly woman. And yet, she commands attention and obedience from her dogs. When the dogs

tear through the yard in hot pursuit of a squirrel, she whistles. Without hesitation, they turn and run back toward her, stopping to sit at her feet. They then wait for the next command. With a subtle cue and quiet confidence, she effectively communicates her status to the dogs. She is the alpha, and they submit.

When asked by a client recently how to regain control of a meeting that had gotten heated, I thought of my neighbor. The client's company was in the midst of a major

reorganization and the change was triggering anxiety and fear in the employees. As a result, they were reacting emotionally, and their weekly meetings were dominated with concern over the future, exchanged in emotional outbursts and shouting. We were engaged to help the team develop the behavioral strategies to lead them through the transition.

I described to the client, Joe, the quiet confidence of my neighbor and suggested he approach his unproductive meetings with the same calm and self-assurance. Whether intentional or not, my neighbor masterfully exhibits the behavioral strategy of quiet confidence. Each time she whistles, she sends a clear message that is wholly reflected in and supported by her tone, tempo and intensity. Her quiet confidence is the consequence of quiet competence. And it is powerful.

"When the fur is flying, what gets people's attention is quiet confidence," writes John Baldoni in a recent *Harvard Business Review* blog post, "How to Lead Without Saying a Word."

Nothing radiates power like emotions kept in check when everyone else is shouting.

THE EXPERIMENT: Next time you're confronted with a tense situation where the

other person's emotional response is elevated, try staying composed and use subtle cues to communicate your point. Here are some suggestions.

Resist the temptation.

Resist the urge to raise your voice. A raised voice puts people on the defensive and interferes with their ability to listen.

Be aware of the total message. Be conscious of all of the messages you're sending. Without thought, we search the speaker's face and body for clues to help us better interpret what is being said or, more often, what is not being said. Be aware of the messages that your entire self is sending. Pay attention to your tone, pitch and tempo, as well as your posture and the expression on your face. If any of these are not in sync with what you're saying, you distract the listener and reduce the likelihood that he or she will truly hear and understand you.

Speak with conviction.

Now you have the person's attention so be direct, clear and concise.

Lead with quiet confidence. Lastly, use this behavior of quiet confidence regularly to remind others of your quiet competence. <<



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