Demonstrating Confidence

Template

Please read the scenario and then respond to the three questions below:

Scenario

You have been invited to join ‘Project Albatross’ which consists of a multi-functional team developing Microsoft’s next hackathon on the topic of ‘Sustainability’. Your manager nominated you as they know you have an interest in the topic and feel it is a good opportunity for you to build your profile in the company. You have not been involved in a hackathon before and are excited, although a little daunted, about the prospect. The kick-off meeting for the project is three days away and will be held face-to-face. The meeting is being led by Fergus Smith the Project Sponsor. Also attending are Erica Wu (Program Manager), Anita Wang (Software Engineer), Eugene Feng (Cloud Solutions Architect) and Sharon Ying (Premier Field Engineer). You believe most of the project team were involved in managing last year’s hackathon. The purpose of the kick-off meeting is to meet everyone on the project team, review what worked well last year, identify what didn’t work well and what needs to change, brainstorm ideas and then allocate responsibilities.

What three things can you do BEFORE the meeting to build your confidence and credibility

Before the meeting

1. Find out the meeting agenda.

Prior to any meeting, find out the topics to be covered so you can figure out what you'll want to say about them, whether an idea, a comment or a question. "One of the things introverts excel at is preparation," Dr. Kahnweiler says.

1. Plan and practice what you’re going to say.

Quieter people may not be the best at thinking on their feet—quite the opposite, they often like to think (sometimes long and hard) before they speak. Practice in front of a mirror what you're basically going to say, or imagine what you're saying in your head to build your confidence. "By the time you get to your meeting, it’s like your brain is tricked into believing you’ve said it, so you're comfortable," explains Dr. Kahnweiler. Avoid memorizing, however, and instead go for a conversational tone: "You could even have notes, but just say it in your own words so it will sound more natural."

1. Find some quiet time before the meeting.

Don’t rush into meetings last-minute, which could make you feel more stressed. Rather, give yourself some time alone before the meeting starts to help you feel more settled.

1. put yourself in a calm state.

Look for ways to lower your anxiety about speaking up. For instance, pay attention to your breathing and avoid negative self-thoughts before and during the meeting. "Focus on your breathing, slowly in and out," advise Dr. Kahnweiler. "When you do that, it's pretty impossible to be anxious, because you can’t be thinking about obsessive thoughts when you’re focused on your breath." If negative thoughts are holding you back from contributing, figure out what irrational thought is getting in your way, such as Everyone is more knowledgable than me.

What three things can you do DURING the meeting to build your confidence and credibility?

**5. Get it over with quickly.**  
If there's something you really want to say, make sure you do it early in the meeting—within the first 5 to 10 minutes. The longer you wait, the more of a deal it'll become in your head.

**6. Give yourself time to think.**  
If a colleague catches you off guard with a question, you don't have to answer immediately. Saying phrases like "That's a good question," or throwing back an open-ended question to your colleague may give you extra moments to formulate a response. If you really are unsure of what to say, you could also say you need time to think it through.

**7. Regain control after interruptions.**  
If a colleague cuts you off while you're stating an important point, regain focus and control of the conversation by putting a finger up to let your colleague know you weren't finished talking. You could also say, "I'd like to continue my thought," or the even gentler version (if the person interrupting you happens to be your boss), "I had a couple more thought to share with you on that."

Although learning to contribute more at meetings may be difficult at first, remember that holding back at meetings may have ramifications for your career. Says Dr. Kahnweiler, "Meetings are places where people make judgments. You’re doing a disservice to people if you’re not giving them info about you and what your results are. You become invisible that way when people don’t really know you, and the organization is not really getting the value of your contributions."

What three things can you do AFTER the meeting to build your confidence and credibility?

1. Create a lasting impression with Fergus Smith the Project Sponsor, by sending a follow up email to thank them for the meeting and expressing the value you received from the meeting and how excited you are to be part of the project team. They may not always respond to your email but your proactivity and enthusiasm will be noted.

2. Send an email to your manager summarising the key points raised and actions. Managing upwards is an important skill to master, particularly in relation to your workload. You manager needs to be aware of what you are working on, what the time estimates are and what exactly you are doing.

3. Record any ideas the meeting triggered for you. Determine an appropriate time to raise these and who would be the appropriate person to raise them with. This will build your reputation as someone who adds value and is proactive. This helps build your confidence and credibility with others.

4. Complete all actions within the agreed timeframe. Be dependable. If you have any questions whilst completing your actions, make sure you know who to contact and ask them early.

5. Take time to critically reflect on the meeting and what you learned. Evaluate how you contributed. Consider what worked well and what would you do differently next time to build confidence, credibility and competence.

6. Within 24 hours, follow up with each member of the project team to build the relationship. Send a short email or message with a positive comment about meeting them (e.g. you like their idea or you valued their experience). Focus on building your network. This will also help to build your confidence when you meet with them again. You could also connect with them on LinkedIn to build your online network.