

## Demonstrating Confidence

# Model Answer

Please note that purpose of the model answer is to provide you with a suggested response that prompts your critical thinking skills. There will be more detail than you were asked to provide. Use the model answer to help you reflect on your response and identify key points or ideas you may have missed. Use the additional suggestions to help build your confidence and credibility. Commit to an action plan for developing the knowledge and skills you need to master confidence. These actions may include further reading and researching, practicing the skills, seeking feedback from others on your skills and paying more attention to how others effectively demonstrate confidence and credibility before, during and after meetings so you can adopt what works well.

Please read the scenario and then respond to the 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 feels 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?

1. Following your invitation to the meeting, send an email briefly introducing yourself to the team and authentically (and briefly) communicate your excitement about being involved in the project team. This will send a warm impression to your new project team members.
2. Prepare for the kick-off meeting by being aware of who has been invited and is attending (and who has declined), what is in the agenda and the allocated time. And of course, ensure you know where the meeting room is, so you are not late trying to find it.
3. Undertake thorough research about hackathons so you are across critical information and appear knowledgeable. This would include building your knowledge about what a hackathon is, what contributes to their success, what feedback has been provided about previous Microsoft hackathons (source evaluation reports and seek out people who have attended), and what competitors in the marketplace are doing in relation to hackathons.
4. Learn about the project team members – their roles, experiences, reputation, personal brand, etc. Review their internal bios, their LinkedIn profiles, ask their colleagues about how they like to work and communicate, etc.
5. Identify how you can demonstrate confidence and competence in the meeting. Plan how you will introduce yourself and build rapport with each project team member. Plan how you will add value and contribute your ideas respectfully and passionately.

6. If you are shy or not overtly confident, perhaps plan and practice what you are going to say – practice in front of a mirror what you want to say (but don't memorise or script it).
7. Allow quiet focused time before the meeting to remind yourself of the agenda, your key points, how you want to show up in the meeting, etc. Avoid rushing from another meeting or piece of work.
8. Put yourself in a calm state if you are feeling anxious. Use strategies that work for you to lower your anxiety about speaking up (e.g. focus on your breathing, avoid negative self-talk, re-frame how you are feeling and use this 'stress response' as a sign you are ready for action and prepared to bring your best to the meeting.).
9. Arrive at the meeting early to introduce yourself to others as they arrive and build rapport with each person before the meeting. This will put them in a more receptive state for receiving your ideas during the meeting if they feel they have made a connection with you first. It also shows you are well prepared which contributes to a positive impression.
10. Ensure you are dressed appropriately for the meeting.

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

1. Make a positive first impression by taking the initiative to smile and shake hands (if appropriate). Make sure you use people's names and introduce yourself.
2. Aim to speak in the first five minutes of the meeting – by getting your voice heard in the room early, you show that you have the confidence to engage in the conversation and you can put your ideas forward whilst everyone is fresh and paying attention.
3. Use positive body language to acknowledge contributions. Nod, smile, take notes and engage in appropriate eye contact at all times.
4. Build on the ideas already being discussed around the table. Engage with the topic being discussed and look for common themes being discussed to help move the conversation forward. For example, "Yes we could do that and then we could...".
5. Ask questions to encourage creative thinking. Spend time listening to others and asking questions to encourage others to open up and think expansively. Instead of asking 'why' questions, prompt creativity and brainstorming by asking 'how' and 'what' questions. Examples of questions could include: How did 'that' work last year? What could we do differently to achieve a greater impact? How can we differentiate this hackathon and make it memorable? What would the target audience really value?

6. Find ways to add your positive voice by commenting on other people's ideas such as, 'Great idea, I can see that working really well'. This illustrates your passion and builds connections.
7. Buy yourself time to think. If you get caught off guard with a question, using a phrase like 'that's a great question' can buy you time to think. Or simply tell them that you would like some time to think about it. Allow yourself time to formulate an appropriate response that contributes to building your confidence and credibility.
8. Convey ideas simply, but with enthusiasm. Be concise and clear to help everyone understand your idea, regardless of their area of expertise. Remove jargon where possible. Explain any technical terms where necessary. Passion and enthusiasm will showcase your authenticity and help people buy-in to your idea.
9. Stay on topic. Support the meeting agenda by staying on track and on time.
10. Don't be afraid to highlight issues or challenges. Approach these constructively by framing your point. For example, avoid phrases such as 'that won't work' and re-frame it so it is more constructive, For example, "I can see why that might work in x situation, however in this situation where x is at play, I am wondering whether that may pose a challenge?" Where possible, be solution focused. Identify possible alternatives or contingencies. This will demonstrate that you are positive, thinking strategically and focused on the end result.
11. Focus on the next steps and be pro-active in taking accountability. Be the person who asks about the next steps, so that everyone is clear what actions are being taken after the meeting. Volunteer to be assigned certain tasks rather than waiting to be asked.

## 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. Your 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.