

Help with presentation skills can boost performance

Greg Diaz looks more like a banker, which matters because he deals with senior bank management and directors; is noticeably more confident when he enters a room; and no longer sways and fidgets when he makes a presentation.

Thank you, Anna Soo Wildermuth.

Diaz is a senior compliance consultant at Thomas Compliance Associates, Inc., a Chicago company that provides compliance support to more than 400 banks nationwide. (So you know, TCA is a long-time client of mine. This column, however, is about Wildermuth and how she can help employees – maybe yours – who want to get better get better.)

Wildermuth, president of Personal Images, Inc., Elmhurst, is an image consultant who works on, among other things, personal presentation skills – everything from what you wear to how you say what you say.

She can make a difference – if, first, the employer is willing to invest in its employees and, second, individuals buy in. Success isn't automatic.

"It's a mindset," says TCA Managing Principal and CEO Tom Thomas. "You must want your staff to be the best it can be, but they must want to improve, too."

Not everyone does. "The individual who hires me is not a hard sell," Wildermuth says. "The people I work with sometimes are."

Diaz was ready. Over a four-month period of 10 two-hour sessions that is about to conclude, here is how Wildermuth worked with Diaz:

* "I had to do a presentation, one of our power points, just to her," Diaz says. "She taped it, and we watched. Then she turned the volume off" and the two watched again.

That's when Wildermuth and Diaz began to work on "The things I've been doing wrong in front of an audience. I got the audience's view, and I could see that I was swaying and fidgeting."

* The pair also worked on verbal communications. Now Diaz can adapt his message to different situations – a board presentation or teller-level training, for example. "I have the right vocabulary," he says.

* Wildermuth and Diaz even hit the men's clothing stores. "We've done some shopping," Diaz admits. "Suits. Shirts and ties."

Wildermuth has made suggestions about colors that work better with Diaz' skin tone. "I have some new ties, too," Diaz says. "She said some of my ties were too loud and 'We're not going to wear them anymore.' Now I have some that are appropriate for a board meeting – and some appropriate for an Hispanic gala."

Colors and clothes aside, here's what matters: Diaz is a more effective employee.

"My co-workers have noticed that I have a different kind of confidence when I walk into a room," Diaz says. "I don't have to search for words. I don't fidget so much. Even my family has noticed."

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