



DiverseUSA presents

IDEA Talks

HOW TO BRIEF AN EXECUTIVE ON DEIA

November 16, 2022

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“Leveraging Differences”



Upcoming Events

Gender Pronouns (How to Use Them and Why)

December 14, 2022

12:30-1:30



DEIA SUMMIT

February 1, 2023

Full Day





If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.

If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

Nelson Mandela



HOW TO BRIEF A SENIOR EXECUTIVE ON DEIA

NOVEMBER 16, 2022

12:30-1:30 PM



Chief Diversity Officers and DEIA practitioners in Federal, State and local Government are faced with the daunting challenge of leading their organizations' diversity efforts, educating the workforce on DEIA, writing strategic plans, conducting barrier analysis and other activities to comply with Federal Executive Orders. In doing so, they must inspire, motivate, and lead their teams to effectively accomplish this work. The effectiveness of an agency's DEIA program, however, may well hinge on Briefing a Senior Executive and gaining their buy-in concerning the DEIA strategy.

This DiverseUSA IDEAs lunch session will be led by **Reginald F. Wells, Ph.D.**, how is currently an Executive-in-Residence with the American University after serving nearly 35 years in the federal government and with state and local government agencies. He recently retired from the Social Security Administration (SSA), where he served as Deputy Commissioner of SSA's Office of Human Resources, Deputy Associate Commissioner for Disability Program Policy, and Senior Advisor in the Office of Disability and Income Security Programs. Dr. Wells also served as the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) and Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) for SSA during his 15-year tenure as Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources (DCHR). In his capacity as DCHR, Dr. Wells had direct responsibility for 400 employees and all human resources for the SSA nationally with an operating budget of \$120 million.

Learning Objectives:

- Approaches to understanding senior executive expectations
 - Common misconceptions
 - How to overcome the communication challenges that stifle open dialogue
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Dr. Reginald F. Wells

Reginald F. Wells, Ph.D., is an Executive-in-Residence with the American University after serving nearly 35 years with the federal government and additional time with State and local government agencies. He recently retired from the Social Security Administration (SSA), an independent agency of the United States government. He was named Deputy Commissioner of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of Human Resources effective July 15, 2002 after serving short tenures as Deputy Associate Commissioner for Disability Program Policy and Senior Advisor in the Office of Disability and Income Security Programs. Dr. Wells also served as the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) and Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) for SSA during his 15-year tenure as Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources (DCHR). In his capacity as DCHR, Dr. Wells had direct responsibility for 400 employees and all human resources for the SSA nationally with an operating budget of \$120 million.



Dr. Wells served as Deputy Commissioner of the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) from October 1994 to April 2002 in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). He shared with the Commissioner full responsibility for planning and directing 25 federal staff and programmatic activities, including the University Centers of Excellence, Developmental Disabilities Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems and Projects of National Significance with a program budget of over \$122 million.

From October 1997 to May 1998, in fulfillment of his responsibilities as a career civil servant during Presidential transition, Dr. Wells served as the Acting Commissioner of ADD/ACF/HHS. Prior to his appointment to ADD, Dr. Wells had 10 years of extensive public-sector executive leadership experience with the District of Columbia's (D.C.) Department of Human Services and four years as a senior manager with the Departments of Health and Rehabilitation and Citizen Services in Essex County, N.J. Dr. Wells has two years of private sector non-profit experience conducting policy research for the National Center on Black Aged (NCBA) in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare.

Dr. Wells has received numerous awards and recognitions, including a Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Executive, the Warner W. Stockberger Achievement Award, the David O. Cooke Award for Leadership in the Public Service, CHCO of the Year, and the Federal News Network Causey Award for his work in human resources. Additionally, Dr. Wells was appointed to President Barack Obama's White House Advisory Group on the Senior Executive Service, inducted into the National Academy of Public Administration as a Fellow, and recognized by the Partnership for Public Service as a Strategic Advisor to Government Executives (SAGE). During his tenure at SSA, Dr. Wells served as Chair and Vice Chair of the Baltimore Federal Executive Board; and served on the Board and as President of the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) from April 2019 to July 2020.

Dr. Wells received a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Temple University in Philadelphia. He earned his M.A. in psychology from Temple University and B.A. in psychology and sociology from American International College.

Key Executive Leadership Program Blog Post for June 2020

6/17/20

Dr. Malone's May blog post entitled "Don't Forget the People," offered an admonishment to those who choose to lead. Our workforces are suffering from stress, fearfulness, and loneliness and Dr. Malone concluded: "that as leaders we will need to work harder to love those we lead, and let them know it."

I am compelled, in this moment, to double down on Dr. Malone's admonition by emphasizing the importance of our connectivity with those under our supervision and the role leaders play in validating shared humanity; and I use recent events as a backdrop for my riff.

"A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In my opinion, leaders capable of molding the consensus we need today must be emotionally intelligent and of impeccable character. They must demonstrate high levels of integrity and show cultural competence; and they must be capable of empathic concern. I have found that it is hard to foster connection and inspire people to perform purposeful work well when those who lead them lack these essential personal attributes.

The recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks have sparked an emerging Zeitgeist reminiscent of my adolescent years. Unlike the images of the '60s, however, it is encouraging to see that the throngs of citizens flooding the streets in protest this time around reflect the rich diversity of America. It is hard to ignore the shocking images of abuse and murder of Black people now available for all to see courtesy of social media. People of conscience who once questioned the veracity of complaints coming from Black America and other communities of color around the globe have witnessed, in real time, what happens when a society remains in denial of its legacy of institutional and individual racism. Thank God they were disgusted and sickened by the images. Their outrage may portend what many of us have been waiting for: a broader coalition of people no longer willing to be complicit in preserving systemic racism through their silence and apathy.

Like COVID-19, recognition of the pandemic of systemic racism has touched a collective nerve; and that shared experience should have made it easier for leaders to make a visceral connection with employees, allow them to recognize and appreciate the emotional fatigue many are feeling, and take an action to mitigate their stress, fear and feelings of loneliness. Even if a leader's frame of reference makes it difficult to reach solidarity with protestors or employees who support their cause, it is not unreasonable for employees to expect leadership

to appreciate the importance of this moment by acknowledging their concerns. By offering messages of encouragement and reconciliation, and listening for the genuine anguish people are feeling, leaders create a safe space and create an opportunity for connecting with people in a meaningful way.

Some leaders did the right thing and stepped up to the needs of their people with messages of encouragement and condemnation of systemic racism and injustice. Leadership at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, American University, and the Partnership for Public Service are cases in point.

When leadership was slow to respond it was reported in the media that some employees actually took it upon themselves to speak truth to power in an effort to trigger action, such as the group of Black employees at the Department of Justice, reminding us that leadership can be situational and come from unexpected sources.

Regrettably, some leadership failed to heed the call all together or failed to heed the call in a timely manner. Those leaders failed to acknowledge the “elephant in the room” and, for employees looking to their leadership for reassurance, the silence was deafening. It is causing some to question the ability of their leaders to feel their pain and show the emotional intelligence and courageous authenticity required to lead a diverse and inclusive workforce effectively.

To Dr. Malone’s point, we have a lot of work to do. Not only do some leaders appear to be incapable of loving those they lead, but they appear to show wanton disregard for the feelings and sensibilities of their employees, or perhaps even worse show intolerably insulting indifference where genuine concern should be shown. The people we lead deserve our love and we need to enhance our ability to show them how much we love and respect them. It all begins with personal reflection (a look in the mirror) and a call for honest feedback from those we lead, especially those courageous individuals who have shown a willingness and ability to be authentically honest with us. Be willing to listen, connect, and allow yourself to feel what they feel. That is one way we can show them the love.

Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Reginald F. Wells, Ph.D.

Reginald F. Wells, Ph.D.

I wept when I first watched the video of George Floyd's "public lynching" at the hands of the Minneapolis police. I was preparing for my upcoming American University summer course, Race, Policy & Administration, and could not contain my emotions of anger and anguish. Perhaps my emotional reaction was primed by the examples of inequities and injustices I had compiled for my students portraying the history of American policy and practice enabling and operationalizing white supremacy and the enslavement, subjugation, dehumanization, demoralization and disenfranchisement of people of African descent since 1619. Perhaps it was the murder of this particular Black man so soon after learning of the recent senseless killings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. More likely, it was my identification with yet another slain Black man because of the shared experience I envisioned we had in common. Coming of age as a teenager in Philadelphia during the era of Frank Rizzo as Police Chief and Mayor, I braved encounters with the Philadelphia Police Department that could have "gone terribly wrong;" and the indignities and microaggressions I experienced at the hands of White police officers combined with the cautionary tales from parents remain with me still.

After the election of Barack Hussein Obama II as the 44th President, many declared the emergence of a new day in America, a "Post-racial America." Some of the progress of President Obama's eight years in office got characterized as transformative and fed into a narrative that America had turned a corner racially. Many members of the majority wanted to believe that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s fervent wish had come to fruition—Americans were finally judging people by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. Since that time, many journalists and scholars have effectively challenged the "Post-racial" narrative with some suggesting the pendulum of majority sentiment has gone back the other way and a backlash has come. History reminds us that there is usually a majority backlash whenever minorities, especially African Americans, achieve a degree of social or economic progress on a scale seemingly unacceptable to Whites.

Since becoming President of AAFEA, I have been asked why we continue to need professional organizations like the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA). My response is that professional affinity group organizations like AAFEA remain relevant and necessary because we offer members supports they do not receive naturally from other sources, such as:

- A framework for taking charge of their careers and receiving supports tailored to the unique challenges of African Americans in federal service;
- State-of-the-art leadership development and professional training that is consistent with their personal leadership agendas;
- Forums and focused conversations offering practical solutions to workplace challenges cultivating communities of interest and practice;
- Exclusive opportunities to mentor and be mentored by accomplished senior leaders;
- Safe spaces for having candid discourse on sensitive issues and receiving feedback without condemnation and negative attribution;
- The neurobiological benefits of social interconnectedness with others who share their experience, leadership passion and pursuit of purpose as civil servants;

- Opportunities to coalesce behind advocacy in favor of inclusive workplaces, advancement of African American leaders, and speak with one unified voice;
- Expanded networks and opportunities for affiliation and friendships with other professionals and organizations that share a common mission; and
- Experiences to reach back and pay it forward in support of maintaining diverse, qualified applicant pools for selecting federal talent.

The fact of the matter is that few organizations are equipped to offer the extraordinary culturally competent membership experience that we do. I hope you agree with me that AAFEA's mission and purpose are still very relevant. If you agree, then I hope you will encourage others to join us in solidarity because there is still much work to do in challenging systemic racism and demanding the full citizenship and opportunity we deserve. The racial disparities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the social unrest resulting from George Floyd's murder serve to confirm my assertion that AAFEA and other organizations devoted to the professional advancement of people of color continue to be necessary. Our commitment to noble causes such as human and civil rights, equal justice under the law, and diversity and inclusion enable us to offer even greater professional excellence that contributes to the best of public service both home and abroad.

[Last Revised June 7, 2020]

**Harvard
Business
Review**

Presentation Skills

How to Brief a Senior Executive

by Grant T. Harris

November 10, 2020



Claus Christensen/ Getty Images

Summary. You can always count on outside circumstances to affect your pitch to a senior leader, so prepare to get your point across under... [more](#)

Briefing a senior executive is an art and adept White House staffers do it every day under the most stressful of circumstances. They're masters of compressing the right information into the right amount of time, no matter how complex the topic or short the briefing. The skills needed to brief the chief executive in the Oval Office are directly applicable to briefing *any* executive in the C-suite.

There's no shortage of advice on how to brief a senior leader: keep it short, front-load the message, and so on. These are solid pointers, but they undervalue the interpersonal elements that are critical to a successful briefing. Your presentation can fail or succeed before it begins and your odds are worse if you skimp on the personal in favor of the PowerPoint.

The following tips are based on battle scars from serving twice in the White House and from years of briefing senior corporate, nonprofit, and government leaders, as well as teaching briefing skills in seminars around the country. They're important whether the briefings take place in person or virtually.

Before You Walk into (or Log into) the Room

Identify the “crucial nodder.” At a critical moment in the briefing, the president will turn to a trusted advisor and look for a facial expression to affirm what you're saying. You need that person to nod “yes.” It's a quiet gesture that gives the boss comfort; it shows that your idea is sound and all of the right people have been consulted. Anything short of a supportive nod

will invite follow-up questions and sow doubt in the room. Even worse, a look askance or a non-endorsement from a chief advisor can spell the quick death of your pitch.

Before you present your idea, figure out who the crucial noddors are (it may be multiple people and it may vary based on the issue) and consult them in advance. While the executive you're briefing may not have a crucial nodder, chances are they do have people whose opinions they trust more than others. You need their support — or at least a sense from them that you're facing an uphill battle.

Know your boss's "tells." If you spend a lot of time with the senior executive, then you should know the nonverbal cues that indicate things like "go deeper on that point" or "speed it up." If not, seek out people who regularly brief and interact with them. Ask what to look for to know if the boss is annoyed and whether there's any way to determine if it's because of something you're saying or if it's unrelated. Also ask how best to respond to negative signals to try to shift the mood. Advance understanding of your boss's body language will help you keep your cool and pivot in the right direction during the briefing.

Find out how the boss engages with the material. People vary in how they react to and absorb information. A senior leader I briefed in the White House would question and push back (hard) on every point, large or small, in every briefing. Some colleagues found this intimidating and eventually turned into "yes" people and lost his respect. Other people jumped into a fight every time; they appeared closed minded and agitated him. The colleagues who earned this leader's respect were the ones who picked their

battles wisely. They went with the “yes” where they could and judiciously pushed back when it counted most, showing flexibility but also confidence in their views. If you go in with an awareness of a leader’s engagement style, you’ll be better prepared to effectively convey information and respond to pushback.

Plan for gradations of success and failure. Of course, you should identify what you need from a meeting before walking in the door. But here’s a twist: Don’t think of it in binary terms of success and failure. Walk into the meeting with your “ask” but also with contingency plans for multiple scenarios of success and failure. If the conversation is trending toward “no,” you can offer a scaled-back version of your proposal. Likewise, if your idea is succeeding, have some additional ideas for add-ons or offer ways to accelerate the timetable. In short, think of how you can achieve a limited victory instead of a complete failure, keep an idea alive to fight another day, or, in the best case scenario, go bigger and faster in implementation.

Once You’re in the Room

Read the room, not your notes. Whether the briefing is in person or virtual, you need to read cues and body language. You should know your material cold by this point so that you’re not fumbling with your notes; your mental energy should be focused on reading the room, looking for openings, and watching out for pitfalls. If there’s a corollary to this rule, it’s “take cues, not notes.” (In fact, when possible, have someone else take notes so you can be fully in the moment.)

Stay laser focused on your task. Time pressure, competing interests, and unforeseen circumstances can threaten to pull you off task during the meeting, but don't lose focus. Your ask is your priority and why you're there, so dedicate all of your mental energy to looking for opportunities to advance it. If the conversation gets off track, a question causes the meeting to digress, or someone starts to rant about a pet topic, pre-plan several ways to redirect the conversation and get what you need. It's a rare talent to be dogged but deft at the same time, and of course, you don't want to look like a stiff or a robot. In a fast-paced work environment, though, meetings often get interrupted or cut short. Try not to deviate or raise unnecessary details to reduce the chance that a briefing will be interrupted before your ask is addressed.

Practice the art of staying silent. You've floated your idea or posed your question. The discussion has taken off and now you need to be exceedingly strategic about whether and when to chime in. The executive is engaging others in the room or thinking aloud. By speaking at the wrong moment, you risk derailing the line of thought or annoying your boss. There's no need to unnecessarily affirm something said or show off your knowledge. Alternatively, if the discussion is trending against you, take your best shot — rather than all the shots — at jumping in to try to get things back on track. Often, *not* speaking at the wrong time is just as important as saying the right thing at the right time.

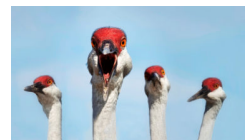
No matter how well you prepare, circumstances beyond your control, from an unrelated crisis to the boss's stress level that day, will affect your pitch. While you cannot guarantee success, focusing on the interpersonal dynamics ahead of time and improving your situational awareness once in the room will make you more effective. You'll be better placed to communicate the right message under pressure, whether you're briefing the president of the United States, a C-suite executive, or any leader.

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Grant T. Harris is CEO of Connect Frontier LLC and advises companies on doing business in emerging markets. He has twice served at the White House and teaches interactive seminars on How to Brief the President (or Any Senior Leader)TM in corporate, nonprofit, university, and policy settings. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Global Management at Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern, and a Lecturer at Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley. Follow him on Twitter.

Recommended for You

Presenting to Management? Be Prepared for the Tough Questions.





DiverseUSA

"Leveraging Differences"

IDEA Talks

How to Brief a Senior Executive on DEIA

November 16, 2022

Additional Resources:

"How to begin the conversation on diversity and inclusion in the workplace"

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-begin-conversation-diversity-inclusion-workplace-perrine-farque/>

"Getting over your fear of talking about diversity"

<https://hbr.org/2019/11/getting-over-your-fear-of-talking-about-diversity>

