Introduction

My goal is to give you simplicity in a world of complexity.

-D.A.Benton

It’s estimated that in 2015 the work force will be comprised of approximately one-third Millennials, one-third GenX, and one-third Boomers – with a few Traditionalists not ready to walk off the playing field. It could get funky. The only digital interpersonal relationship and communication rule will be: There are no clear rules.

You will be in one of those generational groups. Regardless of your age or time in the workplace, in your pursuit to be better, you will still have to separate yourself from contenders in a competitive environment. That goes whether you are working face-to-face or on your laptop, desktop, tablet, or mobile device. You have to put yourself out there, elevate your game, and stand-out even when others can’t see you physically.

So, how do you differentiate yourself from others in a cyber world? How do you craft the most masterful message to establish a unique executive brand? How do you take that up a notch? What are the little things that make people think of you? How do you make them remember you for the right reasons? How do you put your best foot forward in the virtual business space? And how important is it really to take the physical experience and replace it with a virtual one?

The truth is you cannot ignore the virtual world.

Well, maybe you can, until some embarrassing or inappropriate footage of you gets posted online and your next job title ends up being “assistant to the summer intern” while you get written off with three words: “considered not ready.”
“If you want to avoid becoming obsolete in the 21st Century, you better get really good with today’s technology or sleep with someone who is.”

**Note to My Readers**

The set apart quotes sprinkled throughout the book are from CEOs, CTOs, CMOs, CIOs, CFOs, CPOs, entrepreneurs, free agents, techie-geeks, MBA students, some business misfits, and a professional dropout or two that I interviewed for this book. They are virtual executives from the U.S. as well as New Zealand, Afghanistan, Korea, Prague, China, Japan, India, Scotland, and Belgium. They expressed themselves so uniquely that I didn’t want to muddy their comments with any rewriting.

No matter your age or the stage of your career, you have to be unsurpassed at your job: brilliant, inspiring, authentic, skilled, undaunted, composed, honest, and a good example to emulate. To be a contender today, you must be that person uniformly online as well as offline. If you don’t embrace all modes of communication at your disposal, you will fall behind so badly you may never catch up. With electronic and digital communication, we might all look the same – except where we make an effort to differentiate ourselves. We are inventing new forms of communication and technologies all the time so I am not attempting to detail the latest advances available to you—which is better covered in a blog, post, or online article —but rather your attitude and approach in utilizing technology.
“Today, you have the WWW – where there is a will there is a way.”

ONLINE/OFFLINE: What it takes to be Successful

(NOTE: In every chapter, the Online/Offline sections like this one provide professional development essentials required to move up and ahead in your career and to go back and forth without a glitch between working face to face or monitor to monitor. Consider this material the timeless, behind the scenes attitudes, values, and actions that will help you succeed as a CEO, or in another leadership position, online and offline in the new digital age.)

There are only two reasons to read self-help books: To become more successful and to make more money. If that is what you want, I hope this tome helps.

To benefit fully from Virtual Executive it helps to understand what “successful” means. My definition of it stems from a professional career spanning over thirty-five enjoyable years working with CEOs and their organizations. From a myriad of experiences I’ve found some things to be universally true about individual success.

The ultimate personal triumph is:

-You are working towards, on the brink, or have met your dream career goals while you remain a solid citizen. You are viewed as a “good”
person: responsible, honest, and fair. You have not, will not, and do not let the business political system corrupt you. The upshot is your co-workers truly like, trust, and respect you, and your family members do too.

-When you communicate—which you have to do all of the time with everyone in some manner or another—you are deemed impressive, memorable, credible, genuine, trusted, liked, competent, confident, comfortable, cool, calm, and collected. You set a good example of personal leadership and you help infuse it in others.

-You feel broadly adequate and treat others as broadly adequate too. That means you expect acceptance for what you bring to the table (which doesn’t mean you are owed anything) and you give it to others. You chose to accept the motive and character of others; you do not judge. Any and every one gets the benefit of the doubt until the person absolutely, unequivocally, indisputably, and undeniably proves to merit otherwise in motive and character. Even then, you do not stand in judgment; you just separate yourself from him or her. That means you fire the person if it is a subordinate; quit or get out from under if it’s your boss; or separate yourself if it’s a friend or colleague.

- People do not care if your style is dictatorial or participative so much; they care if you have good will towards them.
- You fully appreciate the Golden Online/Offline Rule of “do unto others as you’d have them do unto you.” You limit inappropriate, incorrect, flat-out bad behavior and you don’t attack a person’s character or motive.

- You understand that when others treat you negatively, it’s because they themselves feel inadequate, do not feel “okay,” are having a bad day, or are upset, and they often attempt to transfer those feelings onto others. However, you do not let them do that to you.

- You are equally effective in communicating these positive attributes that have contributed to your success whether you are face to face, talking on a phone, or e-mailing half way around the world.

That foundation in mindset is what it takes to be successful. It’s what separates you apart from others in the same quest.

____________________________________________________________________

YOUR (AND MY) WORLD IS ONE OF COMPLETE RESPONSIBILITY BUT INCOMPLETE CONTROL
So what do you need to do to succeed in this day and age? Be able to move seamlessly between the multitudes of demands from:

- the C-suite executive who wants to meet face to face
- the senior manager who requires a video conference call with you and project members in Sao Paulo, Tokyo, and Toledo
- the junior manager who writes you a flurry of e-mails
- the new-hire who sends a blizzard of text messages

Traditionally, business has been done in-person and face-to-face, where others can see your great jaw line and experience your firm handshake. However, being in the flesh is fairly restrictive compared to the various communication channels available to you today.

With video on their smart phone, tablet, or laptop, people you conduct business with can still see your eyes and your nervous or relaxed body language; observe your shining or frowning facial expression; experience your charisma; and hear your melodious or monotone voice. While talking, listening, watching, and interacting with you, they also can do an Internet search and instantly find photos or video of you, read reports you’ve taken part of or projects you’ve been involved in, hear your voice in speeches, and scan articles you’ve written or in which you’ve been quoted. They can access online communities to read your professional profile, likes, people you follow, and those who follow you. Today, you can blog, post, comment, tag, e-mail, text message, video chat at any time to not only find out about others, but to show more of who you are.
“When I Google someone or view their social networking posting history, I get to see if the person is a one-shot-hot-shot-empty-suit or a sustained solid citizen. As my Dad used to say, ‘the years carve a man in different ways’.”

You have the option to utilize all kinds of communication: online and offline. Online trumps offline all to heck, though, because the great number of communication channels increases your chance of actually communicating with others. There is a greater possibility of hearing others and being heard.

You don’t need to be in the flesh to demonstrate your brilliance, skill, and character; you just need electricity to power up and recharge your devices.

_______

6 out of 7 American homes

have broadband Internet service

9 out of 10 Americans are

online

_______

The Benefits of Online Communication

You get things done a whole lot faster, cheaper, and with less effort across time zones, geographic distances, and to a larger number of people. If a person that you need to interact with can’t or won’t right now, you can send an e-mail, text message, or leave a voice-mail. And ditto from him or her to you.
You have a world of information a click away. It used to be politicians, global leaders, and CEOs of multi-nationals owned the bulk of information access. With the Web you can gain just as much data, just as fast as anyone. You have accessibility to the same knowledge as anyone else in the world.

There is a lesser amount of instant prejudice and bias based on physical things that (unfairly) but stereotypically might work against you like: short/tall; handsome/homely; slow/fast; skinny/heavyset, or young/old.

“My hair is thinning at a rate that annoys me and I’m going soft around the middle, but no one sees. I like that. I can hide my tears and sweaty handshake plus work naked at home. Furthermore I don’t have to smell the person in the office cubicle next to me who pumps 29 sprays of cologne on himself before he goes to lunch – and, yes, I counted.”

You don’t have to respond in real time as if you would if you’re facing someone in person. You can take a moment or two to mull over your reactions, collect your thoughts, read the notes that others can’t see you have laid out in front of you, and be organized to position yourself how you want in a phone call, e-mail, or voice or text message.
You can truly absorb what the other person is saying when you don’t have to engage in the physicality of face to face, such as mirroring, matching, pacing, posturing. You can focus on what is being said on the phone or written on the monitor. Government trained professional problem solvers separate themselves in rooms when trying to come up with solutions. In person human dynamics impede creativity when people take the power chair, use body movements to intimidate, measurably raise or lower voice, pound the table, etc. Digital discussions are more democratic.

You can be communicating anytime and anywhere in the world without having to pack a bag, drive to the airport, make it through a TSA pat down, sit squashed for three hours in an airplane seat between two passengers who should have been cut off three beers ago, taxi to the meeting, only to find it postponed or canceled. Electronic gadgets eliminate downtime.

Online you have software that enables you to translate languages so you don’t have semantics issue like you do in person.

You have many more options to present yourself, your expertise, positions, and opinions through your posts, profiles, blogs, tweets, and videos. Those same sources allow you to be vetted easily. Since people learn and are influenced in various ways, you can give them a mixture of approaches—seeing, reading, listening, experiencing, and getting others opinions.
There are more opportunities to be monitored online than in person. When observed, recorded, and documented you get more opportunities for feedback. When you work with that feedback, you improve.

You get a little mystique around you. Some unknown elements about each other levels the playing field; can break down hierarchy; encourage a little audacity; and provide some positive anticipation.

Anonymity gives you bravery. You can express your true opinions without having to face others. This, of course, is a double-edged sword because you might say or do something you wouldn’t normally since you don’t have to eyeball the person or group to whom you’re speaking!

You save trees. And when you use less paper you require less filing; you experience less paper degradation from age, bugs, or dogs eating it.

Your community benefits from a virtual workforce when you take into account the number of reduced automobile emissions and traffic on roads, increased safety, fewer parking lots needed, and more room for vegetation.

Your company benefits through increased job satisfaction and productivity; decreased work place real estate costs, energy use, and other fixed costs.
87% of sample polled desired to work virtually

TO BE A GOOD EXECUTIVE YOU HAVE TO BE ADEPT IN ALL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Technical savvy alone will not make you a good executive; that requires being a good person and a hard worker with common sense and good people skills. If you do not have such qualities, no amount of practical, technological understanding will save you. If you do possess all these traits, you have to demonstrate them not only in face to face interaction, but also when you text, e-mail, phone, video chat, or engage in digital networking.

“Times have changed due to technology but human nature remains the same.”

In two of my previous books, Executive Charisma: Six Steps to Mastering the Art of Leadership (McGraw-Hill) and CEO Material: How to Be a Leader in Any Organization (McGraw-Hill), I fully discuss conventional, in-person communication. In this book, however, I explore the online presentation of self and how to manage and lead using the communication channels open to you. I am not writing as a technologist; I would be outdated before you finish your dinner this evening. I’m writing as your coach.
to give you better ways to use electronic gadgets to get the things done that you need to do as you seamlessly move between online and offline communication.

---

**ONLINE/OFFLINE: Be a Solid Citizen**

Having upright character is entirely self-serving: You feel good about yourself and you sleep soundly. You don’t fear how your actions will look in the newspaper or in the blogosphere. You need not agonize over how your kids, partner, parents, friends, classmates, neighbors, and co-workers will view you. Being a solid citizen is the ultimate de-stressor. Consider these three truths:

- Fame, popularity, riches go away; only character endures.
- Ethos is established at the top and you’re the top in your world.
- People want to trust you so make it easy for them to especially when they can’t see you.

“I have plenty of faults but I try to do the right thing.”

Your upbringing, socialization, religious training, and cultural environment affect your predisposition. But you chose who you want to be going forward; it’s your decision at this point in time. Upright actions are all due to you. You have possession of your life when you own up to personal responsibility. You don’t when you won’t. Your decision as it relates to character becomes your moral fiber.
“There are two reasons to do the right thing. 1. A sense of right and wrong. 2. You’re going to get caught.”

Eight days a week you will encounter temptation to break your personal code of conduct. One college conducted a sting to test cheating. Of the 600 students who took the test one-third cheated. When a student was interviewed about it, he said, “What’s the big deal, everybody does it all the time.”

“The true test of character is doing the right thing even when no one sees.”

To do what’s right, you merely make one of two choices: be honest or be dishonest. That’s it. It’s not complicated.

And you don’t:

-intentionally mislead
-straddle the line
-disseminate false information
-break promises
-go back on your word
-waltz around
-exaggerate
-or participate in other chicanery
Also, these words do not come out of your mouth or get put into an e-mail:

“Everyone else does it.”

“It’s a victimless crime.”

“I can hide it.”

“It doesn’t matter how it gets done, I just have to get it done.”

“Well, maybe just this one time….”

“No one will ever know.”

“I’ll just shred (or burn) that document.”

“What’s in it for me?”

“How much can we get away with?”

“I’d say anything goes.”

“I will deny we had this discussion.”

“We didn’t have this conversation.”

“This is a non meeting.”

“Is this legal?”

“Nothing baffles people full of trick and duplicity than simple straightforward integrity.”

So if you signed Oprah’s No Phone Zone Pledge, the national campaign started in 2009 against texting or talking on your cell phone while driving, you shouldn’t do any of these things behind the wheel either: scratch off a lottery ticket, read the Bible, eat a bowl
of cereal, change your clothes, or paint your fingernails despite the fact it’s not stated in
the pledge (all of which I’ve seen people do).

The far end of lacking integrity is breaking the law. There are corporate
scoundrels who are involved in insider stock trading, securities fraud, wire fraud, money
laundering, bribes, Ponzi schemes, and kickbacks (just a short list of potential options).
People steal, cheat, and lie online and off. Experts report that today cyber crime is more
prevalent than drug crime.

In this day and age, you will be found out. You might go to jail. You will lose
trust from family and friends and you will never get it back – even when you are being
truthful.

Integrity is pretty simple: show up, get in fast with the truth, let go of the
outcome.

“Sometimes liars end up as a boss but they are more likely to last a year, not a career.”

_________

We are lied to up to 200 times a day

Maybe that’s why the United States

has 5% of the world population

but 66% of the world’s lawyers

_____________________________________

FOUR ACTIONS OF A DYNAMIC VIRTUAL PRESENCE
There are basically two kinds of information:

1. data
2. anything pertaining to self

The first type is self-explanatory. The second type of information is what you hear first, remember longest, and act upon the most and fastest. Just as information that pertains to others is what they hear first, remember longest, and act upon the most and fastest. So find out what that information is. Effective online communication delivers empathy – “you understand and you care”. Within the first twenty seconds of a face to face meeting and first two seconds of a phone call or e-mail you have to give the person the number two type of information.

“In detached communication you need to get better at how to get better.”

To effectively connect and present yourself online ask early and often of those with whom you deal, “How do you prefer to communicate?” Then use the channel that person prefers over the one you prefer.

One CEO I interviewed for this book has an aversion to cell phones and e-mail and prefers leaving voice messages using his iPad. Another CEO prefers yellow stickie notes left on his desk for incoming messages. And a different one installed – in 2011 – a loudspeaker system in his company headquarters over which he broadcasts everything from simple directives to the latest news several times a day.
So one good potential first action to having a dynamic presence in a virtual workplace is to find out the preferred communication channel of the person, or people, you are speaking with and accommodate this preference.

A second action is to strive for the common theme, the “something” that connects you together no matter how far apart – age, experience, culture, language, geography, and the rest that could be separators instead of unite-ers.

A third action is for you to consistently and persistently work to leave a positive lasting impression regardless of the communication channel you use. Although technology enables you to do things more quickly, to bond and connect today you will get further faster by being slower and deliberate in your communication. There is a time and a place for phone calls or texting, e-mails, video chat, and social networks – pick the right one based on what type of information, type one or type two, you are conveying.

With overwhelming technological advances it is easy to lose sight of the human aspect of communication because we do not have to face people and actually see them in the flesh. People attempt to process you and treat you like a commodity or transaction as compared to developing meaningful interaction. It’s up to you to fight that habit in yourself and in allowing others to do it to you. That’s your fourth action.

The following chapters are to help communicate with other’s preferences as well as yours; seek affinity and sincere connections; be the best that’s in you and then make that better; and help make your missives personal and not a process.

As you read this book, feel free to e-mail me with your own insights and experience (debra@debrabenton.com). Keep in mind throughout that Technology means
little compared to you as a human being. Everything you do needs to generate trust, as that is what people are looking for from you online and off.