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Ask Jill

By Jill Kanter

Competing with a Friend

Dear Jill,

I'm a senior consultant in a large firm, and am interested in moving out of consulting and into industry. I've recently learned of a great opportunity at a company where I've always wanted to work, and feel that my background is a perfect fit. However a colleague and close friend, who is also quietly looking around, told me in confidence that she is actively pursuing the same opportunity. I want to apply, but am concerned about how this will affect our friendship—I know she'll be upset, and we see each other every day! How should I handle this?

Thanks,
Leslie

Dear Leslie,

I've worked with many clients in similar situations and can appreciate the complexities involved. However, one thing is very clear: it wouldn't serve you or your friendship to overlook a chance at your dream job—even to protect a close friend's feelings. What friendship could withstand that kind of sacrifice?

As consultants, you've probably both been in situations where you've competed with other firms for the same piece of business. In such cases, one not only expects to face competitors, but may even respect the strength of their proposals. I encourage you to take a similar perspective in your job search, depersonalizing things as much as possible. Plan a time to sit down with your friend, and have an honest conversation. Let her know about your strong interest in this opportunity, as well as your concern for your friendship. Then be ready to practice your best listening, keeping in mind that she may need time to collect her thoughts. This could well be the first of many such discussions, as you see your way through this sensitive period.

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Competition between friends is never easy. It requires both being true to yourself, and honoring the relationship you've developed. If you can give each other the space you need, as well as find ways to communicate, your friendship may actually strengthen as a result of this ordeal!

Building Self Confidence and Performance

Dear Jill,

I recently was given a choice project that involves presenting to senior level teams throughout the organization. I don't have much experience speaking to groups this senior, and have gotten off to a bumpy start. Some executives fire questions at me, and I find this unnerving (more due to their challenging style, than the content of their questions). I often become self-conscious, and then have difficulty thinking clearly. This really frustrates me, because I can always think of strong responses after these meetings! My self-confidence is dwindling, and I don't want to blow this opportunity. Do you have any suggestions?

*Thanks for your help,
Mary*

Dear Mary,

Congratulations on being chosen for this project. It sounds like you've got what it takes, and just need to gain comfort in communicating to a new audience. I suggest that you try practicing a powerful technique called positive imagery. Sports psychologists have conducted a great deal of research on how athletes use this tool to improve their performance. I've found it can be a very effective performance enhancing technique for clients in business environments.

Plan to start at least one day before your next executive meeting. Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably. Then begin by slowly relaxing your body, from head to toe. When you feel very relaxed, guide your mind in imagining an optimal run-through of the entire meeting—almost as though you're watching it on video. Allow yourself to imagine what you'll be doing and how you'll be feeling:

- before the meeting (e.g., relaxed, confident, looking forward to being of service by providing key information)
- as you enter the meeting (e.g., steady, sharp, eager to engage)
- during the meeting (e.g., clear, concise, magnetic, humorous)

Then visualize what the executives in the session will be thinking and experiencing:

- before the meeting (e.g., looking forward to your presentation, in great need of the information that you'll provide)
- during the meeting (e.g., actively listening, completely absorbed, highly engaged)
- following the meeting (e.g., impressed by your performance, confident in your abilities, greatly helped by the information that you shared)

Most of my clients are quite surprised by the degree of improvement they experience in performing activities that they have visualized. In general, the more you practice positive imagery, the easier it becomes, and the greater its positive effect. Good luck, Mary, and hang in there!

If you have a question about a leadership or team issue in the workplace, please write to AskJill@womenandbiz.com.

Jill Kanter is a management consultant, speaker and writer with expertise in leadership development, team effectiveness and organizational change. She brings a strong practical approach and highly developed intuition to projects incorporating executive coaching, team development, workplace improvement and career empowerment.

Jill has worked extensively with clients in large, dynamic organizations in the financial services, hospital, healthcare, telecommunications and high-tech industries, as well as institutions of higher education and a variety of non-profits. She founded her firm in 1990, after earning her Ed.M. from Harvard University. You can reach Jill at 617-469-0100 or jdk@jillkanter.com. For more information about Jill Kanter visit her website at www.jillkanter.com.

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