



AVE: 36764.01 (ZAR)

Transformation | Of Transforming Interest

CONFIDENCE

OWN THE ROOM

It has been two decades since Jules Newton had a vision; an Avocado vision. From humble beginnings, the core focus of the business was in training. In essence, empowering people to develop to their full potential. Avocado Vision has stood the test of time and as it has evolved, it has enthusiastically embraced the principles of Transformation. In 2015, Newton sold Avocado Vision to BTS, an international market leader in supporting organisations with their Leadership, Strategic Alignment, Business Acumen and Sales challenges. Avo now has the benefit of BTS’s international best practice and resources, as they meaningfully continue to participate in a Transforming South Africa.

“Confidence is more than a way of thinking, it’s a lifestyle”.

We’ve seen them walk into a room and claim it in seconds. Thuli Madonsela, Pravin Gordhan, Julius Malema, Mmusi Maimane or Cyril Ramaphosa, though not ones for having much in common regarding their politics, they all have a sense of unshakeable confidence. When they take to the podium, it is with absolute certainty. One couldn’t possibly imagine them quaking in their collective boots, behind the curtains, while waiting to go on stage. Their styles are all different. From the quiet confidence of Gordhan, to the bellowing certainty of Malema, it is not their politics which intrigues us today but rather their sense of presence and how they achieve the same thing in such different ways. Ahhh, what would we give to present ourselves with half as much aplomb?

Building confidence, however, is a long-term game. It doesn’t come overnight and it’s not something they sell at the local Woolies - though wouldn’t that be cool?! It takes a concerted effort, because even those with killer confidence have moments of crippling self-doubt. So, how do you start the journey of self-assurance?

Know Your Stuff

Prep it! Know it! Believe it! Show up! You rob yourself of your own self-confidence when you are unprepared for a presentation or meeting. You need to know your subject matter well. That’s not to say that you need to know absolutely everything but you do need to know what you are talking about. So, prepare enough that you put your own best foot forward. You are presenting because you know your stuff, so even if it’s your first time out, you know the subject matter well enough to anticipate some of the audience’s questions. Run through some of those as part of your preparation. Being prepared not only makes you look good, it gives you the confidence to face a room and own a situation.

If you have prepared enough and have presented with confidence, then when that single question that you don’t know the answer to arises, you won’t mind saying that you don’t have the answer and will need to get back to the person. You won’t feel the need to bluster and blither until you lose all credibility in the room. Which brings us to fudging it. If you don’t know the answer to a question, rather say so, instead of chattering on hoping to baffle the questioner enough that they forget what they asked. They won’t. The room won’t and you will look like a nit.

There’s nothing wrong with saying you don’t know, or that you will revert to a question. However, when you stutter and stumble for answers, it makes you look ill prepared.

The Best Version of You

It doesn't matter if you plod around at home in last week's gym pants (but... you know... don't). It matters that when you leave the house, you leave looking like the person you wish you actually were. A nice suit or elegant outfit acts like a knight's suit of armour. It prepares you for the outside world. It allows you to don the mask of confidence you wish you really had. You've prepared, right? Well, part of that prep will be understanding your audience. Reading the nuances of the team or client you'll be working with, means you want to aim to dress in a similar way to them, or one level up. Never underestimate the power of reaching someone on their wavelength by mirroring the way they talk and look. It makes people feel more comfortable with you, and like you're 'one of us'.

You need to beware of the Christmas tree approach. Too much accessorising or extreme bling (think jangly bracelets, dangly earrings or BA Baracus-style gold chains) will just distract you, making you fiddle, and will ultimately detract from what you are saying. Keep it clean, keep it suitable and make sure it all fits.

Know Your Body

Let's do a little experiment. In your next few meetings. Watch those who are confident (not in a don't-blink-watching-every-move-super-stalker kind of way, but just keep a gentle eye on them). Watch their gestures, watch the space they take up in a meeting, how they sit and how they stand. Now, watch those who are perceived as less powerful. Watch their space and their gestures.

Your body sends a message of power. So often in meetings we see people (generally women), who try to take up as little space as possible. Their elbows are tucked in, they sit on the edge of their seat and they sit very symmetrically. All of these are your body's way of apologising for being in the room. It's saying that at any moment you expect to be asked to leave because you aren't the right person for the job.

We aren't saying that you need to languish in your chair, but if at any point you feel like you shouldn't be in the room, affirm to yourself that you are meant to be there. Sit in your chair comfortably. Claim the space in front of you and speak up. Use your gestures more. Open up your body. If you feel deserving, you will reflect that in your body language. There needs to be a congruence between what you feel inside and what you reflect on the outside.

Baby Steps, Baby

Part of feeling confident is knowing that you've achieved something previously. For some, that can mean finishing a varsity degree, for others, it comes from work achievements. No matter the source, achievement helps you feel confident and in control. It allows you to attempt new adventures, then hopefully achieve them. You begin to recognise that you can do 'stuff' and that makes you confident enough to try more. A never ending circle, if you will. So, set small goals, achievable ones. Don't begin by planning on taking over the world, start small and build up to the HAG's (hairy, audacious goals!)

Constantly grow – by learning, asking questions and seeking to gain understanding. The weakest person in a room is never the one asking questions or seeking clarification on an acronym they don't understand. The weakest person in a room is the one silently trying to fathom out what everyone else is talking about. Let people answer your questions. People love to feel smart and answering your questions allows them to feel just that; smart and in control. So question, question, question!

Fake It Till You Make It, But Still Be You!

I never liked this saying, until I had to use it. I've walked into more boardrooms than I can count, quaking inside, yet outwardly smiling, breathing and looking like my biggest worry is how much milk is in my tea (a great trick in parenting too, if you can manage it). Faking it has two big advantages. The first is that your audience buys it (as long as you are as sincere as possible), the second is that as you fake it, it becomes easier and easier to actually become confident. It's a little like persuading yourself one day at a time to be as awesome as your Facebook timeline always says you are.

The trick here is to be you at the same time. You need to appear to be confident, yet you need to build that on your own foundation. Building your own confident persona takes considerable effort. If you are trying to appear confident by ripping off Jack Nicholson in 'A Few Good Men' (you know – the 'You can't handle the truth' speech), then chances are your gestures, the tone of your voice and body language will give you away in a second. It's not authentic, it's not you, and it feels weird, which is why the audience will lose faith in what you are saying. If you can't be authentically confident, those around you will smell it, which will undermine their trust in you.

There is so much to building a long lasting foundation of confidence, with many, many tricks you can use to build it correctly. The best advice is to trust yourself. Trust that what you have to say is valuable but, more importantly, make sure you believe it. When you are passionate about something it becomes a lot easier to confidently and authentically spread that message. You must forget what you don't know and concentrate on what you do and that passion is infectious, and gets confused for confidence!



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