

Learning executive presence from the great Lord Hanuman

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Lord Hanuman is known for his physical prowess. The way he crossed the Indian ocean to reach Lanka to locate Devi Sita and how he went to the Himalayas to fetch the life saving medicine, Sanjeevani are very well known. But a less well known side of the Lord is his extraordinary ability to communicate depending on the context. He was a role model if ever there was any for executive presence. Lord Hanuman had an extraordinary knack for carefully listening, responding appropriately, choosing the right words and sentences and making everyone in the meeting comfortable. This story is based on Lord Hanuman's meeting with Lord Rama. It is taken from the Kishkindakanda of the Ramayana. This is the fourth section of the epic after Balakanda, Ayodhyakanda and Aranyakanda.

Sugriva is in exile in Rishyamuka, having been forced out of his kingdom by elder brother Vali. On seeing Rama and Lakshmana wielding powerful weapons and entering his hideout, Sugriva is alarmed. Mortally scared of Vali, Sugriva becomes highly agitated and deliberates with his followers on what to do next.

Hanuman remains calm and tells Sugriva: "O chief of monkeys I do not see here any sign of the cruel Vali, of whom you are afraid.....O good natured Sugriva, you are afraid of your elder brother Vali as he is evil minded and sinful. But I do not see any reason for you to be frightened as he is not found anywhere here."

Sugriva however remains apprehensive: 'Who would not be apprehensive of these two long armed and large eyed individuals comparable to sons of gods wielding arrows, bows and swords.....One has to identify these men roaming in disguise. These are not trustworthy and could even be our enemies, making us believe them so as to attack us when we are not vigilant.'

Sugriva then tells Hanuman to assume an ordinary form and approach them. He asks Hanuman to gain the confidence of Rama and Lakshmana, ascertain their purpose, and more specifically find out about their intentions.

Hanuman agrees to follow Sugriva's instructions and then proceeds towards Rama and Lakshmana, assuming the guise of a mendicant. Approaching Rama and Lakshmana in all humility, Hanuman greets them and then addresses them respectfully:

'You both fair in complexion, resemble royal sages or gods. You appear like ascetics and pursue vows in austerity. How come, you are present here, as if to frighten the animals and other creatures roaming this forest?'

'Gazing at the trees on the banks of Pampa, you both appear in brilliant complexion as if to enhance the beauty of the auspicious river water. Though young, courageous and with handsome shoulders, you seem to sigh in exhaustion. And though you look like ascetics robed in bark, you seem to terrify these creatures.'

'Having the gaze of a lion, both of you are heroic in your stance. As each of you hold a bow resembling the rainbow, you seem to be mighty warriors eager to annihilate the enemies. With the valour of superior bulls and your shoulders resembling elephant's trunks, you look magnificent, handsome and brilliant. No doubt, you are the best among the humans.'

'You are young and radiant like the gods. This king of mountains (Rishyamuka) dazzles with your brilliance. Although you deserve to be sovereigns, how is it that you are here (in the forest)?'

'Both of you appear alike, with eyes like lotus petals and locks of matted hair. You look like heroes descending from the world of the gods. You look like the Sun and the Moon dropped incidentally on this earth. With shoulders like those of a lion and the majesty of energetic bulls, you broad chested warriors appear like divine beings..... Your long arms and sphere like shoulders appear as strong as iron clubs. Although they deserve to be decked with ornaments, how is it they are

unadorned. To me, you both deserve to rule the entire earth encompassed by seas and forests and adorned with mountains like Vindhya and Meru.”

Hanuman then explains that he is the messenger of the “great and righteous” warrior Sugriva, who is sadly wandering about in exile, after being banished by his brother. He explains that Sugriva wishes to be friends with them.

[Comments: Look at Hanuman’s choice of words. The way he comes across as an agreeable person. The way he builds rapport with Rama and Lakshmana. The impact he makes by appealing to the emotions of Rama and Lakshmana. The way he establishes his credibility by his humility and openness. The reactions of Rama and Lakshmana show how much they like Hanuman after hearing him speak. The specific comments that we need to take special note of, are marked in bold.]

Having heard Hanuman, Rama cheerfully tells Lakshmana: 'Here is the minister to Sugriva, the great chief of monkeys whom I wish to see.... this monkey, Sugriva's minister, is skilled in friendly communication. Reply to him in words gentle and sweet. **Unless well versed in Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda, for sure, it is not possible for anyone to articulate so well.**

[Comment: Great communication rests on the bedrock of knowledge. With empty pitchers, noise is possible but not communication!]

“Surely, he seems to have studied well the whole of grammar, for there is not a single mispronunciation in his entire speech. No fault can be found in his face, eyes, forehead, between the eyebrows or any other part of his body (during his expression). **His sentences are not too elaborate, not ambiguous, not dragging, not fast, raised in the chest or throat, in a medium tone.** His words are auspicious. They are refined. Neither fast nor slow, his utterances captivate the heart.”

[Comments: Using short, crisp sentences, speaking in a calm, even tone and appealing to the heart: That is the essence of great communication.]

'His colourful words flow from all the three sources: the bottom of his bosom, his throat and his head. Whose mind will not adore them even if one happens to be an enemy holding a sword? --- how can a king, whoever he be, not accomplish his goal in the past with such an ambassador? Whoever has such great taskmasters of great qualities as their envoys, can have all their goals accomplished, driven by their diplomatic skills. "

Lakshmana then addresses Hanuman: 'O learned Hanuman, having heard about the virtues of great Sugriva, lord of the monkeys, we eagerly look forward to meeting him. O virtuous Hanuman, we will do whatever you are saying, for it is the message of Sugriva."

Pleased with Lakshmana's words, Hanuman, Rama and Lakshmana, reach the Malaya mountain. Hanuman announces to Sugriva, the arrival of the celestial princes:

'This Rama of great wisdom and valour, endowed with the power of truth has arrived along with Lakshmana..... While the great Rama armed with self-restraint was living in the forest, his wife was abducted by Ravana."

'This Rama, son of a king (Dasaratha) who had gratified the firegod through many yajnas like Rajasuya and Aswamedha, gifted hundreds of thousands of cows and ruled this earth with truth and austerity, has come seeking help..... Both the brothers, Rama and Lakshmana seek friendship with you. As both of them are worthiest of worship, welcome them with due reverence.'

(Comment: Look at the way Hanuman introduces Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva. Self-introduction and introduction of others are an integral part of executive presence. It is a skill that can be developed only with practice.)

Hanuman's words take away Sugriva's great fear for Rama. He speaks to Rama lovingly: 'You are a great hero, affectionate to all and well versed in all dharmas.

The son of the Wind god has, in fact, apprised me of your virtues. O Lord that you are eager to have friendship with me, who is a monkey is a great honor and is extremely beneficial to me. If you are desirous of my friendship, here is my arm (palm) stretched out to you. With due regard, establish our bond firmly, holding my palm in yours.'

Rama becomes very happy to hear Sugriva's warm words. He goes close to Sugriva and hugs him affectionately. Then, Hanuman assumes his natural form and generates fire by rubbing two pieces of wood. He makes an offering of flowers to the flaming fire and places it between them. They both go around the blazing fire and solemnize their friendship. They continue looking at each other, happy and content. Then Sugriva cuts the branch of a sala tree with luxuriant leaves and flowers, spreads it on the ground and sits down along with Rama. Hanuman feels very happy, cuts the branch of a sandalwood tree full of flowers and gives it to Lakshmana.

Sugreeva then mentions to Rama that he has been severely insulted by Vali who has also abducted his wife. As a result, he is exiled in the forest and leading a disturbed and distraught life in great fear.

Rama tells Sugriva with a gentle smile on his face: 'O great monkey I know friendship is the fruit of a beneficial deed. I will kill that Vali who has usurped your wife. These arrows ... sharp and straight at the tip, comparable to great Indra's thunderbolt are like the sun. Looking like angry serpents, they will unfailingly strike at the miscreant Vali soon..... He will fall down on the ground like a mountain shattered. You will see it now'.