

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE

Competence goes beyond having a specific expertise. It certainly means being knowledgeable and skillful in your field. But it also means possessing a problem-solving ability that goes beyond your own specialty. If you don't know the answer, or how to fix the problem, with competence as an ability, you know how to go about getting someone who does. Competence means having a can-do attitude and following through on it.

We all know Incompetence when we see it. I speak a lot in public and once in a while I run into a situation where the person handling the technical aspects of the event – the “AV” as it's called, for audio-visual – doesn't know what to do when something goes wrong. There's feedback in the microphone, or the projector is showing the slides crooked, and the person, who obviously hasn't had the right training for the job, looks hopeless. Sometimes they look at ME to see if I know how to fix it.

I'm happy to say the great majority of the time I work with people who are truly competent at what they do. When something goes wrong, like a buzz in the PA system, for instance, they may not know exactly where it's coming from, but they know how to troubleshoot to find it. They check one piece of equipment, and then another, and then another, until they find the problem.

Exhibiting competence in knowing what you're doing, or knowing how to get something done, is

communicated to others in a variety of ways. There's the obvious level of actually being able to do what you say you can do.

Your “non-verbals” – how you look, the sound of your voice – go a long way toward conveying competence. So does the style of behavior you choose – whether you come across as a very casual person, or as someone who's a professional and takes herself seriously. Notice I said, “The style of behavior you choose,” because you do have a choice.

And that's my tip on competence: you can choose to behave in a way that exudes competence, or you can choose to undercut what skills you do have by looking and acting as if you're not sure of yourself.

Your ability to gain influence with other people is dependent on how they see you, whether they judge you to be trustworthy, and whether they think you really know what you're talking about, or can manage the tasks you claim you can. You'll go a long way toward gaining that trust when you're able to impress them with your competence.

Dr. Tony Alessandra has authored numerous books, recorded over 50 audio and video programs, and delivered over 2,000 keynote speeches since 1976. If you would like more information about Dr. Alessandra's books, audio tapesets and video programs, or about Dr. Alessandra as a keynote speaker, visit his website at www.alessandra.com.