506. The “It Factor” – How Impressions Make a Difference – Timed Agenda/Outline
(This material is based heavily on material prepared by panel member Steve Chung, which he and certain of the other panel members have used at prior sessions similar to this one.)

Note: Because of time constraints, it is likely that we will not be able to touch on all of the topics. The moderator will have to read the room and figure out which topics are likely to be useful to the participants, and then throw the topics out to the panelists to react to.

1. Introductions (10 minutes): Panelists will focus on why presentation skills have been important for your practice.
   a. Remember that your superiors are likely to be your first clients, so the senior associate, the counsel, the partner (or senior attorney at your in-house legal department) you are working for is your “client.” External clients are somewhat different. Recognize there are differences between people at your firm and those outside your firm.
   b. In-house, remember that anyone who asks you a question or needs you to do something within your organization should be treated as your client.

2. Authenticity (15 minutes):
   a. Another word for this is “Integrity.”
   b. Client loyalty and trust are the foundations of your career. The more clients who say, “I must have [your name] on my case or deal,” the more your firm or organization will value you.
   c. What is authenticity, and how does it affect presentation skills?
   d. Who you are as a person comes across in all of your interactions, including those you have on a professional basis.
   e. People you interact with can usually sniff-out a phony pretty quickly. People can detect someone who is just trying to help him/herself or use them. Don’t be the “spineless blob of protoplasm.”
   f. Conversely, people can also figure out that you are someone who has integrity and convictions and is really willing to help.
   g. Recent educational trends have focused on fostering tolerance and openness. While this is good, and we really should tolerate and be open to others’ viewpoints (generally), each of us must also have a viewpoint of his or her own.
   h. We should not apply the principle of tolerance and openness to our own opinions. We should not “tolerate” ourselves taking shifting and amorphous viewpoints on everything. If there is some issue with respect to which we are unsure, that’s fine, but we really ought to have principles we live by.
   i. This is not to say that you should be out there confrontationally arguing your viewpoint with your clients all the time (as discussed later), but your convictions will be there as a backdrop to your interactions.
   j. So what about your work? How can you be authentic and have convictions about your work? What if your work isn’t something you can easily have convictions about (e.g., document review or due diligence)? Take pride in
whatever you are doing. Do it to the best of your ability, even if the task seems menial or “beneath you.” Demonstrate that you are there to make your client’s life easier, and you will soon develop a reputation for competence.

k. Your reputation for competence is your greatest asset in a work environment. It takes a long time to develop it, but a big mistake can easily destroy it.

l. In a professional setting, authenticity must include competence, because no matter how authentic you are, if you can’t get the job done, you are not going to be able to help, and you certainly aren’t going to make your client’s life easier.

m. The opposite of authenticity is using people. People do not like being used, and if they feel like you are going to use them, they will go far out of their way to avoid you.

n. Bottom line, the attorney-client relationship is one of trust, and people tend not to trust someone whom they think has no principles or is just trying to gain some advantage.

3. Specific behaviors that make you appear nervous or insecure and therefore make people feel uncomfortable (10 minutes):
   a. Overly reactive behavior
   b. Overly diffident/obsequious behavior
   c. Laughing too much/nervous laughter (particularly when the other person is not laughing or making a joke)
   d. Fishing for compliments
   e. Self-deprecating humor
   f. Making too many jokes
   g. Giving too many compliments
   h. Failing to calibrate (i.e., your energy level is very different from the other person’s energy level)
   i. Being overly logical/taking things too seriously
   j. Looking for any positive reinforcement
   k. Agreeing too easily
   l. Only asking questions, not really interacting with the answers

4. Specific behaviors that make people feel like you’re there to help (15 minutes):
   a. Be competent. It is hard to make someone feel like they are being helped if you actually aren’t. This is a prerequisite for success.
   b. Actually be there to help. Be genuinely curious about the other person. Actually care about them. Always be on the lookout for an opportunity to help or simply entertain. Remember the other person likely is as nervous or insecure as you are!
   c. Find commonality of experience. People are different, but they often have more in common than they think.
   d. At a social gathering, chances are there is something you have in common with everyone at the gathering. Likely, you have some common interest or cause. At the very least, you are eating and drinking the same general thing. The
sponsoring organization, the food, the music, the surroundings, etc. can be a good place to start.
e. Sporting events or other entertainment also give you something in common to talk about. This is why firms often get boxes or seats at sports venues.
f. Sympathize with the emotional content of what others have said. Don’t minimize the other person or belittle him/her for reacting that way. Empathize if you have been in a similar situation. You can do so with a story also if you have a similar experience.
g. Keep a “library” of vignettes and stories that you can use in social situations. If they are funny, and if that is in keeping with your persona, so much the better. If you have children, chances are you have more than enough funny stories.
h. If the other person volunteers a work-related story, see if there is a work-related story in your “library” that is similar and demonstrates your competence to help with that situation. This is the “Holy Grail” of client development.
i. Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Does the person appear bored by what you are saying? Is the person genuinely interested?
j. If you are an introvert, while you may seem to be at a disadvantage in a social setting, you actually have an important advantage. You will be quite aware what you are feeling and how outside events make you feel. Turn that to your advantage by putting yourself in the other person’s place and saying things that make the other person feel comfortable.
k. Display competence by being a good host. Most people will want to feel at home in a social gathering. Most Asian cultures value hospitality greatly, so you may have an advantage in that you already have had good models in being a good host.

5. Being a good mentee (10 minutes):
a. Avoid the “entitlement attitude.” Fairly or unfairly, people in younger generations are almost always stereotyped as being “entitled” by those in older generations. Realize that the stereotype exists and avoid behaviors that would fall into the stereotype. Make affirmative statements that counteract the stereotype (such as expressing gratitude and taking intentional steps to make the most of the mentor’s time) without being obsequious.
b. Honor the mentor’s time. Do not be late to appointments. Keep appointments whenever possible. The mentor is likely to be a very busy person who is sacrificing time with his/her family or friends to spend time with you.
c. Have a plan. Well in advance of meeting with your mentor (or even better yet, before you even ask to be mentored), figure out what sorts of things do you feel you need to work on.
d. Don’t just sit there and make the mentor do all the work. Don’t make your mentor figure out what to do with you. Don’t ask a bunch of open-ended questions (e.g., “How did you get to be so successful?”) if you aren’t prepared to get nigh-useless answers (e.g., “I don’t know. You just have to ‘get out there.’”).
e. Accept mentoring wherever you can get it. If someone is taking an active interest in your career, within reason, try to seek to work with that person. That person may or may not be Asian-American.

f. If you have a choice of practice area or practice group, choose the one in which you have the most mentors (so long as you do not have extremely strong feelings against the practice area). You are going to be spending a great deal of time with the people you’re working with in your practice group. Therefore, in most cases, mentorship and relationships are more important than practice area.

g. A lot of the best mentoring relationships just spring up naturally out of the work you’re doing together. By doing excellent work for your mentor, you’ve already demonstrated to your mentor that you are there to help and make his/her life easier. You also have a built-in core of commonality with your mentor that allows for much easier and more natural rapport and feedback. Don’t throw that sort of thing away! (As an aside, the loss of such relationships is often what is most difficult about lateral moves.)

6. Learn when to disagree, and how (10 minutes):
   a. Work situations:
      i. There is a time to disagree and there is a time to just follow directions. High-stress, time-sensitive situations are usually not good times to disagree unless absolutely necessary.
      ii. When disagreeing with a superior in your workplace, it is best to do so privately. If you must disagree with your outside client, it is best to do so offline, in an individual conversation (particularly outside the hearing of your client’s supervisor and of course not in the presence of the other side).
      iii. Be aware of your cultural context when you disagree. Remember that your organization is a culture too, and you have to learn it.
      iv. Often, it is best to give on various points that your client does not care about in order to build up political capital to use in a situation in which you must make a stand on a substantive point your client really does care about.
      v. As Sun-Tzu said, “Always allow your opponent an avenue of retreat.” Allow the person you are disagreeing with the opportunity to save face if they are forced to give the point.
   b. Casual conversation/networking:
      i. In most instances it will not be necessary to explicitly disagree with someone with whom you’re trying to network. (Exceptions, of course, include discriminatory, harassing or offensive speech and similar behaviors.)
      ii. Remember your goal, which is to learn from other people and build commonality with them. Find things in what the other person is saying that you can agree with but don’t just agree. Seek to enrich the other person by elaborating on and deepening what is said.
iii. However, don’t be “that person,” who tries to show how smart you are by always having a slightly different opinion on everything someone else says. Remember, in a networking situation, you’re trying to build commonality with the other person, not point out differences.

iv. In casual conversation, maintain your personal convictions, but use your judgment as to whether you really need to disagree explicitly with the person you’re speaking with.

v. You may find that being diplomatic at first may give you an opportunity to deepen the relationship so as to make actual intellectual discourse (and disagreement) possible.

7. Q&A (10 minutes)