

Master every minute of your meeting

Take these alpha-male tricks into the boardroom, says *ShortList's* Michael Hogan, and you'll never be outshone again

Go on. Take a look at your diary. Ignore for a minute Dave from marketing's leaving do, the well-overdue trip to the dentist and that exhortation to hit the gym and you probably have at least one meeting tomorrow. And one the day after, and repeat to fade...

Hours spent in the world of whiteboards and oval tables may not appear to be the most inspirational of spaces, but this is the businessman's arena – the place where you can show just how quick-witted, charismatic and resourceful you can be. That's why we've consulted the experts for tips on how to be a Don Draper rather than a David Brent...

HOW TO DOMINATE... ENTERING THE ROOM

Resist the temptation to file-in reluctantly. As Tony Heywood, serial entrepreneur and CEO of Yoodoo.biz, says: "It's all about confidence in yourself and your ideas, then sharing that with everyone else in the room. It's good to get there early, so you can introduce yourself one-to-one to those you haven't met before. However, don't try to talk to everyone as you'll come across as fake. Dedicate time to your conversations and try to pick out the most important or relevant people to you, without being dismissive to anyone else."

HOW TO DOMINATE... WHERE YOU SIT

"Seating can have a big impact on the meeting," explains Penny de Valk, chief executive of the Institute Of Leadership & Management. "Sitting to the right of the chairperson, say, can subconsciously imply you're a natural supporter of them." You should also try to place yourself in the eye-line of the movers and shakers.

HOW TO DOMINATE... HOW YOU SIT

Philip Jones, director at consultancy Workplace Dynamics, advises: "Sit up, don't slouch, face the meeting and keep your hands relaxed. You'll look confident and ready." Barbara Pachter, author of *New Rules @ Work*, advises tidiness too: "Don't spread papers around, it looks chaotic. Men also tend to put phones and BlackBerrys on the table to look important, but it just says you're distracted and likely to disrupt the meeting." Just take a notepad, a pen and a glass of water. Not



only will hydration help keep you alert but also give you some much-needed time to pause and reflect, rather than simply blurting out your response. If someone asks a tricky question, take a sip before answering, buying yourself a few moments to think and formulate something much more considered.

HOW TO DOMINATE... THE EARLY STAGES

This one's simple: contribute quickly. "The longer you wait to speak, the harder it gets," says Pachter, "so have something to say in the first five minutes or about the first agenda item." Jones concurs: "As meetings progress, someone will always get left behind and become invisible. So keep your comments relevant and brief, but get in early."

HOW TO DOMINATE... A BRAINSTORM

"It's easy to be self-deprecating in these situations, but communicate your ideas with confidence," says Heywood. "Don't be afraid to come out with a maverick idea off-the-cuff to show your creativity, but make sure it's sensible too, or it could end up falling flat." Jones adds: "Look around the room as you speak to include others,

down and ask open-ended questions. If you can show genuine curiosity about what is important to that person, it will build rapport and surprise them. We often assume that financial matters are the sticking point, whereas lots of people are prepared to pay more for good service. So relax and be responsive, not gladiatorial. They'll tend to slow down and reconsider."

HOW TO DOMINATE... WHEN OUTNUMBERED IN AN ARGUMENT

Swimming against the tide isn't a bad thing. "It shows you're not afraid and will get you noticed," says De Valk. "The trick is to disagree in the right way. Provide clear and structured reasons to make your point." Language can help too, says career coach Denise Taylor of Amazing People: "Speak from your perspective, rather than being general – it's hard to argue with and conveys belief in your position. For example, 'I understand that you feel X. However, I'd like us to discuss Y.'" Wynn adds: "Use their own words to show you're listening rather than just arguing." Above all, don't be personal or overly aggressive, no sulking or sarcasm.

HOW TO DOMINATE... BODY LANGUAGE AND SUBTLE TRICKS

"Start by drawing a map of the table with names and jobs," says Jones. "Using someone's name when addressing them is key to gaining their confidence and spreading your influence around the room." Taylor adds: "Subtle mirroring of body language can help." The colour you wear can also have a subconscious effect, believes De Valk: "Blue is perceived as open and friendly, red is aggressive. So if you need to assert yourself, a red tie can help project power and control."

HOW TO DOMINATE... WHEN WRAPPING UP

It might be a relief the meeting's over, but don't run for the exit. "Thank people for their comments and use their name," says Taylor. "People like to be remembered." Jones agrees: "Finish as you started – shake hands, be friendly, say something appreciative about what they said during the meetings. Oh, and always be polite to the receptionist on the way out."

"PEOPLE ALWAYS REMEMBER A GOOD LISTENER FONDLY, BUT A TALKER CAN BE REMEMBERED FOR THE WRONG REASONS"

link your thoughts with what's gone before and feel free to praise people. Offer to do the 'flipcharting' to get yourself in the centre of the action." Don't be afraid to zip it, though. Nobody wants to be remembered as the verbose chap who talked 10 to the dozen over everyone else in the room, after all. As Lisa Wynn, executive coach at Corporate Potential, explains: "The saying goes that we have one mouth and two ears – so aim to listen at least twice as much as you speak."

HOW TO DOMINATE... DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS

"Negotiations are a deal and to strike a deal you need to find the right give/take balance," explains entrepreneur Darren Fell, founder of Crunch.co.uk. "Rather than trying to win outright, be thinking, 'What can I do to benefit them?' Make your offer more appealing and they'll be receptive. Ask for a lower price, sure, but in return offer to help promote their service. It's a two-way relationship." Wynn adds: "Slow