

## **Executive Evocateurs: How to Be a Master at Developing Talent**

**By John P. Schuster**

Real leaders know that as they go higher in the organization they gain increased authority but the power to execute their plans is increasingly in the hands of the doers-- middle managers down to the front-line performers. In other words, as authority increases, the power to execute decreases. This can be a problem, but the best executives know how to turn the power they do have into strategic advantage.

### **Second-Hand Power to Execute**

One way to do this is by mastering a kind of lasting power, one that actually increases substantially the higher the position. This is the lasting impact on people that people (**executives**) in authority have to shape peoples' pictures of who they are and what they can accomplish. This power is enormous for most executives.

When this part of executive work is done well, empowering people to be at their best, the executive will be remembered for the rest of his or her life. I know this from conversations with top executives about the people who made a difference in their lives or careers.. Although some of the examples are recent, many of those I hear about go back years, even decades. They recount stories about how the latent talent within them was tapped by their boss, *how they turned a corner on who they thought they were and what they thought they were able to accomplish*. And they tell you like it was yesterday, their memories are so vivid.

I call this "the power to evoke." The executives who are good and practiced at this set of skills are *executive evocateurs*.

Executive-evoking power begins with the kind and quality of feedback the individual provides. Everything an executive says is important (at least until the individual blows his or her credibility). Lower-level managers compete, grovel, can even make themselves sick over the desire for a word of praise or encouragement from the senior v-p or the president. Executives are often aware of this power, but often they forget what power they have projected upon them by their followers. And unless they manage with intention and lots of heart, they may squander that power or not harness it for its most useful purpose to the business and the people in it; that is, evoking great things out of the people who execute the work.

Calling forth potential--being an evocateur--is a talent. The executives who do it have the desire to do it. They know they are delving deeply into a person's heart and soul to find the untouched promise the individual holds.

Let's look at how they do it.

## **Executive Evocateurs at Work**

There are several ways that executive evocateurs have an impact on the people within their organizations, building in them the capability to execute:

**Executive evocateurs accept them as the facts, not something to ignore or rationalize.** They understand that an unpolished gemstone of a potential leader will become brighter only with polish. They understand that the key to knowing who and when to polish is first accepting the person, blemishes and all, as the individual is. Then and only then can the executive evocateur move onto the polishing part.

**Executive evocateurs see what others see, but they think something different.** In viewing an emerging leader, executive evocateurs see what is and what can be. At a prominent medical device company in Minnesota, a woman was hired as a temp and placed in the clinical affairs department processing the data that resulted from the use of new devices being tested before being presented to the FDA for approval. Look ahead ten years, and she is a clinical research manager with many people reporting to her, has lived through a company acquisition and constant organizational restructurings, has traveled for business frequently and has earned the acknowledgement and respect of company leaders. Her potential for this kind of responsibility was spotted, and she was taught, groomed and advanced.

**Executive evocateurs appeal to the innate human longing to be more than we are.** They neither dismiss others' aspirations nor step on their dreams. They know not to accept who they are seeing in front of their eyes at face value. They are not like one non-evocateur who told a young secretary who had decided to return to college, "You'll never make it." Not only did he not appeal to her longing to develop herself, he cynically commented on her chances. But his remark did not discourage her. She did indeed "make it," completing a B.A. after many years spent working, attending school and raising a child. But those words, and the smug expression on the face of the "leader" who said them, aren't forgotten to this day.

**Executive evocateurs both find and create teachable moments.** They have the talent of discernment—knowing if the right time has come or making the time right as it presents itself. They take advantage of an employee's capability to soak up the lessons that are available to him or her. Too early and too late and the window is gone.

**Executive evocateurs adapt their method.** They have developed more than one way to listen, to challenge, to provide feedback, to acknowledge. They work with what they're working with. And they know when to push hard, and when value will be lost by doing so. One student said of her accomplished teacher, the famous Dorothy Delay of the Juilliard School of Music..."Her method is that she has no method. She figures out how the student thinks and goes there."

**Executive evocateurs work at the level of identity.** When you have had a real evocateur for your boss, you know you will never be the same. Something deep changes and it changes permanently. One explanation for this is that the evocateur changes not just the way you think; he or she challenges and sharpens your values. The person who once was interested in customers becomes passionate about customers. The person who wanted to build an adequate team now wants to create the highest performing team possible. The person who wanted a good career **now** wants to make a difference.

**Executive evocateurs acknowledge.** They are not holdovers from the old belief that an occasional pat on the head and “atta boy” is sufficient. They know that the need for acknowledgement for real contribution is one of the deepest motivators in human life. They know that a word of praise when it is sincere could well be remembered for a lifetime.

How do you know if you have done any of the above; that is, if you have been an executive evocateur? There is a simple measure. You hear people say things like this about you and your organization. “I was proud to be a part of the organization, and on your team. I was at my best when I was there.” That is the kind of reaction that makes your effort worthwhile.

Are you up to the task?

*John P. Schuster is an author and a speaker and mentor to executives. He has had his own business for 27 years in Kansas City Missouri. His latest book is called Answering Your Call: a Guide to Living Your Deepest Purpose, in which he describes the evocateur role more fully. For more information:*  
[www.johnpschuster.com](http://www.johnpschuster.com).