

COVER STORY

Fake it 'til you make it

Act in the position you want, not the one you've got, writes **Ann-Maree Moodie**.

You're sitting at the company's table at a business luncheon, listening to your boss make the keynote address. Every word is delivered clearly, her style is inviting and the audience is captivated. Afterwards you watch as she works the room, making everyone feel like the most important person in the world.

We all have our heroes: a film star, an elite sportsman, a friend. But what if the person we want to emulate is our boss?

It's not always the elusive "X" factor that makes someone good at what they do. Successful people finely hone five key areas: qualifications, image, communication, style and their ability to make decisions.

By acting in the role you want, you're showing your boss and others in the company you're the sort of person who's prepared to do more than asked. And in these recessionary times, someone who does more than what's needed and doesn't grumble about the state of the world will be rewarded when the economy turns again.

"Employers will be looking for strong leadership to ensure they navigate the business through this cycle so when the economy picks up towards the latter part of the year they are in the right position to capitalise and grow as they enter 2010," says Debra Loveridge, chief executive of international recruiters Randstad.

Here's how you can look and sound like a boss and train to be one.

Decisions

Making good decisions – however small they may be – and leading a

productive and efficient team are important skills no matter how senior or junior a manager you are.

"A decision is about someone making a choice and the plan that will put that choice into action," says Mark Horstman, co-host of the Manager Tools podcast. "Effective decisions include a plan of action, otherwise a decision is simply a good intention. Choosing is not enough."

So it doesn't matter what sort of decisions you make or how important they are, it's whether the decisions are planned and implemented that will get you noticed as a manager to watch.

Delaying decisions keeps your staff in limbo. The longer it takes for you to make a decision, the more frustrated and angry they'll become. Sometimes decisions are wrong. Many other times they're right. Either way, your staff will be glad they're not stuck in a quagmire of inertia.

Networking

Your boss goes to lunches with other chief executives. It's not the place for a junior manager. So how do you get the same sort of access?

Julia Palmer, of Sydney relationship-building firm BConsulted, says that while some networks are geared to certain job titles only, there are many industry and business-based networks that draw a range of people due to the topic or theme of each event.

"Sign up to the newsletters of such networks to be kept abreast of invitations and current affairs and ensure you show initiative by attending the events that are aligned to your organisation," she says.

Don't be afraid to ask your boss what sort of networking functions he or she attends. It might be a good way to wrangle yourself an invitation.

"High-level networkers have a better understanding of social and business etiquette," Palmer says. "By observing how your boss behaves, you will learn how to introduce people to each other, host a table or simply just mingle effectively."

Presentation

Melbourne image consultant Helen Robinett, of Image Quest, says you don't need to spend a fortune to look the part.

"You just need to look like a leader," she says. "The focus should be on you and not your clothes."

Careful attention to grooming is essential – a professional haircut, healthy skin, manicured hands and well-maintained footwear.

Otherwise, model your work wardrobe choices on the sorts of clothes senior management wears.

"Accessories are also very important – but ensure you wear classic jewellery and avoid anything ostentatious," Robinett says.

Communication

The trick to communicating as well as your boss is to concentrate on the outcome, not the style.

"It's important to find your own voice and to be authentic," says Tanya Makin, of Melbourne company The Presentation Group.

Hire a voice coach to help you find the natural resonance of your voice and to assist you to project your voice in order to be heard (this is an especially important skill for women).

But avoid using the same presentation techniques as your boss. Aim for the same level of engagement with an audience but do it in your own way.

Qualifications

Many jobs require an entry-level degree. But what else has your boss learned formally that you

can also benefit from knowing?

A post-graduate qualification in management, business or commerce is always an option. Take advantage of degree courses that start off at a certificate or diploma level and end in a full degree.

Ask your boss about his or her qualifications. What are his or her recommendations? It won't do you any harm for your boss to know you're competent in a second language, a less well-known software program, or that you know the difference between cabernet and pinot.

Ann-Maree Moodie is a management educator and the managing director of The Boardroom Consulting Group.

Speak up ... you may require a voice coach to help you project, especially if you are a woman.

