

How Do You Build Connection and Credibility in the C-Suite?

Leadership success often hinges on relationships, especially at the executive level. Building trust, fostering collaboration, and demonstrating strategic value are all critical to establishing credibility in the C-suite. As part of this issue's exploration of executive alliances, we asked three seasoned HR leaders this question:

What has helped you the most in building connections and credibility in the C-suite?



The Power of Saying 'Yes': Opportunity Multiplies Through Action

Stephen Childs

CHRO AND VP OF HR AT
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One word: Yes. If I had to boil it down, the biggest factor that's helped me build connections and real credibility in the C-suite isn't just hard work and building a great team. It has been the simple act of saying yes. Saying yes expands your surface area for luck. It builds momentum, pulls you into action, and often leads to unexpected (and sometimes wildly uncomfortable) growth, which I now relish.

Most people default to "no" because it's safer. "No" doesn't require a calendar update. It doesn't expose you to rejection. And it's the pajama pants of personal development: comfortable, familiar, and guaranteed to keep you right where you are. Feels good in the moment but gets you absolutely nowhere.

I was no different a decade ago. But then I started saying "yes": Yes to networking events. Yes to mentoring. Yes to panel discussions and board roles. Yes to executive development programs. Yes to writing articles. Yes to writing a book (which still blows my mind).

My capabilities expanded, my network exploded, and my impact deepened across my industry and community. Saying yes didn't just open doors. It made me someone others wanted to open doors for.

Credibility isn't just built; it's earned through action, repetition, generosity, and a willingness to stretch yourself beyond what feels easy.



Trust Is the Currency of Leadership, and Clarity Is How You Earn It

Pamela J. Brown

EXECUTIVE VP, HEAD OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE AT CRUNCH FITNESS



Credibility in the C-suite has never been about proving my worth. It is about multiplying it. I've learned that trust is the ultimate currency, and the fastest way to earn trust is by bringing clarity when others bring complexity.

Early on, I understood that credibility isn't about having every answer. It's about understanding how the business creates value and how people fuel that momentum; [it's about] identifying opportunities to strengthen what drives growth. I've always approached my work as a business leader who specializes in people.

I lead with what drives the business. I use data to surface what matters, whether it's a risk to retaining top talent or a gap that could slow momentum. When something shows up in the numbers, I translate it into impact: what it costs, what it unlocks, and what it means for growth. That's what builds trust in the C-suite. People insights become powerful when they're treated as business intelligence that helps leaders focus, align, and move with purpose.

Connection comes from curiosity. Credibility comes from courage. And both matter most when they serve something bigger than you.



Credibility Grows When HR Speaks the Language of Business

Marjorie Powell

CHRO AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AT AARP



As chief human resources officer, my priority is to build meaningful connections and establish credibility within the C-suite by demonstrating a deep understanding of the business and aligning HR strategies with organizational objectives. I approach my role as a business leader with expertise in human capital strategy and planning. By actively participating in strategic planning sessions and providing insights into workforce trends, I contribute substantively to organizational success.

Developing strong relationships with fellow executives through regular communication and collaboration is essential. This includes discussing HR initiatives, supporting departmental priorities, and accepting feedback when improvement is needed. I back up my recommendations with data and analytics to inform decisions and quantify the impact of HR initiatives on business outcomes.

Staying abreast of trends and best-in-class approaches within industry is vital. Finally, fostering transparency and trust across the organization builds a positive reputation and secures the confidence of both leadership and employees.