

If leadership can be defined as what others do when the leader is not there, then Executive Presence may be summarized as how other people describe or think of you when you are not in the room.

You hear a lot of buzz about “Executive Presence” or EP but few people can really define it. For leaders, EP is crucial to influence others and drive results. According to a poll of senior executives, EP accounts for up to 26% of a decision to promote someone into leadership. So what, exactly, is this elusive and critical skill set known as Executive Presence?

For many, EP is personal confidence and the ability to mobilize others to act. It is the ability to influence others, create buy-in and stand out in order to drive the organization to excel. And, while many of these skills are often assessed nonverbally, developing EP is more than just “charm school.” It involves personal character, persistence and decision-making skills to transition a positive executive presence into a lasting leadership legacy.

How does one enhance or develop his EP? Through a series of soft skills that establish credibility and following through with strategic leadership ability. These soft skills are often undervalued by high potential candidates who focus on results or data and ignore the impact of their actions or presence.

Some steps to enhance EP are no brainers – becoming an active listener and not checking your smartphone or tablet during meetings is one of the most constant recommendations from executives. Making sure that your personal appearance is neat and tidy with pressed, clean clothes that fit properly is another tactic that

THE POWER OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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subconsciously communicates you pay attention to details. Probably the most crippling and most common factor is failure to voice ideas or make suggestions during meetings. That lack of voice is often perceived as a lack of initiative or leadership.

The bottom line is that we follow leaders or do business with people we perceive to be most “like us.” We look for wisdom and substance in our leaders because it instills confidence. Here are several body language strategies you can incorporate that inspire or elicit respect:

1. Assume the Power Pose position.

When you walk into a room, pause for 3-5 seconds with your feet 12-14” apart and arms resting lightly at your sides. This is considered the most confident pose as you are standing completely open or vulnerable to your “enemies.” This position establishes confidence and nonverbally says that you have no fear.

A variation of the Power Pose for a seated meeting is to sit comfortably in your chair, with a straight back and hands on top of the table. You can lean forward slightly, just be careful not to slump backwards into the seat.

2. Speak slower and lower. Studies show that people respond and respect voices with a lower pitch or deep timber. If you weren’t born with a broadcasting voice, practice lowering your pitch with a quick exercise. Repeat “King Kong” 5x every day for a week. Each time you repeat “King”, push your voice to go higher, and when you say “Kong,” try lowering your voice. You’ll literally feel the stretch of the vocal

cord muscles. Before answering an important question or walking into a meeting, mentally say “Kong” and your voice will drop in pitch to be more powerful and authoritative.

These two nonverbal strategies will project an image of confidence; the final strategy has to do with personal character and leadership ability:

3. Develop a respectful questioning attitude.

This is the confidence and, sometimes, courage to speak up in higher level meetings to push back or voice risks in a respectful manner. This one strategy helps you stand out as a committed and creative problem solver. Take a deep breath, lower your pitch and ask a probing question such as “Have you considered...” or “What happens if we...”

Executive Presence isn’t developed in a day – it takes time to establish yourself and your brand. Using these tactics will expedite the process and position you for success.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allison Blankenship is no stranger to busting barriers. She bounced back from qualifying for food stamps to becoming one of the first female regional directors in a 5-star hotel company. After winning the Jim Barber Leadership Award for the state of Florida, she wrote 4 books, founded a women’s honorary at Auburn University and was named the Florida Speaker of the Year. Allison specializes in establishing executive presence, creating buy-in and dynamic presentation skills. www.PrecisionSpeaking.com

