

Executive Presence Part One: An Inside Job

By
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Do you have it? Do you have that ability to take hold of a room by making a polished entrance, immediately shaking people's hands, and forging quick, personal connections? If you answered, "Yes", you may have that elusive quality that marks you for success – Executive Presence.

"When leaders with executive presence speak, people listen-because the talk is filled with conviction instead of equivocation. They inspire that I'll-follow-you-anywhere loyalty, conveying an aura of warmth and authenticity to everybody from the receptionist to the CEO." That's how Business Week described executive presence in their article, "She's Gotta Have It" published in their July 22, 2002 issue. In short, those with executive presence:

- Radiate confidence, poise, and authority
- They connect with others
- They build on their strengths and,
- They are genuine and authentic

Today we are talking about executive presence. In a recent coaching call, a client and I were discussing the art of negotiation and how the founder and president of the company she worked for, who had little formal education and limited verbal skills, could walk into a room and own it. Clearly he had executive presence. But where does it come from? It's not the clothes or the language or the formal education, surely. For this individual had none of those. What he has and what you may aspire to have, starts from the inside out.

In the conversation with my client about her employer, I suggested that this individual created such a powerful presence because he had a crystal clear vision for his business and his objectives. His vision was aligned with his values and was effectively placed in the service of achieving his mission. That clarity and sense of mission leads to conviction which naturally results in confidence and finally, in presence.

If I asked you why you do what you do, what would you say? Do you have a vision for your work? Are you on a mission? Do you have conviction? If you are not sure or want to explore that topic further, email me at Marianne@starmakercoaching.com and I will send you an exercise to help you get started.

Your vision, mission, and conviction are important to creating executive presence because more than 50% of the impression being formed about you is directly tied to how you look and act. In literally a split second, others are deciding about your honesty, integrity, loyalty, creativity, intelligence, industriousness and dependability. Yes, what you are wearing definitely impacts on that, but it is not the sole determiner of the impact you make.

There is another important element to executive presence and this is one that is particularly critical for women, although men sometimes have a problem with this, too. That is the sound of your voice. Women tell me they often are unable to control the room or gain attention for the points they make, despite the fact that they are experts at what they do. It's frustrating and they say it really holds them back. A commanding voice is a powerful tool. "The lower the register of your voice, the more commanding it will be", says Performance Coach Adair Simon, president of Atlanta-based Strictly Speaking. "And", Adair says, "It is one you can learn to use quickly and easily just by paying attention, making a conscious effort to bring your voice down and enunciate clearly." If you would like more on developing a more powerful voice, you can email me at Marie@starmakercoaching.com for a copy of writer/performer Beth J. Mann's article, "Quick And Easy Ways To Improve Your Speaking Voice".

Back to the client conversation about her employer. His success proves the last element of impression and that is about the words. The actual words you use have only a modest impact on the impression you make. Words become more important when the rest of your physical presentation is off. Then the words can confirm the impression you've already made, one way or the other. Of course, there are nuances to these three major elements like posture, carriage, use of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and so forth.

If executive presence is your goal, then study those individuals you most admire and watch what they do and say. Look for the subtle ways they make connection. How do they communicate genuineness and authenticity? What specific gestures or ways of being do they model? What could you do to emulate that and still be authentic yourself?

This concludes Part One of our conversation about executive presence and why executive presence starts from the inside out. In Part Two, we will look at the exterior aspects of executive presence and how clothing, color and style support the message you want to send.

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