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Executive Presence: The Wow Factor for Leaders

Each one of us has an executive presence, and it is a skill that could be enhanced through practice.

BY MONIKA NAVANDAR

Imagine yourself in these situations: interviewing for your dream job or the next step in your career; leading a team; presenting in front of senior executives, board members, and venture capitalists; or simply addressing a big crowd. There are so many other similar situations in which you are trying to establish your credibility and positively influence others. What is it that keeps your audience excited and engaged? What is it that makes your audience want to listen to you, believe you, and follow you? What is it that in closed-door meetings and in your absence, would make the senior leaders in your organization go out on a limb to advocate for your next opportunity? Well, executive presence is one of the answers to these ever-tricky questions. You know it when you see it—some call it gravitas, but how do you really define it? Is it a skill that you can build? How do you maintain it in the long run? How does one sustain it, especially under high-pressure situations?

While there are multiple definitions on the internet, executive presence, for me, is a person's ability to read the room/situation, to manage one's emotions by not letting anything affect the way one plans to deliver the message, to be authentic, and to be confident in one's skin. It is the ability to communicate effectively and establish credibility that influences and motivates others to believe

you, collaborate with you or follow you to accomplish the desired outcome. Executive presence can help you achieve your personal as well as professional goals through effective, ethical persuasion^[1]. For example, as a leader, when you see that energy is scattered all over the place, executive presence means bringing in that anchor to centralize the energy and positively influence others to act.


Each one of us has an executive presence, and it is a skill that could be enhanced through practice. Executive presence involves everything: think about your first impressions, interpersonal skills, mannerisms, maturity, confidence, wisdom, values, integrity, temperament, social presence, demeanour, consistency, courage, etc.

While many of us struggle and want to put our best foot forward under high-pressure situations, and while there are multiple ways to deal with anxiety and other emotions, what works best for me is focusing on providing value. Sustaining executive presence needs self-awareness and continuous monitoring.

Tips to improve your executive presence:

- Start by reading Harrison Monarth's bestselling book on executive presence^[1].
- Invest in an assessment tool to get evaluated on your executive presence.



- Set clear criteria and seek 360-degree feedback on your executive presence.
- For high stake meetings, you can never over-prepare: preparation, practice, and managing your anxiety are critical. Make notes, practice in front of your colleagues/friends, meditate or do anything that helps you relax; for me, it is listening to music and singing.
- Lastly, dress for the occasion, work on your relationship capital, improve your listening skills, and work on enhancing your public speaking skills. My personal favourites are people who speak clearly and to the point—articulation is quite an art! 

Reference:

Monarth, H. (2010). *Executive Presence: The Art of Commanding Respect Like a CEO*.

About the Author

Monika Navandar has 15+ years of multi-industry HR experience and has led many leadership roles in India, USA, Singapore, Dubai, and South Africa, supporting global C-suite leaders. She is the Founder of NeoSeven Solutions and has a dynamic partner team of senior leaders worldwide. She has been on the Harvard Business Review Advisory Council for 3+ years. Formerly, she has worked with Johnson & Johnson, Volkswagen, Merck Pharma, HSBC, and IBM. Monika is also an eminent speaker. Reach out to her at inquiry@neoseven.in