

Defining **Executive Presence** tends to be a vague, ambiguous concept; yet many will say they know it when they see it. For organizations, it is one of the biggest differentiators for upward mobility. Yet, many professionals become frustrated at the lack of definition and clarity around the topic. Leading many to conclude, that it's something you have or you don't, rather than a skill that can be developed. As leaders, it is our responsibility to create clarity, give feedback and create a consistent view of executive presence for both men and women. At the same time, it is each professional's responsibility to learn what executive presence is, understand one's own strengths and opportunities, get feedback and apply it to how one operates within the organization. Here we will focus on some basics of executive presence and provide tips for both leaders and individuals.



A DEFINITION OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

It is the ability to project a mature, calm, self-confident approach, through personal and technical competence, allowing one to take lead during difficult and unpredictable situations while maintaining positive relationships with all levels of the organization.

Early in our career, a large part of our time and energy is focused on developing technical competence and know-how. As one grows within the organization, success is determined by how well you build relationships and provide strategic solutions. These perceptions are built through positive experiences with organizational leaders.

CRITICAL EXECUTIVE PRESENCE SKILLS

- Building Connections:** *The ability to engage others and make them feel comfortable.*
 Emotional intelligence plays a key part in connections by being able to read other's reactions and adapt your style. To build connections, it is critical to create a network outside of your team and function, and understand what motivates/influences others.
- Demonstrating Credibility:** *The ability to demonstrate technical and interpersonal competency.*
 Credibility is gained through experience on which others can depend. To increase credibility, focus on developing your technical expertise, increasing situational adaptability, driving engagement and influencing others.
- Strong Communication skills:** *The ability to listen and deliver clear, concise messages through story-telling and clear messaging.*
 To build communication skills, engage in conversations that others want to continue. Make others feel seen, heard and valued. Know what you want to communicate, deliver it, and engage others in a dialogue in a simple and inspiring manner.
- Being Authentic:** *The ability to be present, comfortable, and confident in your own skin.*
 To build authenticity you must know your strengths and areas of opportunity, be able to regulate your emotions, and create trustworthiness.
- Creating Strategic Solutions:** *The ability to create and tie recommendations to the strategy.*
 To create strategic solutions, simplify the complex, be curious and test for understanding, communicate in a way that motivates others and stay open to the views and perspectives of others while working towards a common goal.

STEPS TO TAKE TO IMPROVE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE (@INDIVIDUAL LEVEL)

1. Questions to ask yourself:

- a. Identify someone in your network/company who has impressed you with what you would describe as executive presence. What do you think draws others to them?
 - i. What energy do they exude?
 - ii. How do they connect? Who are they closest to?
 - iii. What feelings do they convey with their physical appearance?
 - iv. How do they communicate?
- b. Turn the gaze inward
 - i. Ask the same questions as above about yourself
 - ii. Answer the question: What do I want to be known for?
 - iii. Get feedback from others on the above questions

2. Create a Development Plan

- a. Create stretch assignments and/or experiences
- b. Engage in coaching (informal & formal)
- c. Participate in 360 feedback
- d. Read relevant articles & books
- e. Attend formal training (specific to areas your development)

3. Steps you can take

- a. Determine what your value proposition is – if you have one, re-evaluate it
- b. Cultivate Strategic relationships
 - i. Create a current state relationship map
 - ii. Determine who you need to create a connection(s) with (look for diversity of thoughts and experiences from your own)
 - iii. Figure out who you need to start spending time with, who you need to continue spending time with and who you need to spend less time with
 - iv. Create questions that will help you learn more about their goals and challenges and how you might support them
- c. Engage in a conversation with your leader to understand how you are perceived by others. What do they see as your strengths and opportunities.
- d. Video or record presentations to review and critique – looking for strengths and gaps

STEPS TO TAKE TO IMPROVE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE (@LEADER LEVEL)

1. Identify Strengths and Opportunities for Team Members & Provide Feedback

- a. Create trusting relationships and communicate support
- b. Set guiding principles for your leadership
- c. Observe team members and gather examples of strong behavior & opportunities
- d. Create space for diverse experience and approaches
- e. Gather feedback from peers and others
- f. Communicate information to team members

2. Provide stretch assignments as a learning opportunity

- a. Look for ways that an individual can get more exposure
- b. Prep them and others to ensure success
- c. Debrief to learn what worked well & what to improve upon

3. Provide support and access to mentors, coaching & training

- a. Identify internal mentors and enlist their support
- b. Procure coaching if available
- c. Identify other resources: books, videos, LMS content, self-assessment tools)

RESOURCES:

- *Executive Presence* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Book)
- *The Unwritten Rules: The Six Skills You Need to Get Promoted to the Executive Level* by John Beeson (Book)
- *Improve Your Leadership Presence* (Muriel Malignan Wilkins) – HBR Video 3:16 minutes
- *Executive Presence for Woman Leaders* (Shital Kahhar Mehra) – TedTalk 14:13 minutes