

Developing your executive presence



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Your executive presence (brand you) is determined by how others perceive you.
Shaped by your image, interactions and internet impressions.

It's not what you think: it's what others think that count.

Introduction

Executive presence is **‘brand you’**, and is critical to your success in a fiercely competitive corporate world.

It embodies the holistic approach you take to the way in which you present yourself to your subordinates, your peers and to your superiors.

Every aspect of your daily life is involved, from how you dress and speak to how you conduct yourself both in and out of the office. It will cover your digital footprint on social media, the relationships you develop and the support and mentoring you both offer and receive.

You need to be seen as a role model, and impressive, both physically and mentally.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.” - Aristotle.

Developing an executive presence requires commitment, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, until it’s as natural to you as breathing.

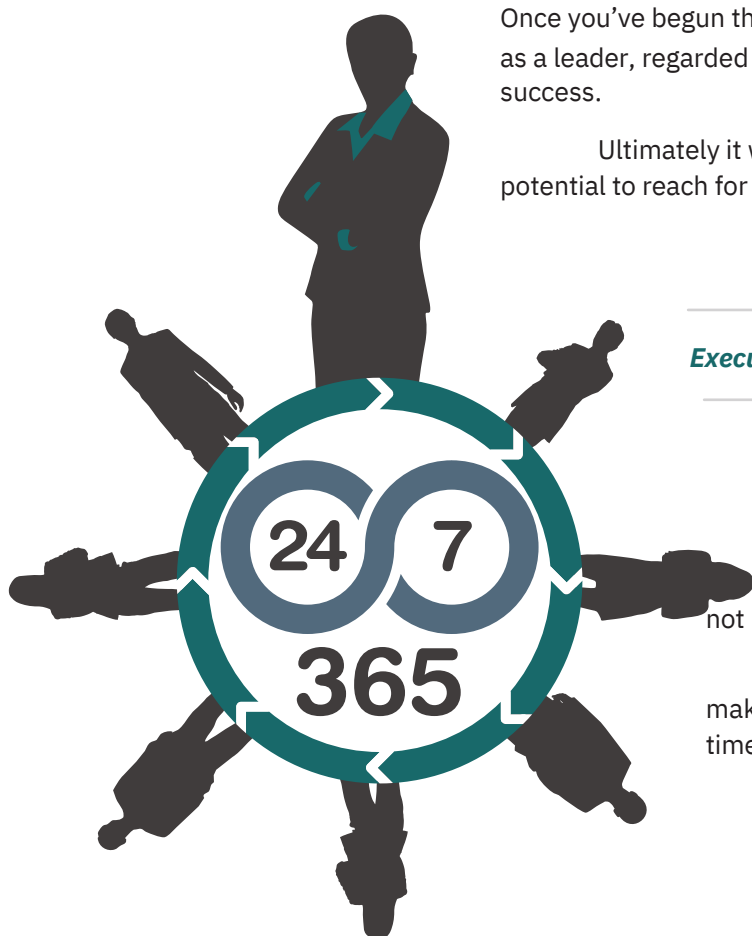
Once you’ve begun the process, it will dictate the way in which you are perceived as a leader, regarded as a team player and valued as a contributor to corporate success.

Ultimately it will reward you with personal fulfilment, promotion and the potential to reach for the moon.

Executive presence is dependent on confidence.

In any high performance environment, a key challenge is to instil confidence in your team especially whilst under extreme pressure – requiring you to maintain your own confidence, make sure you keep your cool, do not lose it, nor buckle under pressure.

To bring out the best in your team, you need to be able to make people feel good about themselves not just in the good times but also in the difficult ones.



What's at stake?

The greater your executive presence the higher your perceived esteem, the sharper your edge and the better your chance of achieving the impossible dream.

To excel, you need to be seen as a role model and “A” player.

Image can sometimes be more important than performance, and can give you an unfair advantage.

People who are seen positively are often given greater airtime, more weight is given to what they say and they are more likely to be included. They're more likely to earn the promotion, win the contract or get the pay rise.

And this applies not just to one event, but to your entire career, the doors which open, the fast track environment, promotion on promotion and the financial reward to go with it.

And it doesn't stop even when you get to the top. There's always another challenge, another achievement...

Anyone over the age of 40 must, without exception, seek opportunities for constructive change. Otherwise you will become outdated in your manner, approach and standing. Rather than pass your sell by date, you need to sharpen the saw or re-invent yourself says Robert Tearle.

CAREER/ ROLE MODEL
SUCCESS LONGEVITY STOCK AWARD
THE TOP JOB/CEO
REDUNDANCY PROMOTION
/SACK SALARY INCREASE
SELF-ESTEEM

Your impact and influence

Be positive, energized and enthusiastic, and you'll become the sort of person others want to work for or with, to have in their team or be heading up the enterprise.

If people are unsure about who you are, your credentials, what you do, what you have done and what you are capable of doing – you'll have zero or minimal executive presence.

You need to consider current stakeholders, influencers and identify those people in your blind spots.

Don't be afraid to use politics to buy in support and sponsorship, and to work your way closer to the top.

Tune in to those around you, understand them and identify their motives. Use

this

knowledge to get them to buy into your ideas.

Avoid self-deprecation and making cheap comments, don't get too familiar, and learn when it's best not to say too much.

Staying organised and clutter free will make you appear in control of things.

Mentoring isn't just a tool for those at the bottom of the corporate ladder but also for those at the top. Even for CEOs there's huge merit in acting both as a mentor and being mentored.

Acting as a mentor will raise your visibility, give you a broader perspective and send a clear message to others.

Energising is fundamental to executive success. Maintain your energy, and energize those around you. To be a role model you need to be energizing as opposed to enervating!

Our principal guidelines here are:

1. You need a sense of purpose.

- This means understanding how you are trying to bring value to the business, and showing others what you represent so they can buy into your cause. You need to be a man with a mission (or woman with one).
- People need to appreciate what you are about, the value you are bringing to the company and your direction.



2. In meetings

- If you have called the meeting you need to control it.

Check in by setting the scene: Why are we meeting? What needs to be discussed? What's the agenda? And check out by summarising what's been discussed and what action needs to be taken.

- Be prepared in advance: Determine the big questions, and always ask the thing others are uncertain about. Plan how to answer any questions you may be asked.
- Don't be late or frequently rearrange meetings. It will make you appear disorganised.
- Leave a footprint. Make your mark and be remembered by asking the question or bringing up the issue which is most important and carries most impact.
- Where appropriate put it in writing, in particular the most important aspects. This will give clarity as to what you expect of people. It will also act as a point of reference.

Don't be a pushover – cultivate assertiveness as a lifetime habit.

3.

Nice or nasty?

Assertiveness comes from self-confidence, “nasty” behaviour generally reflects insecurity, selfish and blinkered approach.

You may need a better understanding of your preferred or default behaviours and learning how to recognise others' preferred behaviours ... psychometric assessment can help with that. You can then maximise your strengths and how

to

use them most effectively i.e. assertiveness comes in many forms, not everyone is driven and forceful, many people can be effectively assertive in their expertise and not necessarily in the boardroom.

If you don't make your case or stand up for yourself when dealing with others

you

are allowing them to compromise your executive presence, and you will rightly be seen as weak or non-assertive. Avoiding conflict will erode your self-respect and leave you feeling out of control and demoralised.

Endured for too long, non-assertiveness can fester and lead to frustration, ultimately causing you to explode into the opposite approach – aggressiveness, where you fail to respect the rights and feelings of others.

Some people are naturally aggressive, giving commands, making demands and imposing their views on others. Aggressiveness in the workplace is counter-productive and damages the company's reputation.

The middle course is assertiveness, which calls into play your emotional intelligence in order to assess and empathise with the needs and feelings of those you are dealing with, while keeping your own goals in view, and being able to make your point honestly and openly.

Assertiveness is defined as the direct and appropriate way to stand up for your rights, while respecting the rights of others. Treading the fine line between assertiveness and aggressiveness is a skill which takes effort and persistence to acquire, so you need to keep practicing until it becomes a habit for life. Nice or tough? Think both.

Is anyone undermining you?

Have you noticed anyone responding to you negatively, either vocally or in their body language? If people are, there's a possibility you stand to lose status to a lesser or greater extent depending on its significance. This is one area in which you'll benefit from having trusted advisors to talk to. More about this later.

Here's how you can build a greater presence if you are a quiet gem.

- Be seen to be pro-active. You could be the one who co-ordinates a project or an initiative.
- Go in for one to one meetings, grab a coffee or club sandwich.
 - Publish your ideas. Get your smart thoughts out there. Use emails, memos and blogging through internal and external social media as appropriate. Be the one who sets in place the frameworks, and determines what's best practice.
 - Send thank you emails, thank you notes or acknowledgements, which you can cc to others and which will raise your visibility.
 - Make sure your credentials are visible to reinforce your expertise. For example a strong linkedin profile or having your certificates, if they are relevant and significant, on display in your office.
- If you lack confidence in yourself others will too. So fake it. Act how you aspire to be. Follow the role models. What do they do? How do they behave?

Record what was said, by whom, in what context and when.

If something concerns you or is important make a note of it, make a note of what was said, by whom and when, and keep it.

There will be times when you will need to refer back to conversations and

memos,

where you have given instruction or guidance, in particular verbally, where an employee, peer or superior may conveniently fail to recall what was said or re-interpret it in a different manner to suit themselves.

Some managers / execs send an email to themselves to record things they may wish to subsequently refer to, and make this easy to reference by creating email folders for employees / projects / initiatives.



How do you see yourself? Nice or nasty? Or nice and tough?



How do others see you? Nice or nasty? Or nice and tough?

What are your strengths and shortcomings?



Point of view approach.

There will be times when you may need to confront someone or an issue. Failing to do so at critical times could expose you as being weak).

In difficult situations it can help to explain your point of view with a full, frank

and

honest disclosure about how you are feeling.

You can be quite forthright with employees when you're developing a major

point,

but maintain respect when dealing with co-workers, peers and your superiors.

When confronting people, you will invariably need to have your ducks lined up and in order.

Prepare your position well and collect any evidence before the meeting or discussion, and used with diplomacy and respect where necessary, this can work well with subordinates, peers and superiors when you are unhappy with a situation.

 "I have a point of view"

 Why it is important to listen to my point of view?

 What the options are for rescuing the situation

Ask them for their observations and conclusions. It is particularly important when dealing with people who report in to you, that they come up with the conclusions.

Your impact and influence continued

4. Make sure your ideas and presentations are structured. Otherwise they won't stand up.

- This applies to memos, emails, proposals, reports and presentations.
- Prepare impact statements for important meetings

5. Always take the '20,000 feet view'. Stand back, see the edges and be able to summarise the situation. Use KUBA – for others buy in to your ideas they have to “Know” what you are talking about, “Understand” what you are talking about, and “Believe” the “Action” is worth taking.

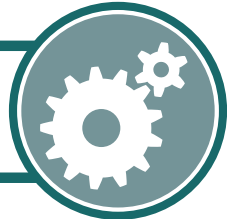
KNOW

people have to “Know” what you are talking about.



UNDERSTAND

what you are talking about and...



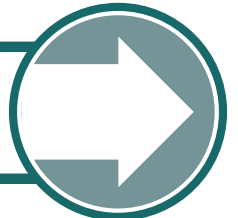
BELIEVE

that the...



ACTION

is worth taking.



6. When presenting, focus on one overriding issue and keep other priorities to a minimum

- Substantiate ideas with facts and focus on outcomes and benefits.
 - Give the audience a roadmap: Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and tell them you've told them.
 - Prepare strong opening and closing statements. You need to hook them in the first 30 seconds and give them a concrete action they can take away at the end.
- Use zippy words and compelling phrases to maintain impact.
- Understand that your pitch is not about you, it's about your audience.

In small groups, the best presentations are good conversations – but maintain control as the leader. In larger groups, audience participation through exercises or a simple show of hands will engage people more, increase the extent to which they internalize your ideas and bring greater buy in.

If public speaking or giving presentations is an important part of your role you may want to look at joining a Public Speaking group such as Toastmasters to get feedback and improve their skills.



7. Take control of how you express yourself.

- Don't ramble – you'll look uncertain.
- Use tone of voice, speed of speech, pause and body language for greater impact.
- Observe high profile speakers such as newsreaders and politicians, and note their measured delivery and pauses for effect.
- Keep it focused and structured or you'll fail to make your point.
- Don't try to be funny when saying something important.

Consider your accent. While there's nothing wrong with a regional or foreign accent, you will be held back if you're unable for any reason to make yourself fully understood. Some regional accents are seen as aggressive or undesirable. In extreme cases it might be appropriate to consider elocution lessons to achieve clarity while not sacrificing individuality.

Watch your grammar when working on written documents of all kinds. If you make a lot of mistakes you'll appear careless, uneducated or uninformed.

9. Pay attention to error alerts in your Word app.

- Use a thesaurus to avoid repetition and increase vocabulary.
- Have colleagues proof read your documents.
- Note the errors you make - you're probably repeating many of them, and once you're aware it will be easy to correct yourself.

Raising your profile and getting noticed for the right reasons

- Consider how and when you can attract attention, and optimise correspondence of all kinds.
- ### 10. Plan your networking activity. Include outliers as well as closer circles.
- Be seen as committed, constructive, positive and energising.

Final word:

Boring as it is, the expression "you never get a second chance to make a first impression" should not be under-estimated. This is particularly relevant in situations in which a breakthrough opportunity exists, such as when making a major announcement, meeting key customers or suppliers and when interviewing either as an interviewee or interviewer.

Critical events present a great opportunity to display executive presence and position yourself well or badly. Therefore you should plan for these situations, including how you present yourself, your ideas and how you choose to interact with people.

Your emotional intelligence

Your emotional intelligence (EI) will shape your interactions with other people and how they see you. When you apply your EI well you will maintain or enhance your status. When you apply it poorly you will compromise it and weaken your personal branding.

Here's some examples as to how this may manifest itself:

- Expressing yourself with confidence and positivity – are you energizing or energizing?
- Failure to act
- Acting too soon
- Not acting at all
- Failure to recognise that someone is not with you, or a lack of interest, they are not engaged in the subject or not on-board to buy in and support a project.
- Staying on a subject too long or brushing over something important.
- Failing to express gratitude 1-2-1 or publicly.
- Failure to pull someone up.

They just don't get it.

That was a stupid comment.

They are making a point or taking a line on something with which they are ignorant/ have little knowledge.

Your emotional intelligence will shape your leadership quality and therefore heavily impact your personal brand – we recommend you continue reading about this on the next page.

Emotional intelligence is a broad description of the ability to understand and control one's own emotions, together with the ability to manage relationships through the recognition and understanding of other people's emotions.

There are four basic areas which shape your emotional intelligence, these are:

Self-awareness

The ability to understand your emotions as well as recognise their impact on relationships and performance. This relates to accurate self-assessment and self-confidence.

Self-management

Controlling your emotions and using your awareness of them to stay flexible and act positively. A critical aspect in business is the ability to keep any disruptive emotions under control in changing situations and overcoming difficulties. This relates to transparency (trustworthiness), adaptability, achievement orientation, initiative and optimism.

Social awareness

Your ability to identify emotions in other people and to understand their perspective and take an interest in their concerns. This relates to empathy, organizational awareness and service orientation.

Social skills/relationship management

Your ability to use your awareness of your own emotions together with your understanding of the emotions of others to manage interactions successfully. A critical aspect in business is the ability to take charge and inspire others while sending out clear, convincing and well-tuned messages. This relates to inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, team work and collaboration.

Emotional intelligence isn't something you can develop with a magic wand but it is something you can develop over time. There are various ways in which you can develop it and you may wish to read our full emotional intelligence white paper.

We recommend you to develop a better consciousness about your EI.

Keep a record over some time – even up to a year – of how well or badly you're doing so you can see where to make improvements.

Consider jotting these items down in your diary or personal notes folder.

Your digital footprint

Expect people to check you out on-line before meeting you and on an ongoing basis – this may even be on an unplanned basis i.e. they are browsing someone else's profile and see yours.

Your digital footprint will be determined by your presence on LinkedIn,

Facebook,

Twitter, Google Search and others. And while a professional profile which presents you in a positive light represents a huge advantage, the opposite is also true.

Who's going to be inclined to browse at your digital footprint? Your superiors, subordinates, customers, suppliers, shareholders and stakeholders in your business, not forgetting head-hunters, HR / recruitment professionals or

Consider:
investors

who may offer a life-changing opportunity in your career.

1. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up to date.
2. LinkedIn is likely to be your most important on-line presence. So ask others for their opinion of your profile.

If you have spelling or grammatical errors on your profile this will compromise

3. you – get people in your people network or friends and family to check your grammar and spelling.

A good photo is essential to showcase you at your best. Ideally one in which

4. you are smiling, look positive, confident, forward looking and professional.

It needs to reflect who you are, what you do and want to do- and the environment in which you operate

- If you want to leverage LinkedIn to max your personal brand a professional formal or semi-formal image is likely to serve you best not one of you running, rock climbing...

- If you want to show off that you've just ran a marathon put up the pic for 1-2 months and then revert.

- young people sometimes include a photo which isn't professional or crisp enough – perhaps one which didn't stop them as a first jobber but which may be a blocker for accelerated career progression and too many older folk include photos which are too boring, make them look tired and wearing clothes / suits from a bygone era!

Consider introducing some personality into your LinkedIn profile particularly if you have posted a comprehensive set of info

5. Showcase relevant skills and accomplishments on LinkedIn, but not your full CV/resume.
6. Be careful that any testimonials recommending you compliment your goals and positioning, and add substance to your profile.

- 7.

8. Your LinkedIn profile should reflect your priorities at any one time

- If you are heads down and happy at work, and so your priorities are to showcase what you and your company can offer customers or business partners

- If you are actively or passively looking for a new job, then you may wish to more heavily emphasise your credentials as a prospective candidate.

9. Facebook also forms part of your overall brand, and is an opportunity to present yourself in the best light. So treat it with respect. Your photo should be smiling and professional, and while your posts can be fun, avoid anything which could be misinterpreted or bounce back on you.

Don't compromise your personal brand on other social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Take care over the photos and comments you post – you don't want to look like a party animal and a drunk on the one hand, nor a bore on the other.

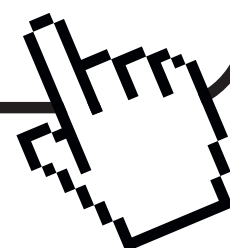
A professional, friendly and responsible Facebook can help position you well alternatively of course you may wish to make your Facebook a private rather than public one.

Google yourself – play around with a few key word searches, using your name, employer, occupation and see what is presented to you

11.



google yourself



Your executive image

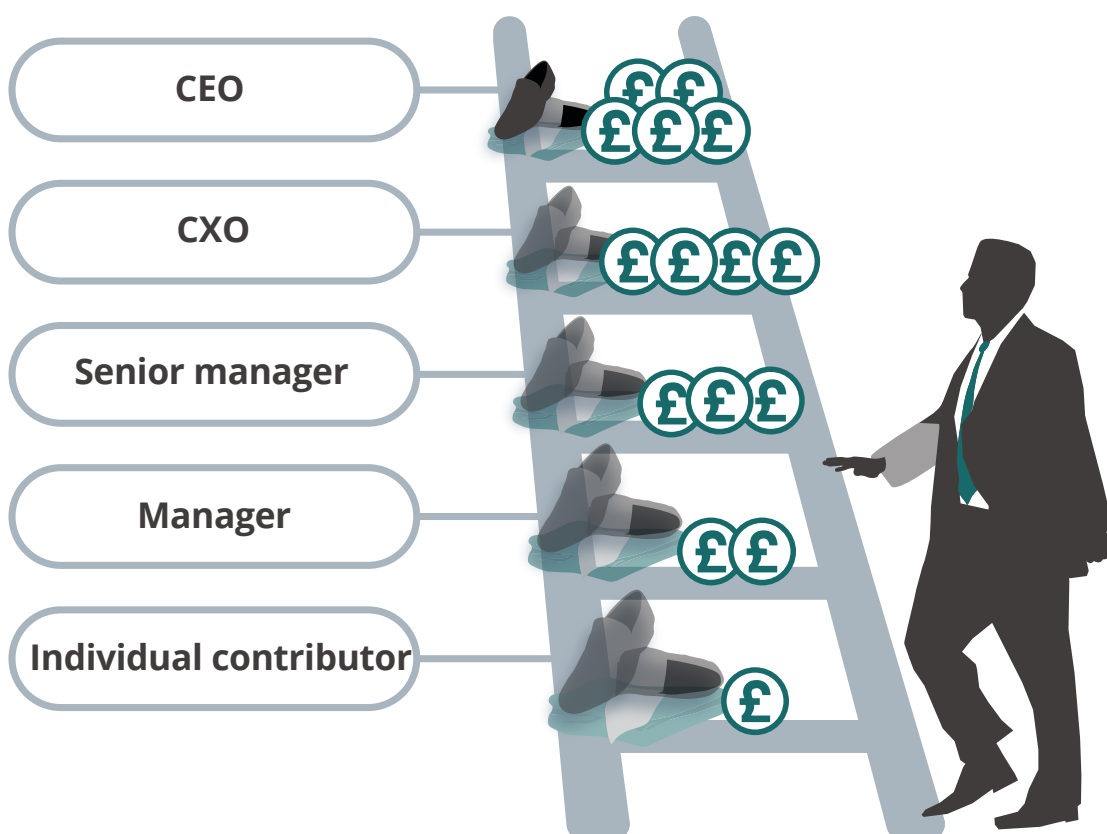
There is a direct relationship between your image and other people's perceptions of you. And it's these perceptions which will determine your success or failure.

You need to be seen as a role model, someone to whom others aspire. You should look immaculate, well groomed and your clothes new and expensive. You need to appear energized and comfortable in the role to which you aspire.

Principal guidelines:

Leaders and role models must dress expensively – as befits their status. The more senior the role, the more expensive your wardrobe needs to be.

You need to look as though you belong at the level of seniority at which you are operating, or which you aspire to.



This does not just apply to your level of seniority but also the significance of your role and the environment in which you work.

The keys to developing an impressive personal presentation at an executive level

are determined by being neutral, getting all the basics exactly right and wearing expensive clothing.



Opt for neutral colours – black, dark grey or navy suits for both men and women, with crisp white or blue shirts or blouses.

Women can wear heels, but not too high. Hair needs to be neat, possibly tied back, new tights, not too much jewellery or make-up, and carry a smart bag. Keep it all coordinated.

You need to look the part for the level at which you are operating, or aspire to, so make sure your clothes reflect this. Good quality, well fitting, and nothing more than a year old.

Have you ever seen someone as a role model who is fat, has yellow teeth, whose hair is unkempt, whose shirt collars have curled, whose shoes look cheap with plastic soles, whose clothes look dated, who take notes with cheap plastic pens and whose desk looks messy?

Look after your grooming too – do your teeth need whitening, or your hair

dyeing?

And what about your nails?

Keep fit. Good posture and an agile body are associated with a healthy mind.

Too much weight makes you appear out of control. This is one of the reasons why politicians often like to be filmed exercising, or walking in the countryside...



And think about how others see you, in and out of work. Organised and successful, or unkempt, and going nowhere? And think about your behaviour. Your image outside work will impact on the impression you make overall.

Should you be tempted to dismiss any of this advice, remind yourself of your role models. Consider if any are overweight, unkempt or badly groomed. How many are wearing cheap, outdated clothes, take notes with cheap plastic pens and whose offices are in a mess.

Your answer will prove my point.

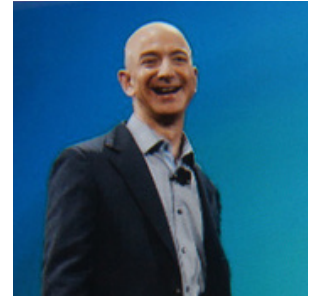
To have the greatest executive presence, you need to look like a role model. This means paying attention to all the little things as well as the big ones – all the time!



Understand it's not so much what you think that matters, it's more about what other people think of you, and this includes aspects about your executive image which you may not be aware of.

Appreciate a single detail or combination of details, even small ones, can compromise your executive presence.

Are you a role model?



Bill McDermott (SAP), Sandberg (Facebook) and Jeff Bezos (Amazon) are all iconic figures and they're well worth adopting as role models.

Some high profile public figures are cool like Larry Page of google, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Elon Musk of Tesla however this doesn't work for everyone. And it doesn't have to.

Observe other people around you, especially those you admire, and who play significant roles, and take note of their personas and styles.

Your executive presence is shaped by a 360 perspective of you and your footprints.

If you think there's room for you to improve your image or stature the following ideas should help you.



Your executive presence isn't just shaped by what you do at work, it's also shaped by how you project yourself and your actions outside of work!

Ideally you wish to be seen as someone who is positive, has a happy disposition and who is energized. The best leaders are energizing ones. And to be energizing, you'll ideally be fit.

In the sweepstakes of life you should never under estimate the importance of a commanding physical presence.

Formal or informal?



Formal or casual smart. Tie or no tie. Suited up or jacket and jeans.

Your style needs to reflect the environment you are in and how you wish to be seen at any one time. Think about whether you are operating in a conservative occupational or industry type/s or creative ones, reserved or contemporary ones.

Your image needs to be current not dated.

For most execs, wearing clothes which are conservative and neutral in style will be most appropriate. But be careful not to present an out of date image, old styles are likely to look dated and you don't want to come across as being out of touch.

Remember, you need to dress in line with your level of seniority, the more senior you are and aspire to be, the more you need to spend! Wearing cheap regular clothing is often associated with people who are junior or unsuccessful.

Observe your executive peer group, industry role models, suppliers, competitors and people you aspire to. Take a look at Global presidential leaders, professional newsreaders and presenters.

Think what impresses you about their appearance, and note common and consistent themes.

Ask others how well they think you present yourself, and to recommend any changes they think you should make.

Executive presence checklist

Use the checklist below with the help of others to determine which areas of your executive presence can be improved, and how you can make it happen...

Firstly, think about previous relevant feedback that you have been given verbally or in writing.

Secondly, discuss and analyse with other people your strengths and shortcomings.



Thirdly, identify ways in which you can capitalise on your strengths and address your weaknesses.

✓ x	Do others recognize that you have a sense of purpose / goal?	
✓ x	How do others perceive your image, age and seniority? Young buck Lacking credibility Tired Out-dated Fitness Posture Step up Need a makeover Energy Attitude Positive Negative	
✓ x	How do others see you? Assertive or aggressive? Nice or nasty?	
✓ x	How strong is your presence in meetings?	
✓ x	How strong is your presence in 1-2-1s?	
✓ x	How strong is your presence when presenting?	
✓ x	How strong is your on-line presence?	
✓ x	Who are your sponsors and supporters? Is anyone undermining you?	
✓ x	Who do you need to align yourself with?	
✓ x	Commit yourself to developing your emotional intelligence	
✓ x	What is the 1 thing which is easily addressable which is holding you back?	



Take away actions

1. **You need a sense of purpose.**

Ensure people know what you stand for. Consider your role models and people you aspire to among your peer group and those you rub shoulders with. What do you admire about them? What do you think you should take note of?

2. **Make sure your aligned**

Identify the key players you need to align with. Tune into them, understand them and identify their motives. Use this knowledge to bring them onside. Optimise all your correspondence and include outliers as well as closer circles in your networking.

3. **Tackle your blind spots.**

Some of the issues here will almost certainly apply to you, although you may need to know which ones. So buddy up. Identify one trusted adviser and work closely with them to develop your executive image. Then find four others you can use to get a 360° view of yourself. Use this document with them.

4. **Review your communication style.**

Re-examine how you are communicating – content, structure and style.

5. **Google yourself.**

Please make sure people's perceptions of you outside of work complement, not compromise, your executive presence.

6. **Always fly the flag.**

Show yourself as committed to the company cause, professionally excellent and the A player you are.

7. **Review your progress**

Diarise a forward note to consider your executive presence again in the future.

You may wish to engage the support of an executive coach to help you develop your executive presence, and of course you can find one in our coach directory.