

# Executive Presence

## What Is Executive Presence?

Although difficult to define, executive presence is a core element of leadership. A nuanced stance that combines poise and confidence, executive presence plays an essential role in engaging others and creating a compelling, captivating, and commanding mark in the workplace.

## Why EP Matters?

Executive presence is vital to engaging, influencing, and leading. It is also about knowing oneself (self-awareness) and knowing how to read the room and quickly adapt to different situations.

### Establishes Authority

Executive presence creates an aura of authority that translates into the ability to command airtime, influence others, and drive impact.

### Shifts Power Dynamics

Leaders with highly cultivated executive presence are able to command authority not because they are “in charge” but because they are perceived as holding the social capital needed to engage and inspire their team members.

### Serves as a Gatekeeping Mechanism

Executive presence is often used as an implicit gatekeeping mechanism (a way to determine who gets the key to the C suite). Knowing what it is and how it is defined across work environments can be essential to one’s upward mobility.

### Supports Agility and Adaptability

With upward mobility, the rules of the game change. At these “table stakes” moments, executive presence helps rising leaders adjust with greater ease.

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for achieving executive presence. It manifests differently across genders, races, ethnicities, ages, personality types, and industries. Still, it is consistently experienced as decisive and influential.

## Context

Some researchers suggest that while IQ accounts for 4-20% of a leader’s success, the rest is EQ (emotional intelligence). I would say that the other 80-96% is part EQ and part PQ (physical intelligence).

### IQ - Thinking



- Cognitive capacity
- Being able to absorb and process information and its implications

### EQ - Feeling



- Emotional ability
- Ability to read the room, adapt, and relate; comfort navigating complex emotions

### PQ - Doing



- Physical capacity
- Acting (ability to move and occupy space in a way that commands authority and respect)

\* Executive presence is a combination of IQ (i.e., thinking on your feet), EQ (i.e., reading the room and engaging individual), and PQ (i.e., showing up looking the part whatever the context).

## Cultivating Executive Presence

While most leaders agree that executive presence matters, few can define it or describe how to cultivate it. As a result, it is often viewed as an inherent asset. In reality, executive presence, like most leadership skills, can be cultivated.

### Key Components of Executive Presence

|                      | Key Components  | Manifestations of Characteristics   | Importance  |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Gravitas</b>      | Seriousness, solemn dignity, and commanding presence; how you are experienced by others.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Displaying confidence</li><li>• Living and leading in alignment with your values</li><li>• Exhibiting grace under fire</li><li>• Acting decisively</li><li>• Showing poise</li><li>• Acting with integrity</li></ul>  | Helps to bolster trust and inspire confidence among one's team members.                 |
| <b>Communication</b> | Encompasses all forms of imparting information, both oral and written, and includes body language; how you are heard by others. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commanding the room</li><li>• Reading and resonating with your audience</li><li>• Keeping your game face on during difficult discussions</li><li>• Adjusting one's communication style to respond to different audiences and contexts</li><li>• Speaking in a clear, concise, and compelling manner</li></ul> | Ensures information is conveyed in a clear, accessible, direct, and appropriate manner. |
| <b>Presentation</b>  | How people see and experience you; how you show up and make an impression.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dressing the part (adjusting to expectations, which may differ across workplaces)</li><li>• Maintaining a healthy lifestyle that inspires others to be at their best.</li><li>• Paying attention to details</li></ul>   | Helps one embody and exude confidence and make a strong first impression.               |

\* Inspired by Sylvia Ann Hewitt definition of executive presence, which breaks executive presence into three similar categories: Gravitas, communication, and appearance.

## Building Awareness about Executive Presence

### Awareness

- Where do you see executive presence done well? Which colleagues, mentors, public figures, and even film characters offer good examples of executive presence?
- Who is effective and why? What are they doing that is impactful?
- Who are your role models?
  - \* Start noticing and looking through this filter.

### Self-Audit

- What feedback do you get on your executive presence? If you have never received feedback on your executive presence, who might you ask for feedback?
- When it comes to executive presence, what comes to you easily?
- What are your potential growth areas?
  - \* Take the steps needed to start cultivating your executive presence in at least one area where there is room to grow.

### Activation

- Reflect on real-time feedback (e.g., watch videos of yourself delivering public presentations).
- Stand and deliver important messages looking in the mirror.
- Confide with a close colleague or spouse and seek out ongoing feedback.
- Work with a certified coach to further hone your executive presence.

## How to Capture the Elusive Executive Presence

### Executive presence can be difficult to cultivate because it is:

- Challenging to define (arguably more challenging than defining both IQ and EQ).
- Abstract (like trust, we know it when we see it but struggle to conceptualize it at a distance).
- Requires attention and intention (takes time, energy, and bandwidth to realize).
- Is most effectively honed through feedback (if you are in a workplace where you're not getting regular and valuable feedback, it can be difficult to cultivate).

### Recommendations:

- Get access and exposure to people with executive presence (and not simply online).
- Observe others, note their impact, and analyze how their actions impact others.
- Be curious (notice what works and then ask why rather than assume you already know).

Executive presence is about showing up with confidence, integrity, clarity, and professionalism.

To continue cultivating your executive presence, set up a time to talk to

**Dr. Camille Preston and the AIM Leadership team.**

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