



What Makes a Great Executive Presence?

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Executive presence is one of those leadership qualities people often recognize before they can clearly define it. It is the difference between simply holding a leadership title and creating confidence when you enter a room, lead a meeting, deliver difficult news, or make a high-stakes decision. Great executive presence is not about being the loudest person in the room, having a perfect wardrobe, or projecting an artificial version of confidence. It is the combination of credibility, communication, self-awareness, composure, and influence that causes people to trust your leadership.

The strongest leaders understand that executive presence is not a personality type. Introverts can have it. Extroverts can have it. New leaders can develop it, and experienced executives can strengthen it. What matters is how consistently your behavior communicates that you are prepared, grounded, capable, and able to lead others through both opportunity and uncertainty.

1. Confidence Without Arrogance

Great executive presence begins with confidence, but confidence is not the same as dominance. Leaders with strong presence do not need to prove that they are the smartest person in every conversation. They can state a position clearly, make a decision, admit when they need more information, and invite other perspectives without appearing uncertain. Confidence becomes powerful when it is paired with humility.

2. Clear, Concise Communication

Senior leaders are constantly communicating - in meetings, presentations, emails, negotiations, interviews, and difficult conversations. Executive presence requires the ability to organize a message, get to the point, and communicate in language the audience can understand. Strong leaders know what they want people to know, what they want people to feel, and what they need people to do next.

3. Composure Under Pressure

Anyone can appear confident when everything is going well. Executive presence becomes most visible when something goes wrong. How do you respond when challenged publicly? What happens when a project fails, a client is upset, a board member disagrees, or your team needs an answer you do not yet have? Leaders with presence regulate their reactions, remain focused on the issue, and create stability for the people around them.

Executive presence is not about commanding every room. It is about creating enough trust, clarity, and credibility that people are willing to listen when you speak and follow when leadership is required.

4. Credibility and Preparation

Presence without substance does not last. Leaders build credibility by understanding their business, knowing their numbers, preparing for important conversations, following through on commitments, and making decisions that reflect sound judgment. Preparation creates confidence, and consistent follow-through turns confidence into trust.

5. The Ability to Read the Room

Executive presence includes situational awareness. A strong leader notices when the room is confused, disengaged, resistant, anxious, or ready to move forward. They adjust their communication without abandoning the message. This is especially important when leading boards, executive teams, large meetings, negotiations, or organizational change.

6. Strong Listening Skills

Listening is one of the most underestimated elements of executive presence. Leaders who constantly interrupt, rush to respond, or dominate conversations may appear confident but can lose influence. Strong executive leaders listen for information, concerns, resistance, and ideas. They ask thoughtful questions and make people feel heard without surrendering their responsibility to make decisions.

7. Professional Presence and Nonverbal Communication

How a leader carries themselves matters. Posture, eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, pace, appearance, and even how a leader enters a meeting can influence perception. Professional presence does not require one particular style. It requires intentionality. Your nonverbal communication should reinforce the confidence and credibility of your words rather than contradict them.

8. Decisiveness With Flexibility

Leaders with executive presence are willing to make decisions. They do not allow fear of being wrong to create endless analysis or ambiguity. At the same time, strong leaders can change direction when new information warrants it. Being decisive does not mean refusing to reconsider. It means making the best decision available, communicating it clearly, and remaining accountable for the outcome.

9. Emotional Intelligence

Executive presence is closely connected to emotional intelligence. Leaders must understand their own triggers, recognize the emotional dynamics around them, and choose responses that support the outcome they want. This does not mean removing emotion from leadership. It means preventing emotion from controlling leadership.

10. Consistency Between Words and Actions

Nothing weakens executive presence faster than inconsistency. Leaders lose credibility when they demand accountability but avoid it themselves, promote transparency but withhold information, or speak about respect while treating people poorly under pressure. Executive presence is built through alignment: what you say, what you do, and what you tolerate should tell the same leadership story.

Executive Presence Can Be Developed

Some people appear naturally comfortable in leadership settings, but executive presence is not something you either have or do not have. It can be strengthened through feedback, coaching, practice, self-awareness, communication training, and intentional exposure to increasingly challenging leadership situations. The key is identifying the gap between how you intend to show up and how others actually experience you.

How Still Standing in Heels Consulting Helps Leaders Build Executive Presence

Still Standing in Heels Consulting works with executives, emerging leaders, business owners, and leadership teams to strengthen the skills that shape executive presence. Coaching and training can focus on communication, confidence, difficult conversations, meeting and boardroom presence, leadership style, emotional intelligence, presentation skills, professional image, influence, and decision-making.

Our approach is practical and individualized. The goal is not to turn leaders into someone they are not. It is to help them become more intentional about how they communicate, how they respond under pressure, and how their leadership is experienced by the people around them. Authenticity and executive presence should work together - because the most effective leadership presence is one a leader can sustain.

The bottom line: Great executive presence is the ability to project confidence without arrogance, communicate with clarity, remain composed under pressure, listen with intention, make sound decisions, and build trust through consistent behavior. Your title may give you authority. Your executive presence determines how effectively you use it.

About the Author

Jenna Ghisolfo is the Founder of Still Standing in Heels Consulting. Her work focuses on executive coaching, leadership development, executive presence, organizational training, communication, and helping leaders build the confidence and skills needed to create stronger teams and greater impact.