

JOEL A. GARFINKLE

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CRACK THE CODE OF  
EXECUTIVE  
**PRESENCE**

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UNLEASH THE “IT” FACTOR THAT  
MAKES GREAT LEADERS

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## Executive Presence The It Factor That Makes Great Leaders

Paul hesitantly walked toward Kevin's office, unsure why a superior three levels above him had invited him into his office. Should he be concerned or excited? His anxiety brewed. Kevin was just one level below the CEO of their multi-billion-dollar biotechnology company, and Paul had never formally met with him before, let alone been invited to his office. His heart beat faster, and he wanted to turn around.

Kevin jumped right in by saying that Paul's performance, talents, and overall track record were all excellent. "You are great at what you do, and you're a high-potential leader that top management has its eyes on," he said. Elated, Paul started to completely relax. He even thought, *maybe he's wanting to give me my boss's job*. Or had another position just opened?

Then, Kevin said something that really shook Paul up. "This conversation isn't about today; it's about your future," he began. "Without executive presence, your career success will come to a halt and you will not continue to thrive at this company."

Paul was in shock. He had never received feedback like this before. "It's not just you," Kevin assured him. "When I'm talking with other executives about who has what it takes for advancement, it's apparent that most of our next-level leaders lack executive presence."

He saw himself in Paul, he continued, and he encouraged Paul to work with a coach to grow his executive presence. Kevin recommended me, and we utilized the 3x3 Executive Presence Model outlined in this book for six months of coaching.

At the end of the coaching engagement, I asked Paul what results had surprised him the most. Here's what he said:

- "My confidence immediately began to soar in the first month of coaching."
- "I saw how much more in command I felt."
- "I became more decisive and could make bolder decisions without any self-doubt."
- "I showed conviction in my ideas."
- "I became more direct in my communication and began expressing myself without hesitation."

He hadn't expected all this to occur. He hadn't expected to not only learn how to *act* like a leader, but how to *feel* like a leader.

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Paul's executive presence began to shine in the first month of coaching. After six months, he became a vice-president. Within a year, he was already being groomed for a senior vice-president role because he now had such a high degree of executive presence competency.

Due to Paul's success, the company hired me to conduct trainings for all the next-level leaders who lacked executive presence. I led two to three programs a year, depending on the number of leaders who needed to prepare for advancement. Every time I conducted the training, I brought Paul in to share his story.

## Why is executive presence essential to career success?

Like Paul, you may be just confronting the question of how to rise to the next level. No matter what field you work in, executive presence is the key to unlocking your full potential.

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Without executive presence,  
your career success will come to a halt.

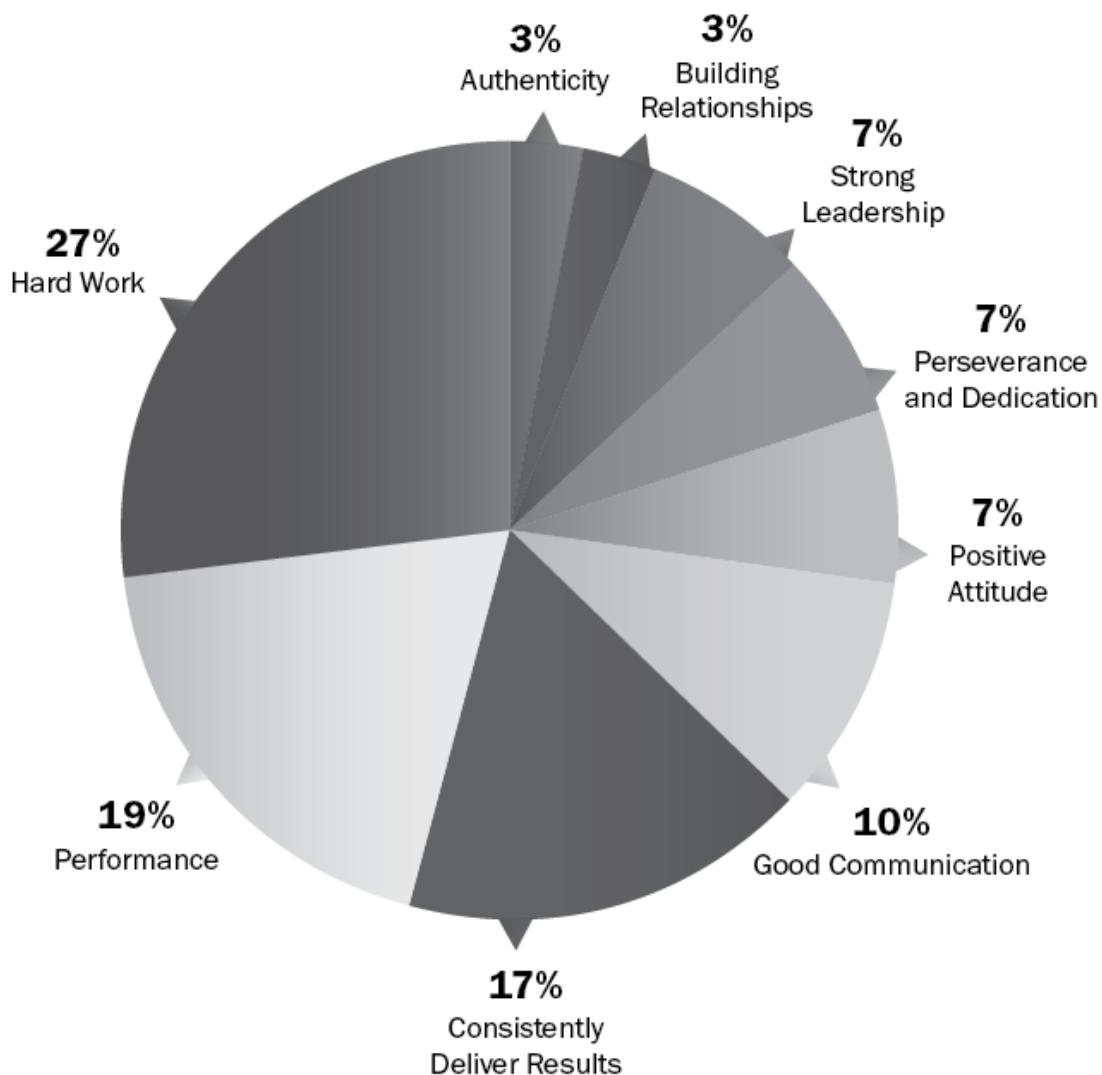
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When 400 CEOs were asked how they chose their next-level leaders, 100% of them said that executive presence can differentiate a person from the crowd, and 89% say it plays a key role in getting ahead.<sup>1</sup> Leaders are paying attention to who has enhanced executive presence, and those who do are the ones who receive the promotions. This quality clearly plays a central role in a leader's career progression and promotional opportunities.

What's gotten you this far in your career won't bring you to the next level. What have you relied on thus far? Probably your performance, credentials, track record, results, abilities, knowledge, and work ethic. Others have validated and affirmed these qualities; you know you're good at what you do and have been perceived positively thus far. But there's a limit to how far those qualities alone can take you.

In this survey, I asked 425 employees what they relied on to get to this stage of their career. From the data collected, the following percentages were revealed.

## WHAT'S GOT YOU TO THIS STAGE OF YOUR CAREER?



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 425 U.S. Workers

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Now, you need a major shift in focus. As you take on or inspire toward increased responsibility, you need a new skill set that will allow you to lead at a high level. You need a high level of executive presence competencies that you can leverage to make an impact, both within your immediate team and in your broader organization.

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No one can realize their full potential as a leader without executive presence. But the good news is that executive presence can be learned. In fact, it turns out that 98% of senior leaders say they didn't innately possess executive presence.<sup>ii</sup> Instead, they had to cultivate it. This book will show you how.

Executive presence is something that can—and must—be learned. As Michael Useem, director of the Center for Leadership and Change Management at Wharton, says:

"Leadership at the front, mid and top lines alike is not innate. It is true some people have a huge head start. They're exceptionally clear minded. They communicate well. They're exceptionally persuasive. They look physically like a leader should, at least in the idealized Hollywood version. But the real skills of leadership at every level must be acquired in our lifetimes. There are no biological advantages. You have to learn those skills. And any organization, by implication, has to provide a chance for everybody to be a leader."<sup>iii</sup>

This book gives you the tools to develop and hone their own executive presence and become the elite performers who influence outcomes and drive change. They'll contribute to major decisions and guide the fulfillment of their company's vision. Readers will learn how to convey confidence, command respect, and exude a professional magnetism that influences others at every level. You'll learn new strategies on how to project conviction, be assertive, and lead with gravitas. You will trade in any passivity and self-doubt for self-assurance, decisiveness, and bold decision-making.

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No one can realize their full potential  
as a leader without executive presence.

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If you're a leader working to help your employees develop executive presence, this book will help you teach them to leverage it more effectively, allowing them to move ahead easily and quickly in their careers. By embodying the qualities of executive presence and applying them wisely, your leaders will continue to sustain a high level of success and impact.

When you and your employees begin exuding the confidence that executive presence entails, top leadership will more easily see you becoming next-level leaders. These senior leaders will be naturally drawn to you, opening new doorways to increased responsibility.

As you rise in your organization, you'll realize how much greater your executive presence must become. The higher the stakes, the more you need that power and presence.

This book will provide you with a step-by-step process for how to build and leverage your executive presence in any role. *Executive Presence* will teach you how to:

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1. Radiate Gravitas: Be confident, commanding, and charismatic.
2. Act with Authority: Be decisive, bold, and influential.
3. Express Yourself Fully: Be vocal, insightful, and clear.

As you master the lessons in this book, you'll expand what is possible for you to achieve. As you teach them to your employees, you'll have a core group of capable leaders who know how to influence others and drive results.

## Creating your executive presence brand.

You need to establish your own brand, or someone else will do it for you. As a rising leader, executive presence needs to be the central focus of that brand.

Most of the time, your brand is created by others. They will project onto you what they believe is there. They will develop a perception of you, an image of what they think they see. This perception may not be accurate or favorable. However, you can control your own narrative by establishing your own executive presence brand—intentionally and systematically.

The manager of one of my executive coaching clients said this to me:

"His ability to become a next-level leader is tied to his brand—to his *executive presence* brand. I asked the higher-level leaders what they think of when they see him, and they drew a blank. Nothing. They knew who he was, but didn't know what he did. They didn't know his value to the company at all."

The advice in this book helped this leader to come up with an executive presence brand that gets the attention of all senior leaders. He learned how to fill in the blank with all the key qualities of executive presence—and you will too.

## Who is this book for?

As mentioned, this book will not only help you to cultivate your own executive presence; it will also teach you how to coach your employees to success. Here are five key audiences who will benefit from this book.

**Top-level leaders and senior executives.** The higher you rise in an organization, the more executive presence becomes a necessity. At the senior executive level, you are already expected to have executive presence. If your executive presence isn't fully developed or is

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underutilized, you'll come across as having less credibility and in turn receive less respect. Senior executives spend the majority of their time in meetings where they constantly need to speak up to convince and influence others. Their employees, peers, C-level executives, and clients all expect them to present themselves and their ideas with conviction, authority, confidence, and command. When top executives lack executive presence, they immediately lose credibility and believability.

**Future company leaders.** These are the fast-rising, high-potential employees who are the up-and-coming stars of the organization. These aspiring and emerging leaders need to have executive presence to succeed in advanced

positions. I am continuously working with leaders whose career success came to an abrupt halt because they didn't develop and improve their executive presence as they rose up in the company. Often they were highly competent and assumed they would naturally continue rising in rank. However, having a high degree of skill and expertise isn't enough. The higher you go in an organization, the more you need that confidence, authority, and presence that you've probably noticed in great leaders.

To ensure the company's continued success, these upper-management employees have the responsibility to master the qualities of executive presence. It's also the only way to continue their personal trajectory toward heightened success.

**Managers who want to help their employees grow into leaders.** Managers want their employees to develop executive presence. As a leader, bringing executive presence to your team will elevate their potential and impact.

Think about all the people you oversee in your role as a manager. Your direct reports, the employees working for your direct reports, and the employees below them. Right now, identify the employees you manage who lack executive presence. Either apply what you are learning in this book to help them improve their executive presence, or give them a copy of it to read.

**Employees with a solid performance who are ready for the next level.** Solid performers receive good performance reviews, have a strong skillset, and execute their responsibilities well. With this strong foundation of performance and results, they are ready to begin developing their executive presence. If you don't have a solid foundation as a good performer, you'll need to shore this up first by eliminating all performance issues before focusing on your executive presence.

**Minority employees and women—and their leaders.** Budding leaders of different races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities will benefit from focusing on cultivating executive presence. Women, people of color, and other employees from marginalized groups are too often

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The higher you go in an organization, the more you need that confidence, authority, and presence.

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overlooked and underappreciated, which causes companies to miss out on their full range of talent. If you're in one of these demographics, growing your executive presence will allow you to leap over the barriers you may encounter in your career.

As the number of minority employees within a company grows, management needs to reflect a similar level of diversity. A highly diversified management team provides a vast array of insights and perspectives, rather than an echo chamber. While women have lacked adequate leadership roles inside companies for decades, now organizations are viewing women as a vital ingredient for future success. Minorities and women need a competitive advantage to get the positions they deserve, and it's called—you guessed it—executive presence.

You may wonder, "Will women be perceived negatively when they display the qualities of executive presence?" After all, studies have shown that women are often viewed as unlikeable for embodying qualities that are lauded in men, like ambition and toughness.<sup>iv</sup> These double standards may raise concerns about being perceived as *too* assertive or even bossy. But you won't get where you want to go by staying on the sidelines. Executive presence is vital for anyone who wants to get into the game. And, guided by the increasing focus on servant leadership, you can work to balance nurturing qualities with strength.

In short, don't dial back your confidence because of how you fear others may perceive you. Own your power and strengths, while also working to convey empathy and compassion. You can't necessarily change people's biases, but you *can* control how you show up. This advice applies equally to men, by the way—they will also benefit greatly from consciously working to show more empathy to others.

## **Ways of approaching this book**

You can review, digest, and implement what you learn in this book in two different ways:

1. A leadership lens
2. A personal lens

When you bring the principles outlined in this book to your team, you are applying the leadership lens by focusing on the growth of the people you manage.

When you review this book for your own benefit, you are investing in yourself and applying the personal lens by working toward your own professional development.

**Executive presence is as important as your current job.**

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Look at the training programs offered by your company. Is developing executive presence on the list? Probably not. Very few companies educate employees on how to develop executive presence. They fail to recognize its vital importance—so it is up to you to pursue this goal. Creating executive presence doesn't happen by accident. You need to mentally, intellectually, and emotionally challenge yourself to step into the shoes of the leader you want to become. Executive presence sometimes doesn't feel natural and easy. It must be practiced and learned over time. What is it going to take for you to commit to making the necessary changes so that executive presence becomes a vital competency of your work life?

Developing executive presence is a separate part-time job that deserves almost as much attention as your current assignment. Phylis Esposito, the executive vice president and chief strategy officer at Omaha-based TD Ameritrade, emphasizes the need for a proactive approach. "Doing nothing and just hoping your next promotion will somehow take care of itself is really the biggest risk," says Esposito. "Don't forget that there are people coming up behind you who want your job."<sup>v</sup>

While cultivating executive presence requires a tremendous amount of time, effort, and energy, it will result in an extraordinary career. You will fully realize your professional, personal, and financial goals and improve the quality and quantity of your contributions to your company. As Roger Enrico, PepsiCo's former CEO, noted in *BusinessWeek*: "The way I look upon it is that leadership is a skill like many others. Whatever leadership ability an individual has can be made better through practice and honing."<sup>vi</sup>

Practicing the core qualities of executive presence will directly increase your competence and confidence, as well as your level of contribution to your organization. Just as an athlete may run several additional miles per week to build endurance, strengthening your executive presence is an undertaking that requires dedication, repetition of key elements, and time spent beyond the typical workweek.

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Practicing the skills that support a strong executive presence will lay the groundwork for becoming the best leader possible.

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Few people have embodied the power of persistent, tenacious training as well as Kobe Bryant. His fellow players recount how at the 2008 Olympics, when the rest of the team was just waking up for breakfast, Bryant came in drenched in sweat after a three-hour workout.<sup>vii</sup> For him, that was just the norm. He routinely worked out and practiced in the wee hours of the morning, long before most people were even up. He made no excuses—not even for a broken wrist, fellow player John Celestand recalls, speaking of the 1999 season:

"The first time I began to understand why he was the best was in the pre-season. In a game against the Wizards, Kobe broke the wrist on his shooting hand. He was always the first person to practice every day, arriving at least an hour and a half early. This would infuriate me because I wanted to be the first person to practice,' says Celestand.

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'As I walked through the training room, I became stricken with fear when I heard a ball bouncing. No, no, it couldn't be! Yes it could. Kobe was already in a full sweat with a cast on his right arm and dribbling and shooting with his left.'"<sup>viii</sup>

Bryant meticulously scrutinized footage of the games he played, even bringing out his laptop at half-time. "He often corrals teammates, fires up the laptop, and shows them precisely how they can carve out easier shots for themselves," ESPN once said.<sup>ix</sup> A soccer player as a child, Bryant focused on learning to use his lower body better than most of his fellow players—through strict self-discipline and rigorous practice.<sup>x</sup>

Just as practicing fundamentals provided a strong foundation upon which Bryant built his basketball skills, practicing the skills that support a strong executive presence will lay the groundwork for becoming the best leader possible.

Developing your executive presence may seem like a daunting task. It involves a lot of work, but it's the kind of work that will have far-reaching, long-lasting benefits. You will become more motivated, you'll learn how recognize and promote your own value, and you'll develop a meaningful and effective career plan. These are all things you can accomplish on your way to becoming a better leader.

## Frequently asked questions at my corporate trainings on executive presence

You may be asking some of these common questions yourself. Read on for a better understanding of how executive presence applies to you.

### **Is executive presence something you are born with or something you can develop?**

Some people come into the world with a certain vibe, energy, or charisma that allows them to show up in a way that naturally draws others to them. They exude an easy confidence and a natural gravitas. These individuals do have an advantage over others who have to work at it. However, the majority of people in the world aren't born with executive presence. It's something they must build and grow throughout their career.

### **Is executive presence only for extroverts?**

Extroverts do have an advantage when it comes to displaying their executive presence. They naturally come across as more confident, outgoing, and at ease with interpersonal dynamics. They tend to speak more loudly, enjoy taking the spotlight, and dominate conversations.

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The loudest person in the room is not always right, or even the best qualified

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But often the best players aren't the ones we'd expect them to be. Just look at the 2006 World Cup Final: Marcello Lippi, the coach for Italy, had to decide which player to give Italy's last penalty

shot in the shoot-out. Rather than giving it to one of the most esteemed and well-known players, he gave it to Fabio Grosso, a quiet, unassuming left-back. Grosso succeeded, bringing Italy to victory. This story shows how talent can emerge in unexpected places, says Ben Lyttleton, author of *Twelve Yards: The Art and Psychology of the Perfect Penalty Kick*. "We may recognize from our own workplace (or, indeed, public life) that the loudest person in the room is not always right, or even the best qualified," he asserts.<sup>xii</sup> I see this point confirmed in my executive coaching work time and time again, watching introverts master the art (or sport) of becoming a strong leader. LinkedIn has recognized this idea with its Quiet Ambassadors program, identifying leaders who don't fit the stereotypical extroverted profile.<sup>xiii</sup>

The key to success for introverts is to dedicate the necessary time to developing their executive presence

Even if they're not the loudest, introverts can learn to exude a steady confidence and presence that speaks volumes. They may struggle to speak up, stand out, and show confidence, which are key elements of executive presence. However, they can learn to speak with conviction, be decisive, put a stake in the ground and own their position, and have a take-charge attitude. They don't need to be the most loquacious person to do any of that—in fact, brevity is one of the essential qualities of executive presence. The key to success for introverts is to dedicate the necessary time to developing their executive presence, because it's a competitive advantage they can't afford not to have.

## **Do you have to be an executive to work on your executive presence?**

No, you don't have to be an executive to work on your executive presence. Don't take the word "executive" literally. If you are stuck on the word "executive" ("I'm not an executive, so I can't relate to the concept of 'executive presence'"), I recommend thinking of it as "leadership presence."

All employees need to improve how they show up, act, and communicate with others. No matter what your role is or your level in the company, you can constantly be working toward radiating more gravitas, acting with more authority, and expressing yourself more fully.

## **What is the line between being confident and cocky? Commanding and a bully?**

Being confident and in command are two cornerstones of executive presence, as we'll explore in this book. But where does confidence stray into being cocky, and where does commanding stray into becoming too pushy?

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Authentic confidence does *not* come across as arrogant. Truly confident people are comfortable admitting their weaknesses and shortcomings, whereas cocky people are hiding behind a veneer of false self-assuredness. They are putting on an act fueled by insecurity. If you're honest with yourself about your flaws as well as strengths, you'll learn to project a natural confidence that does not come across as condescending. The same goes for showing that you're in command—you'll learn to radiate capability and inspire others to have confidence in you without being domineering. Most people tend to come across as lacking confidence or the ability to be in command, rather than too arrogant or pushy. However, if you believe those words describe you, cultivating executive presence will help you develop a more people-centered approach grounded in *true* confidence and command rather than an attempt to hide your weaknesses.

**Does executive presence matter as much in the virtual world? Does the same advice for displaying it still apply?**

Absolutely—executive presence matters just as much, if not more, on teams working remotely. Holding people's attention proves even more challenging in a Zoom meeting than in person. And because you're not seeing people throughout the day, you need to really make an impression when you do speak with them. Those few moments go a long way toward inspiring engagement, instilling a sense of purpose, and keeping people driven to fulfill a shared vision. The 3x3 Executive Presence Model applies equally to those who work virtually and in person, and the advice I'll share in this book can be applied across all contexts. In certain cases, I'll share particular tips for making qualities known in virtual settings.

**How much does appearance matter for executive presence—in the virtual world and in person?**

It's essential to project a professional appearance, both virtually and in person. While dress norms are shifting in many companies, you also need to consider how clients and other people outside of your immediate workplace culture will perceive you—as well as your superiors. If working from home, dress like you're back in the office, and follow the same dress standards as people at your boss's level (unless they're wearing sweatpants!). You'll set yourself apart from the crowd, especially if others have become more lax about dress.

Appearance is not one of the core qualities in the 3x3 Executive Presence Model because it takes relatively little effort to get this right. In this book, we're going to spend time exploring the qualities that take more effort to develop, helping you to express yourself well and show up fully as a leader. Dress is an important but superficial matter in comparison.

**Do cultural differences affect whether you should demonstrate executive presence?**

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Cultural differences may affect exactly *how* your executive presence shows up, but in general, executive presence benefits leaders across cultures. Be sensitive to your audience and culture. For example, if your culture doesn't engage in a lot of direct eye contact, you can follow that cultural norm (unless you're interacting with people outside of your culture, when you can consider changing your approach). Confidence may be tempered with more humility in certain cultures, like Japan—but even when making humble statements, one might project confidence as calm self-assuredness through body language and tone of voice. Keep your particular cultural context in mind, working to portray the executive presence qualities in a way that will resonate with the people you work among.

## **Does executive presence mesh with servant leadership?**

Today's leaders are realizing the value of servant leadership, Teal organizations, and an agile mindset, which focus less on showing authority and more on empowering individuals. It follows that many will wonder if executive presence applies in these contexts. My answer is a resounding yes. Executive presence is not about intimidating people or dominating groups. Rather, it is about stepping into your potential as a leader who can effectively guide your team to success. And power is not about bossing others around—it's about bringing out their highest potential. Being a confident person whom people trust and respect will allow you to influence them in positive ways and draw out the best qualities of those around you. Thus, it will allow you to become a better servant leader rather than flying under the radar and missing opportunities to make a difference. You can model the humbleness of a great servant leader while radiating all of the nine executive presence qualities discussed in this book—and I encourage you to strive toward this goal. Thus, executive presence will accentuate rather than hinder

**The sweet spot of executive presence lies between “too nice” and “arrogant.”**

Executive presence is not about intimidating others *or* appeasing them. People who don't have executive presence often come across as being very nice but unassertive. Conversely, those who possess a high level of certain qualities but not others can seem arrogant or aggressive, as we'll discuss further in the coming chapters. These two extremes *both* come from not possessing a balanced range of all core executive presence qualities. The sweet spot you are trying to find lies in the middle of being too nice and too aggressive, and it comes from achieving that ideal balance.

A narcissistic person *can* project the appearance of executive presence at first glance. They can talk a good game and may even rise up through the ranks because some leaders perceive their arrogance as confidence. However, they lack essential qualities of executive presence that will make them a truly great leader, and most experienced leaders will see through them. Great leaders are committed to nurturing others, leveraging all of their EP qualities for the good of the team rather than just personal gain.

## DO YOU HAVE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE? ASSESS YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF EP.

1. I don't have enough of a presence during meetings. When I do speak up, my words are overlooked.
2. I frequently have trouble with decision-making and feeling conviction in my choices.
3. I avoid the spotlight because it makes me nervous.
4. I frequently feel that I need to be more articulate in order to make myself heard.
5. Peers often talk over me or overlook my strengths.
6. I don't fit the stereotypical mold of a leader, so I am often overlooked.
7. I wish I were better at naturally drawing people to me and building excitement for my ideas.
8. I have trouble with being persuasive and advocating for an idea even when I truly believe in its merit.
9. I tend to overanalyze what I'm going to say, and then I don't speak up.
10. I defer to others too often instead of taking the lead.
11. I can be laidback and casual, going with the flow and lacking conviction.
12. I'm often too nice and accommodating, making decisions based on appeasing people.
13. I'm hesitant to take risks and make mistakes.
14. When others are pushing back or disagreeing, I tend to give in and back down.
15. I could let my expertise and enthusiasm for the topic radiate more.
16. I could be more energetic and inspiring to move people toward action.
17. I need to make decisions more quickly, especially in situations with imperfect information and uncertainty.

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18. When I have new, creative, and unbaked ideas, I don't usually share them at meetings.
19. I avoid confronting challenges head-on and without delay.
20. I get consumed by my day-to-day responsibilities and don't spend enough time setting the strategic direction.
21. I manage my current scope of responsibility, but I don't influence groups outside of the one I belong to.
22. I know the meetings I attend are important, but I often show up unprepared.
23. I do have important things to share, but when I speak, I am mired in the details, long-winded, and unable to make my point.
24. I tend to think out loud and share my unedited train of thought.
25. I have a high level of expertise, but too often I focus on data, facts, process, and background details that aren't necessary.

These are all common flaws that people experience in the workplace—even high-level leaders. In many cases, while leaders have been promoted to positions of authority, they've never had any support in cultivating the abilities that will give them real power and influence. People with a great deal of talent often feel trapped at a certain rung of the leadership ladder because they lack that power and influence.

## WHAT DOES YOUR SCORE MEAN?

Tally up the number of items you checked, and find the corresponding number below:

- 1–9:** *Your executive presence is beginning to make itself known, even if you're not aware of it yet. You are probably getting noticed for your great ideas, talents, and leadership potential. Your organization is likely beginning to groom you for succession, seeing you as someone who knows how to take charge, rally others behind an idea and drive change.*
- 10–17:** *You show promise in certain areas of leadership, but you're falling short in other ways that are keeping you from growing the visibility and influence you deserve. The good news is that you do have a leadership skill set that you can further cultivate in order to reach the next level—and this book will show you how.*
- 18–25:** *You urgently need to take action to step into your power as a leader. You shrink back as others learn to assert themselves as leaders—even though they aren't more talented and capable than you. Fortunately, this book will help you change that. Your low level of gravitas, authority, and expressiveness are holding you back in your career, and it's time to correct course so you can achieve the career you deserve.*

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Whether you're a seasoned leader who wants to get more from your team, or you're wondering why you haven't yet been promoted to a next-level leadership role, this book can help. As you work your way through it, use the action steps and exercises in this book to apply the lessons you're learning right away, while they're fresh in your mind. And don't rush. Growing executive presence is a journey that must be taken one step at a time, so be patient with yourself as you diligently implement these lessons. Give each step the time it deserves, and you'll become a truly inspiring and impressive leader who commands respect, exudes charisma, and radiates gravitas in all your presentations, discussions, and interactions.

## How Does Executive Presence Enhance Leadership?

*"We convince by our presence."* – Walt Whitman

If you're an aspiring leader wondering if you have what it takes to reach the next level, *you do*. You may be lacking executive presence now, but you have the skills and intelligence to build it step by step—just like nearly every great leader who has come before you.

How does executive presence benefit your own success? It will allow you to step into your full potential and drive your team toward your goals with grace and skill. People throughout your organization will see you as a leader, and thus, new opportunities will continuously open up.

How does executive presence benefit your company's success? As you cultivate your own executive presence, you'll continue to become a more motivational leader who guides others to reach their full potential.

As a leader, you also must focus on helping your employees to develop their own executive presence. If you're a senior leader striving to win the talent war, it's not about finding the right employees. You already have the best talent. Now is the time to uncover the high-value people inside your organization who are being overlooked. They are the competitive advantage you can't afford to lose.

What will move your hidden talent up to superstar status? Engaging, empowering, and leveraging them effectively. They are waiting for the development of their executive potential. Dedicate time, training, and coaching on how to improve their executive presence, and you'll release the untapped potential of your underutilized leaders.

Let's take a look now at why executive presence is critical to companies' success, as well as individual leaders' ability to thrive.

### Why do companies need employees with executive presence?

By helping your people cultivate their executive presence, you'll accomplish each of these objectives:

- Build a leadership pipeline.
- Get the most from your hidden leaders.
- Dramatically boost retention and engagement.
- Know the value each leader is contributing.

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- Benefit from a diverse pool of talent.

Fifteen years ago, executive presence wasn't something companies focused on as a leadership development area. A few years ago, it didn't even make the top 20 list of traits for a leader to have. But across the board, company executives have come to realize that it can make or break their leaders' success. On a survey conducted by Gartner, it came in second on the list of the top 20 leadership traits that make a difference.<sup>xiii</sup>

Executive presence is not just a nice-to-have perk. Here's why every company should be focusing on helping its people cultivate executive presence—and why you need to start developing it in yourself, no matter what level you're at today.

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When your people are equipped with executive presence,  
they will become the high-impact leaders  
who move the organization forward.

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## **Executive presence allows you to build a leadership pipeline.**

Executive presence is essential to preparing employees for higher levels of leadership. As companies come to realize this, they're discussing this trait more than ever. They are requiring their people to have a strong foundation of executive presence as they move into middle management and above. Stepping up to the next levels in a leader's career progression requires a higher and higher degree of executive presence.

As you prepare for succession, work to grow leadership at scale. Don't just focus on a couple of people—build a cadre of leaders, as Claudio Feser, senior partner with McKinsey & Co., urges. "Organizations that built a significant number of leaders tend to outperform those that focus in on the very few," he explains.<sup>xiv</sup>

In a survey by the Association for Talent Development, 47% of organizations said they expect to have a skills gap at the executive level in future years.<sup>xv</sup> Robert Half found that 52% of CFOs don't have a successor lined up for their position.<sup>xvi</sup> "A company that doesn't engage in executive mentoring and knowledge-sharing can struggle with retention and potentially lose institutional expertise," Robert Half emphasizes. By providing targeted support to budding leaders, companies can fill these talent gaps and grow a leadership talent pipeline. You'll be helping each employee create a roadmap for future success, and your company will have a solid succession plan in place. When your people are equipped with executive presence, they will become the high-impact leaders who move the organization forward.

## **You'll get the most from your hidden leaders.**

Every company has hidden leaders. These hidden leaders remain unrecognized and unappreciated, leading them to feel invisible. During talent reviews, executives will say, "I have

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no idea who that person is” or “I’ve been in meetings with them, but I never hear from them.” As these leaders remain hidden, the company loses out on all that unused talent. Gallup has found that companies miss the mark in their promotional and hiring decisions for leadership positions *82% of the time*, and allowing this talent to remain invisible has serious repercussions on productivity and engagement.<sup>xvii</sup>

Don’t fall into (or stay in) this trap. You must focus on bringing out the latent potential of your talented people so they’ll become motivated, valued, and sought-after leaders. When these hidden leaders know how to convey confidence, command respect, and exude a professional magnetism that influences others, they’ll be able to inspire others and drive change.

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As these leaders remain hidden,  
the company loses out on all that unused talent.

Peter Drucker said, “The purpose of an organization is to enable ordinary people to do extraordinary things.” Hidden leaders can become extraordinary when they grow and leverage a top-notch executive presence.

## ***WHO are the hidden leaders?***

- Those in *a department that’s low profile* or far from the center of the action.
- Those who are *quiet and reluctant to push themselves forward*, eclipsed by more forceful peers.
- Those who display some *leadership potential, though it remains untapped because senior managers don’t know they exist*.
- The budding stars who chose the parent track over the fast track.
- Those who took *part in a project that failed*, which damaged their reputation.
- Those who were *assigned to an unsupportive manager* who didn’t encourage them to grow.
- Those with *unconventional backgrounds*.
- Those who *stepped off the upward mobility track for personal reasons*, transferring onto the mommy track, the back-to-school track, or the spouse relocation track.

The whole company benefits when you find and identify these hidden leaders, not just the individual.

**You’ll dramatically boost retention and engagement.**

How do you make sure your employees feel like an integral part of your company? By giving them the visibility they desire and deserve, through cultivating executive presence. Garner has

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found that high-potential employees are 15% more likely than other employees to seek out other job opportunities if they don't believe you're grooming them for succession.<sup>xviii</sup> Training your people to exude executive presence says, "You matter to us." It makes employees feel emotionally involved with the company. When you proactively work to identify and train your overlooked leaders, you'll also show them that you aim to promote from within. They'll envision an exciting future with your company, rather than thinking they'll only find opportunities for advancement elsewhere. People will want to be on your team, which saves you time and money by reducing recruiting costs and increasing employee retention rates. Elevating your leaders' executive presence will also greatly improve engagement. When people feel valued, they produce better results. They'll have the confidence to bring great ideas to fruition and excited about what they are accomplishing. This creates a positive feedback loop in which the successes they experience fuel their desire to achieve more. As they enjoy the recognition that comes with strong performance, they'll feel driven to reach higher and higher, motivating their team to accomplish more ambitious goals.

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When Intuit noticed it was experiencing a serious engagement problem, it began focusing on providing high-quality coaching for managers and giving them greater autonomy in solving problems.<sup>xix</sup> Within two years, engagement improved by 16%, reports the Society for Human Resource Management. Intuit's stock rose in turn by almost 300%, and the company achieved the highest growth rate it had seen in four years. As this example clearly shows, your company's success depends on your people's engagement.

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A leader's impact isn't just the end product of their work—it's their ability to shine as a confident, commanding, bold, decisive, and expressive leader.

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## You'll know the value each leader is contributing.

Oftentimes, the hidden leaders are the worker bees who put their head down and get the work done. They let their work speak for itself, but that means senior leaders may have no idea what they actually contribute. Thus, it's hard for their organizations to engage in effective decision-making, since they don't have all the information about what their leaders are doing.

A leader's impact isn't just the end product of their work—it's their ability to shine as a confident, commanding, bold, decisive, and expressive leader. Letting their work speak for itself will directly undermine their executive presence and cause their company to gain less value from their efforts—partly because the company doesn't know what they've achieved. As they develop executive presence, others will know who they are and will appreciate the value they bring to the table.

## Your company will benefit from a diverse pool of talent.

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Women, people of color, introverts, and those whose gender or sexual orientation is outside of the norm are prone to being overlooked and undervalued. Too often, companies miss out on leveraging their potential even when they have a phenomenal skill set. If you're underutilizing those who don't fit the traditional mold of a leader in your company, you're missing out on a vast pool of talent. Building a culturally diverse and inclusive leadership pool will give you access to an incredible range of insights, experience, and wisdom to draw from. You'll avoid the groupthink that can result from operating in a silo, while allowing your company to create a pipeline of inclusive leadership. By supporting these leaders' executive-level growth, you'll fully leverage them and inspire their loyalty to your organization.

In today's competitive environment, focusing on diversity and inclusion is a must. Since 47% of the workers in this country are women<sup>xx</sup> and 37% are minorities,<sup>xxi</sup> it's time to stop overlooking these underrepresented groups. Providing them with executive presence training will allow them to rise to their full potential, stepping into the leadership positions they deserve.

Many of these potential leaders would probably answer "yes" to most of the following questions:

- Does top management often *overlook your insights and perspectives?*
- Do you accomplish significant victories on key projects, yet your *low visibility prevents you from receiving the recognition you deserve?*
- Do you believe that *your work should speak for itself*—that you shouldn't need to promote yourself to gain respect and influence within your company?
- Are *your colleagues getting more respect and influence than you are?*
- Do you realize that *talent, results, and competence aren't enough* to achieve career success?
- Do you wish your colleagues and managers would value and appreciate your contributions?
- Do you leave the fate of your career in someone else's hands?
- Would you like to be *recognized as being highly capable, credible, and respected by upper management?*

In a Deloitte study, 75% of respondents said they thrive in a diverse and inclusive environment. Many said it helps them to grow professionally and encourages creativity. Smart organizations are responding by making inclusiveness a priority through the recruitment of diverse employees for higher-level positions.

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For a host of reasons, people of marginalized groups may not put themselves forward or draw attention to themselves, however—and when they do, they may be overlooked. Executive presence is the key to making their abilities so widely known that advancement is not just likely, but inevitable.

To encourage them along this journey, it's important to embody six signature qualities of inclusive leadership, Deloitte explains.<sup>xxii</sup> These six qualities will help you serve as the best mentor possible for a diverse range of talent as they rise into their full potential:

- Commitment
- Courage
- Cognizance of bias
- Curiosity
- Cultural intelligence
- Collaboration

Through commitment to inclusion, the courage to challenge the status quo, cognizance of their personal bias, curiosity about how other people view the world, an effort to become culturally intelligent, and proficiency at collaboration in diverse groups, you can nurture the development of all your rising stars.

Exuding confidence doesn't come naturally to everyone. However, leaders from marginalized groups can absolutely learn to radiate conviction in their ideas and command respect from everyone at the table as they cultivate executive presence.

## Why is executive presence critical to your own success as a leader?

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78% of business leaders state that a low level of executive presence paralyzes career advancement

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Executive presence will propel your success forward in all of these ways:

- Marking you as a next-level leader.
- Transforming self-doubt into confidence.
- Leading you to love your work more.
- Driving your team to accomplish bigger and bigger goals.

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Here are the key ways in which I see executive presence benefiting the leaders I am coaching every day.

## **Executive presence helps select next-level leaders.**

The employees who are most likely to be chosen for next-level roles are the ones who are already viewed as capable and competent leaders. Because they exude confidence, senior executives see them as the leaders who will ensure the company's future success. They regularly receive opportunities for growth and advancement, including the training and mentoring that will help them continue honing their leadership abilities.

Just as executive presence is a prerequisite for next-level success, diminished executive presence will bring career advancement to a screeching halt. Seventy-eight percent of business leaders feel that a low level of executive presence paralyzes career advancement.<sup>xxiii</sup> Leaders who lack executive presence will find themselves hitting an impenetrable ceiling. They'll fail to achieve their potential, become frustrated, and appear to lack conviction and power.

By taking the time to cultivate executive presence, you'll propel yourself forward in your career. You'll see new doors opening for you as senior leaders become your advocates who nominate you for high-level projects and promotions. Other leaders will see you as an equal, believe in your abilities, and as a result, feel invested in your success.

## **Executive presence transforms self-doubt into confidence.**

With executive presence, your self-doubt and uncertainty will transform into self-assurance, energy, and the confidence to successfully navigate the corporate landscape. You'll learn to think in new ways that will help you reframe your relationship to work, creating a more positive and productive attitude and belief system.

Don't worry if you can't imagine how that will look and feel right now. Executive presence can only be grown one step at a time, and through steady practice, you'll build up your confidence until you become a leader you may not even recognize right now!

## **Executive presence will lead you to love your work more.**

As your executive presence grows, you'll gain more satisfaction from your daily work. You'll have a deeper level of engagement in your role that makes you excited for the work you are doing.

Here are some key changes you'll begin to see as your executive presence starts to shine:

- You'll anticipate seeing the results of the projects you take pride in, giving you a stronger sense of enthusiasm about your work.

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- You'll build meaningful relationships with peers and superiors across the organization, making your work more enjoyable.
- People will seek out your perspective and insight, and your guidance will help shape the success of their initiatives.
- You'll take ownership of more complex and challenging projects, making your work more interesting.
- You'll be more fully seen for your contributions, making your work more satisfying.

As a result, your work will become more dynamic and rewarding, giving you a higher level of fulfillment from your job.

## **Executive presence will drive your team to accomplish bigger and bigger goals.**

Cultivating executive presence won't just transform you as an individual—it will transform your team as well. All the people you lead will benefit from the enhanced motivation they receive from you, and your whole team will flourish. You'll become a leader who is skilled at helping people create a roadmap to their goals and staying the course to achieve them. When dealing with change, your calm, confident presence will help everyone around you to navigate the transition with grace and composure. Your peers and superiors will benefit from these qualities as well, which will continue to grow as you further develop your executive presence.

As you reach your full potential as a leader, you'll tap into the hidden leadership qualities within your own people. You'll help them to awaken their own latent abilities and supercharge their strengths. As a result, you'll become a cherished mentor who helps create a leadership pipeline for your organization.

## **Eloise Strategically Grows Her Executive Presence**

### ***Problem:***

Eloise, who'd been passed up twice for a promotion, finally realized she'd been leaving the fate of her career in someone else's hands. We discussed how she could demonstrate a stronger presence among her peers, to show she was ready for advancement.

Eloise needed to start leading from where she was rather than waiting for a golden opportunity to come along. She had been far too passive about letting her strengths shine, and she needed to take initiative to develop her own brand as a leader with executive presence.

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## *Action:*

Together, we determined ways that she could make her expertise visible to colleagues and senior leaders rather than keeping it hidden. We also discussed how she could take more ownership of projects she was involved in by closely tracking their results and sharing them with senior leaders in an easily digestible way, rather than waiting for her boss to do it.

## *Results:*

As she began to share her expertise with conviction in ways that benefitted others, she built her influence among her coworkers and across functions. She also gained more notice for the results of her projects as she shared them directly with leaders. Her boss took note. Eloise was finally ready to move to the next level, because she'd begun displaying the key ingredient for leadership success: executive presence.

Now, let's delve deeper into what executive presence actually is, so you can learn to recognize it in yourself and others.

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## What Is Executive Presence?

Since most of us tend to have a hard time assessing ourselves, it's easier to start with noticing executive presence in others. Begin learning to identify what executive presence is and is not by looking for it in the people you work with. This exercise will help you learn to observe executive presence in action, so you know what qualities to emulate.

### Notice Executive Presence in Others

Executive presence is an elusive quality—yet if it's lacking, you really notice its absence.

#### Identify the following three people in your company.

#1 and #2 – Two people with a high level of executive presence.

#3 – A person with a low degree of executive presence.

#4 – Anyone that comes to mind.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Rate how well they each demonstrate executive presence.

Name of Employee Chosen	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
	<input type="radio"/>				
	<input type="radio"/>				
	<input type="radio"/>				
	<input type="radio"/>				

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**Now answer the following questions for each of the four people chosen.**

- Why did I give (*name of employee*) that specific rating?
- What behaviors of theirs show they have executive presence?
- What do they do to undermine their executive presence?

Person #1:

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Person #2:

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Person #3:

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Person #4:

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Executive presence is easy to recognize, but hard to define.

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I've asked over 150 leaders how they would define executive presence, and they named over 75 different attributes. These findings show me that people have difficulty defining its core components.

Executive presence is an elusive quality—yet if it's lacking, you really notice its absence. A leader who lacks executive presence stands out in ways that don't feel elusive at all. Here are just a few examples:

- Rambling on and on, compulsively speaking with no clear purpose.
- Appearing quiet and reserved, rarely speaking up.
- Being tentative and indecisive in decision-making.
- Engaging in unassertive and passive behavior.

People who engage in those behaviors stand out for all the wrong reasons, sabotaging their achievement of their full potential. In a survey I conducted with 245 business leaders at a workshop on executive presence, 76% said that people who lack executive presence stand out from the crowd—but not for the reasons they hope.

## Karen Captivates Leaders with Her Executive Presence

### **Problem:**

In a talent review meeting, three different names came up. The executives at the table were working to create a succession plan that would replace a soon-to-retire leader. They concurred on the following points:

- One of the candidates displayed excellent performance.
- The other was extremely talented.
- The last one was very smart.

All executives said **SOMETHING was missing** from each of them. They couldn't put their finger on it, though. They argued and argued, and finally someone said, "*Executive presence!*" "Yes, that's it!" they all agreed.

Then, they argued over their individual interpretations of what executive presence is for the next hour. But ultimately, they all agreed that the winning candidate would need to speak with conviction, command respect, and demonstrate influence throughout the

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organization. They compared how each person led a meeting and presented ideas. None of them had that charisma and aura of authority that an inspiring leader carries.

## Action:

Karen, the talented one, had been one of the three names brought up at this meeting. It turns out that one of Karen's advocates happened to be a leader sitting at that table. Her advocate emphasized why she needed to hone in on her executive presence. That's why Karen reached out for executive coaching assistance. We came up with a plan for how she could assert herself with conviction in meetings and discussions with leaders. We also outlined some actions she could take to present herself as more charismatic and grow her influence, like displaying more enthusiasm for her work and supporting her colleagues in their endeavors.

## Results:

“She speaks boldly and directly, voicing her ideas with confidence.”

Six months down the road, the senior leaders held another talent review. Karen's name came up again, and this time, there was no contest. “She captures everyone's attention from the moment she walks into a room,” said one leader. “When people have an idea, they want to hear what Karen thinks,” said another. “She speaks boldly and directly, voicing her ideas with confidence,” said a third. After this rave review, Karen is now preparing to assume her boss's job when he retires in the next year.

As this story shows, even experienced leaders have difficulty describing executive presence—yet they all recognize it in action. People intuitively follow a leader who has it, without even questioning whether they have executive presence. It can be tough to put executive presence into words, since it's made up of various qualities that all work together. When we see it in practice, though, there's no question whether a leader has it.

## Subtle executive presence: Learn to recognize its nascent signs.

Executive presence can begin to show up in subtle ways as people build their confidence. Sometimes they've possessed a nascent form of executive presence all along. Often they have elements of EP in certain domains but not in others, and the domains where they're lacking cause those positive qualities to go unnoticed.

Do any of these statements ring true to you? If so, you may possess subtle elements of executive presence.

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- I have a very high level of expertise in my industry, but I am insecure and self-doubting, which can cause others to think I lack knowledge and intelligence.
- I am a quiet and soft-spoken person, and that causes people who don't know me well to assume that I am not engaging and passionate. Within my own team, however, I'm very inspiring and enthusiastic.
- I am sometimes unorganized and unprepared when coming to meetings. This can cause others to think I am easily flustered and unstable, when I'm actually a clear, composed, and grounded communicator.
- I often appear indecisive because I weigh all of my options carefully. That causes others to think I lack confidence when I actually don't.
- I can be unassertive and complacent in group settings, especially when dominant personalities are present. This causes others to perceive me as not caring or not being willing to take a stand, when I actually do care. I will show my persuasive side when something extremely important needs to be communicated.
- I am an easygoing and laid-back person, and that causes others to overlook my strength, power, and conviction.
- I am usually very agreeable, which causes others to not notice when I am bold, convincing, and forceful.
- I don't get easily excited and show much emotion in meetings. This leads others to see me as uninspiring, when I'm actually encouraging and energizing with people one-on-one.
- I am extremely proficient and knowledgeable, and I love sharing my knowledge with others. However, I don't naturally hold their attention and make them excited to learn more.
- I am great at summarizing concepts concisely in a way that's easy to understand. However, I don't communicate with the strength and power that really drives ideas home.
- I tend to fly under the radar, which leads people to overlook how I have mentored many direct reports to success. I excel at inspiring and motivating others behind the scenes, even though I don't usually take center stage.
- I am often unclear, meandering, and confusing when communicating, which causes others to question whether I have conviction, can take accountability, and can be decisive. These three areas are my strengths, but they don't get noticed.
- I am a rambling, verbose, long-winded talker, which causes others to not just tune me out, but to also not notice when I am being decisive and confident.

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When we think of executive presence, we tend to think of someone with an outgoing, dominant, and loud personality. However, executive presence isn't just about being the loudest person in the room. In the 2016 true story film *Hidden Figures*, Katherine is put on the spot by her boss in a room filled with top-brass NASA officials—all of them male, all of them white.<sup>xxiv</sup> Katherine, an African American woman vying for a seat at the table in the space race, is asked to lay out the math to bring John Glenn's space capsule out of orbit and back to Earth. She calmly strides up to the chalkboard to display not only her math brilliance, but also her *aura of authority*.

As she explains the math, Katherine skillfully demonstrates each of the three main areas of executive presence:

- She shows gravitas in how she handles the situation by stepping up to the challenge, unfazed and in command.
- She claims authority by being bold and convincing in her speech.
- She makes herself understood by communicating concisely, with well-prepared and expressive words that establish her as credible and trustworthy.

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Executive presence isn't just about being  
the loudest person in the room.

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Katherine does not hesitate to seize the moment. Though she certainly wasn't immune to nervousness, she stayed poised and in control, showing a clear self-assuredness that led others to trust her conclusions. By doing so, she signaled that she not only possessed incredible mathematical abilities, but also the markings of a great leader.

## So, what exactly is executive presence?

Leaders with executive presence exude a certain magnetism that grabs people's attention. People lean in and want to listen to them.

Having this presence means radiating confidence in all your interactions. It means communicating with conviction and clarity, avoiding ambiguity. It means being a bold and decisive decision-maker, and coming across as professional and competent.

People with executive presence have a reputation for making things happen. They're admired for exemplary leadership and respected as an authority. They earn people's respect—not because they demand it, but because they *command* it.

To cultivate executive presence, you need to look closely at how you show up at work, how you speak, and how you make decisions.

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## Telegraphing that you're in charge.

In its seminal definition of executive presence, the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) characterizes it as “a mixture of qualities that true leaders exude, culminating in an aura that telegraphs you’re in charge or deserve to be.”<sup>xxv</sup>

People with executive presence often come across as being in charge even when they’re not the official leader. If working on a project with their boss’s boss, their power and conviction makes it seem like they’re at least a peer—and possibly the leader. It’s like when a supporting actor outshines the person with the lead role and gets all the praise in the reviews of the film. These people have the “IT factor” that keeps all eyes on them, even if they’re not the loudest in the room. Through all of their words and actions, they telegraph that they’re in charge, meaning they’re in the know, self-possessed, and poised to lead the team to success.

Take a close look at your ability to radiate that aura of authority.

- Do you speak decisively when announcing a decision?
- When an opportunity arises to show leadership, do you step up to the plate without hesitation, owning the role?
- Do you share a clear rationale for your ideas, so you immediately gain buy-in?
- Are you highly engaging in your speech, exuding a charisma that draws others to listen to you?

Practice seizing the opportunity to demonstrate your leadership in both large and small ways throughout your daily work. Rather than just going through your day in the same way you always do, ask yourself, “How does a leader approach this situation?” Here are a few examples:

- When your boss asks for a volunteer to lead a challenging new project, you offer to take the reins.
- You mentally rehearse how you’ll present a project proposal in a meeting with a compelling story and factual evidence.
- Before your quarterly performance review, you create a draft career plan to share with your boss, as well as a list of points to get feedback on.

To grow or enhance these qualities, practice taking steps like these to exude authority and charisma in all your interactions.

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“...a mixture of qualities that true leaders exude, culminating in an aura that telegraphs you’re in charge or deserve to be.”

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## Winning the confidence of those around you.

Employees throughout your company need to see you as a leader they believe in. A leader they respect. A leader with credibility. A leader who inspires confidence and whom others feel confident with. This is executive presence in action.

If you want to lead others, you can’t just go through your daily work without an awareness of how every action and interaction comes across to them. How do they experience you? Do they view you as confident, bold, charismatic, in command, and radiating gravitas?

Take a close look at all of your behaviors, asking what qualities they radiate.

- How does your voice sound when you share an idea at a meeting? Do you stumble over your words or waver in your speech, or communicate clearly and powerfully?
- What does your body language say about you? Do you slouch or cross your arms, looking unsure or closed off—or do you put your shoulders back, sit up straight, and make direct eye contact?
- When speaking to senior leaders, does your approach change? Or do you speak with the same ease and confidence you use with peers?
- How do you enter a room? Do you immediately acknowledge people, boldly and without hesitation?

How do you feel about your own ideas, too? Do you believe in your own brilliance, or do you constantly doubt yourself? If you have a lot of insecurity, work to bolster your confidence by tackling increasingly bigger challenges. That approach will help you work through any of these confidence issues. Determine where you struggle, and at every opportunity, push yourself to step a little more outside of your comfort zone to exude confidence. It will get easier the more you practice it, because it creates a positive feedback loop—you notice others responding to your confidence, which makes you *feel even more confident*.

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Employees throughout your company need to see you as a leader they believe in. A leader they respect

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## Painting a picture of yourself as a compelling force inside your organization.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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To shine as a leader with executive presence, you need to become known as someone who influences outcomes, contributes to major decisions, and drives change. Don't wait for someone to bestow a certain title on you. Instead, leverage your influence now to positively shape outcomes. As you demonstrate your ability to influence others for the good of the organization, your colleagues, subordinates, and superiors will rely on your strength and wisdom.

Ask yourself how well you do all of the following:

- Give others useful advice that helps them make the best decision possible.
- Coach and mentor others to success, including both direct reports and peers.
- Follow through on the ideas you suggest, guiding them to fruition.
- Voice ideas to people at all levels of the organization and across functions.
- Build the trust with others that leads them to truly value your ideas and input.

Practice sharing your insights and opinions strategically and following up on the results. Take the time to check in on how projects are going, finding out if more advice is needed. By doing so, you'll show your investment in creating positive change and your commitment to seeing it through.

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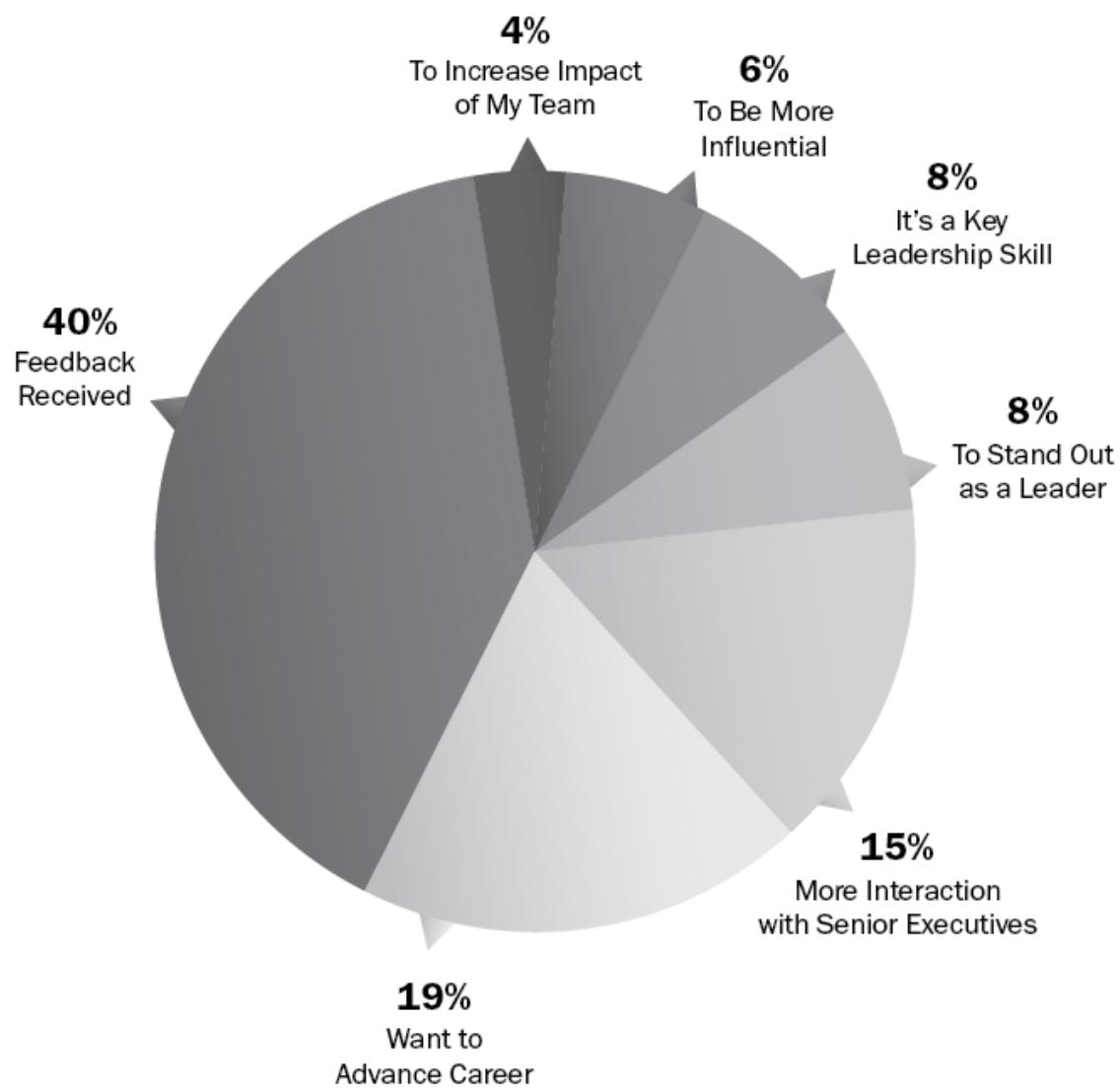
To shine as a leader with executive presence,  
you need to become known as someone who influences outcomes,  
contributes to major decisions, and drives change.

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## Why do you want to grow your executive presence?

People are motivated to begin this journey for a number of reasons. The pie chart below shows a quick glance at the seven key reasons I have heard people voice. We'll take a look at each of them in this section.

## WHY DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR EP?



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 425 U.S. Workers

**Feedback received from superiors.**

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Some people have been approached by a boss or senior leader urging them to work on growing their executive presence. This feedback is often vague, as the other person may not even know how to define EP—they just know it when they see it. The 3x3 EP Model will clarify what needs to be done.

In other cases, executive presence makes up part of an existing development plan, and a boss may suggest focusing on this area.

## Career advancement.

Many people wish to cultivate EP in order to move up in their organization. They know that it's a key to advancement, as reaching and excelling at the next level requires an entirely new skill set. They seek out executive presence to gain the confidence and competence to take the next steps.

## Making an impact at the executive level.

Many leaders wish to make a greater impact at the highest levels of their company. They want to be heard and understood by senior management. They wish to gain respect among their ranks, presenting themselves as a next-level leader and influencing upward. They gain great satisfaction from guiding company strategy and vision, which executive presence will allow them to do more effectively.

## Standing out as a leader.

People frequently wish to improve their executive presence to build their visibility as a leader. They seek to improve their presentation in both groups and one-on-one settings, making a lasting impression. They recognize that they fall under the radar too often, and that executive presence will get them noticed in positive ways.

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To show that you're the confident, commanding leader whom others can rely on, you need to cultivate executive presence.

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Others think about executive presence in broader terms, realizing the vital role it plays in leadership. To thrive as a leader, they need to grow their EP. They know this will help them become recognized as an effective leader, allowing them to take on increased responsibility.

## Becoming more influential.

Many people wish to develop executive presence to exert better command of a room and persuade people at all levels to believe in their ideas. They want others to seek out and listen to

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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their input. They know that building influence through EP will help them win over peers, senior leaders, direct reports, clients, and others, helping them to guide their organization's direction.

## **Enhancing team capabilities.**

People often wish to grow their EP to increase the impact of their team. They know that a leader with EP can guide their team to greater success, and they take great satisfaction from helping their team achieve ambitious goals.

As the survey results show, not everyone is motivated by a desire for advancement. Some people want to achieve more in their current role—or they may have already made their way to the top, and they want to leverage their position as effectively as possible. Other people do ultimately want a promotion, but more importantly, they wish to enhance their job satisfaction by excelling as a leader. They want more responsibility, influence, and engagement; they want a seat at the decision-making table. To grow this influence and show that you're the confident, commanding leader whom others can rely on, you need to cultivate executive presence.

## **Why do you want to grow your EP?**

*Select one of the following answers to each of these questions:*

I have been advised by a superior to work on my EP.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I wish to open new doors in my career, which will require a new skill set.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I wish to have a greater impact at the highest levels of my company and be taken seriously by senior leaders.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I need to boost my visibility and stand out—too often, I blend in too much.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I want to grow a strong leadership skill set so I can truly thrive in my career.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I need to build my influence in all directions.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

I want to become a more effective team leader.

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree    Strongly agree

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Your answers most likely show that a combination of several factors is driving you to improve your executive presence. There's no "score" for this exercise—hopefully it has simply helped you to zero in on your own motivation for doing so, which can continue to propel you forward on this transformative journey.

## Common situations where having executive presence matters.

You're being continuously judged and evaluated at work on whether you have executive presence or not—even if people aren't aware that they're judging you. Here are some of the main situations where an enhanced executive presence matters. Think of them as opportunities to gain exposure for your EP.

- Regular staff meetings
- Team updates
- Discussions with clients
- Sharing a new vision
- Leading a project
- Advocating for your team or employee
- Community events
- Presentations to superiors
- Guiding your team in a new direction
- Meeting with external stakeholders
- Giving a presentation
- Influencing others (in any direction)
- Implementing organizational changes
- Presenting a business case when seeking funding
- Conducting performance reviews
- Coping with setbacks
- Managing a crisis
- Running into senior executives
- Mediating a disagreement or conflict
- One-on-ones with direct reports
- Getting the necessary resources for your team

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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- Informal chats in the hallway
- Cross-departmental meetings
- Discussing ideas with colleagues over coffee
- All-hands meetings

This covers quite a range of situations, as you've probably noticed. That's why executive presence has to become a part of who you *are*, not just something you turn on once in a while. In fact, executive presence must become part of your DNA, because there is no situation where your performance will not improve dramatically from having a high level of EP.

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You're being continuously judged and evaluated at work on whether you have executive presence or not.

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## Which audience needs to see your executive presence?

The quick answer: everyone. Here's a more detailed breakdown of the various audiences who need you as having EP:

- Subordinates
- Coworkers
- Your boss
- Peers across functions
- Superiors
- Senior leadership
- Customers
- Clients
- Vendors

Lack of EP isn't something that can be hidden. It will be clearly noted and filed away. Strive to establish your EP in your interactions with all of these groups.

Let's take a look at a variety of situations that every leader faces at one point or another. The following two exercises will help you to notice and evaluate your own level of executive presence, and to recognize it in others.

## Would you show executive presence in these scenarios?

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

As you read through these 10 common circumstances where executive presence is critical, ask yourself this: “Would I display executive presence in this situation?” Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 for each one.

1. *You have an important presentation to give to five leaders who are a couple levels above you. Since you've never spoken to this group before, you want to make an excellent first impression. How do you come across in this presentation?*

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly  
Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly  
Agree

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

2. *You need to make a decision on an important project. Other leaders and subordinates are waiting for your verdict. Do you feel sure or yourself or uncertain? How do you come across to others?*

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly  
Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly  
Agree

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

3. *You're sitting in a meeting where you have an opinion to share. Around you sit a mixed group of peers and leaders. Everyone is talking animatedly; there's hardly a break in the conversation. Do you make your ideas heard and known? How do others perceive you when—or if—you speak up?*

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree <b>1</b>	Disagree <b>2</b>	Neutral <b>3</b>	Agree <b>4</b>	Strongly Agree <b>5</b>
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4. Your boss's boss drops by while you're convening a team meeting, wanting to see what's happening on the ground. How do you conduct yourself at this meeting, and how does your team respond? Are they fully engaged and passionate about their ideas, or unenthused and just plodding through the day?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree <b>1</b>	Disagree <b>2</b>	Neutral <b>3</b>	Agree <b>4</b>	Strongly Agree <b>5</b>
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5. You run into a top leader in the elevator. She asks for an update on your current project. How do you answer her? Do you share a concise overview with conviction, or does your reply sound confused or hum-drum?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree <b>1</b>	Disagree <b>2</b>	Neutral <b>3</b>	Agree <b>4</b>	Strongly Agree <b>5</b>
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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

6. Your boss announces an important new initiative that senior leadership has been planning and asks who is interested in leading it. Do you step forward and take the reins, or do you second-guess your abilities and let someone else take charge?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7. You need to have a tough conversation with a direct report who isn't meeting expectations. Do you feel so anxious that it shows, or do you master your emotions and remain poised and in command?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. An advocate invites you to lunch with several superiors. This is a great chance to build a rapport with them. How do you interact with them? Do you relate to them as a peer, or do you feel like a subordinate?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

9. You're announcing a new initiative to your team. They're gathered around you, listening. Are they on the edge of their seat, hanging on your every word? As you speak, can you feel their excitement growing, knowing everyone is vying for a lead role?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree

**1**

Disagree

**2**

Neutral

**3**

Agree

**4**

Strongly Agree

**5**

10. You're speaking to a large group of superiors, peers, and subordinates about the results of your latest project. When you take the stage, do you command attention immediately? Do you emanate charisma and make them feel energized by your words, or do you cower in the spotlight and muddle through your presentation?

## WOULD I DISPLAY EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN THIS SITUATION?

Strongly Disagree

**1**

Disagree

**2**

Neutral

**3**

Agree

**4**

Strongly Agree

**5**

Tally up your total score. If you got 40–50, you're doing fantastic. You may have some work to do, but you're well on your way to radiating executive presence on a daily basis. If you scored from 30–40, you sometimes show executive presence—either in certain situations where you feel the most confident, or in subtle ways. If you got 20–30, you occasionally show certain executive presence qualities, although people have to be paying close attention to notice them. If you scored from 10–20, you haven't yet begun to exude a noticeable executive presence—but you'll see changes before you know it as you put the lessons in this book to work.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## Learn the 3x3 Executive Presence Model

Executive presence doesn't have to be a mystery anymore. My 3x3 Executive Presence Model outlines 3 domains that each encompass 3 qualities of executive presence, for a total of 9 core competencies. This model breaks down exactly what makes up executive presence, giving you an easy-to-use guide to growing your EP.

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These 9 competencies distinguish the best executives from others.  
The remarkable from the ordinary. The exceptional from the average.

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The 3x3 Executive Presence Model is based on solid research.

I created the 3X3 Executive Presence Model based on 15 years of studying executive presence. To solidify the information I share in the model, I conducted research with over 1,400 of my executive coaching clients and 7500 workshop participants. These developing, established, and senior leaders provided feedback that leant great clarity on what makes a leader with executive presence. Ultimately, I isolated the executive presence characteristics that showed up in the top-performing leaders time after time, so others can follow in their footsteps.

The leaders attending the workshops and participating in 1:1 executive coaching hail from many of the most successful companies in the world:

Amazon	Starbucks	Toyota	Eli Lilly	NBC Universal	Hewlett-Packard	Cisco Systems
Google	Oracle	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	Procter & Gamble	Shell Chemicals	Wells Fargo Bank	Blue Cross Blue Shield
Microsoft	Deloitte	Genentech	Accenture	Sanofi	Nissan	Corning
Verizon	Oracle	Nestle USA	Henkel	Autodesk	Boeing	Kohl's
Starbucks	NASA	Comcast	Novartis	Gap Inc.	PG&E	Gensler
Citibank	Gilead	CVS Pharmacy	VMware	Takeda	Aramark	Fidelity
Bank of America	Marriott Hotels	Warner Bros. Entertainment	Charles Schwab	Electronic Arts	Morgan Stanley	
Williams-Sonoma Inc.	The Federal Reserve Bank	National Basketball Association (NBA)	The Ritz-Carlton Hotels	Levi Strauss & Company	The Peninsula Hotels	

These companies hire the best and the brightest. I've had the opportunity to learn firsthand what a leader at this type of company does to project a top-notch executive presence. As you can see, my research spans a wide variety of industries.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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The results shone a spotlight on 312 behaviors: 145 positive and 167 negative. My team conducted cluster analysis, a method of organizing related behaviors into the same groups, called clusters. Ultimately, this brought us to a total of 30 behaviors: 15 showing strong executive presence, and 15 showing a lack of executive presence. Then, we tracked patterns for these 30 behaviors. From this analysis, we saw that exceptional leaders with executive presence exhibit 9 recurring positive behaviors. We then narrowed the final positive executive presence competencies to the 9 qualities that now make up the 3x3 Executive Presence Competency Model. These 9 competencies distinguish the best executives from others. The remarkable from the ordinary. The exceptional from the average.

This research showed that the leaders who shine the most, achieve greatness for themselves, and create immense success for their organization are the ones who embrace and utilize **gravitas, authority, and expression**. These 3 domains are the foundational pillars holding up the 9 executive presence competencies: confident, commanding, charismatic, decisive, bold, influential, vocal, insightful, and clear. These are the qualities you must dedicate yourself to growing so you can exude and embody them for far-reaching impact and success.

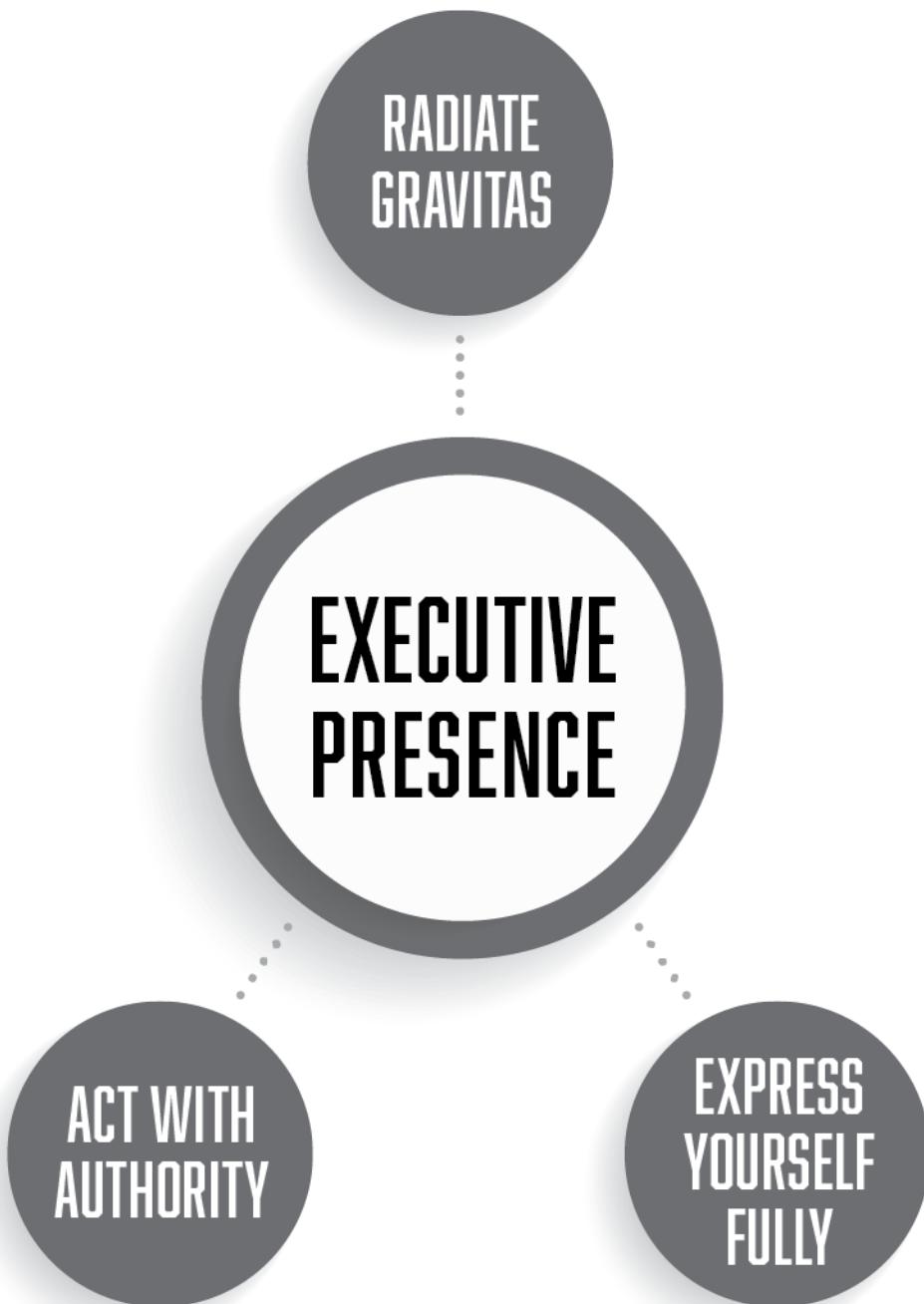
## Learn which executive presence behaviors matter most.

Let's take a more detailed look at each of the three executive presence (EP) domains. To be a leader with executive presence, you must:

- **Radiate gravitas.** Leaders with executive presence demonstrate an innate self-assurance that leads others to trust them implicitly. They exuded charisma and passion for what they do, and their belief in their work is a powerful driving force that motivates all those around them. They step up to the plate whenever strong leadership is needed, and they command a room just by showing up.
- **Act with authority.** Leaders who model executive presence are assertive and persuasive, projecting an aura of being in charge. They lead by example and make decisions decisively, taking strategic risks. The strength and resolve that emanates from these leaders makes others naturally follow them and seek out their input.
- **Express yourself fully.** Leaders with executive presence make their ideas and opinions known. They speak candidly and eloquently, and their concise, polished words resonate widely. They are outspoken but share the most essential ideas rather than rambling, and thus, when they speak, people pay close attention.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

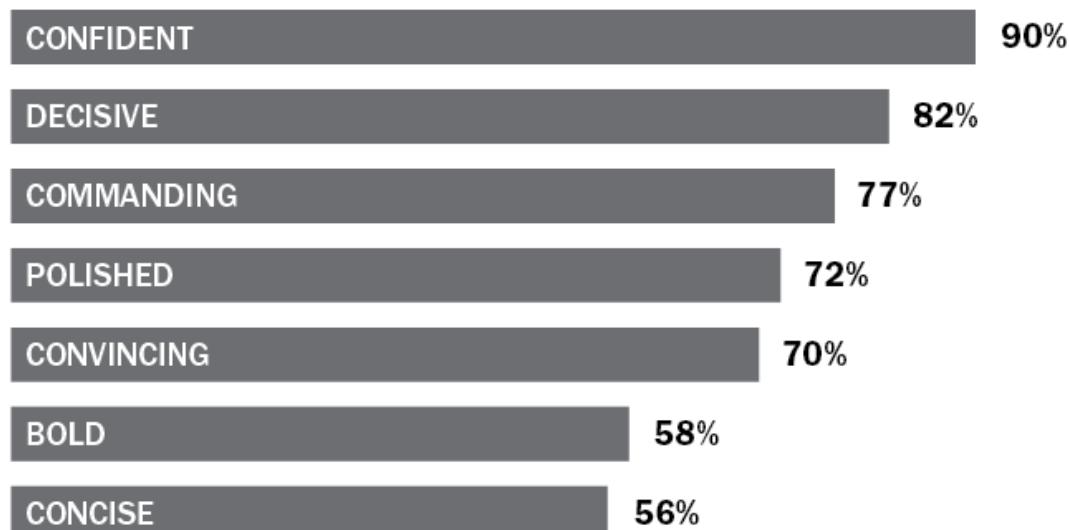
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Each of these 3 key executive presence domains is made up of 3 core EP qualities. Now, let's take a closer look at the most essential behaviors within each of those domains.

In the survey, I asked a sample of 1,400 middle managers, high-level leaders, and other employees which specific behaviors are most crucial in helping leaders exude executive presence. From the data collected via both workshops and one-on-one executive coaching, I found the percentage of people who embody that competency, as shown here.

## WHICH EXECUTIVE PRESENCE BEHAVIORS MATTER MOST?

% of leaders who say it is absolutely essential for a leader to be ...



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

While analyzing the results of our survey, my team surmised that "polished" and "concise" both strongly pertained to one of the nine core EP competencies, "clear." Additionally, we found that "convincing" is strongly associated with "influential," another of the nine core competencies

As you can see, the majority of participants in this survey said that being confident, decisive, and commanding are the top three EP qualities a leader needs to radiate. But each quality in this chart is essential, contributing to the perception that a leader has what it takes to guide the team to success in any situation. As discussed previously, having a *balanced* range of these competencies is essential. If you're extremely decisive or bold, but neglectful of the interpersonal skills that build charisma or allow you to effectively express yourself, you'll probably rub people the wrong way.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Being confident, decisive, and commanding are the top three EP qualities a leader needs to radiate.

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The study identified 9 total qualities that reveal executive presence, grouped by the 3 key EP domains in the following chart.

## COMPETENCIES FOR EACH OF THE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE DOMAINS

*The results of the study also revealed fifteen behaviors of a leader showing strong executive presence.*

DOMAINS	COMPETENCIES
GRAVITAS	Confident
	Commanding
	Charismatic
AUTHORITY	Decisive
	Bold
	Influential
EXPRESSION	Vocal
	Insightful
	Clear

As we the survey results, we ultimately reduced the five categories for each domain into three core ones, which we'll examine in more depth shortly. We found, for instance, that "inspiring" was a component of charisma, so I address it the discussion of that competency.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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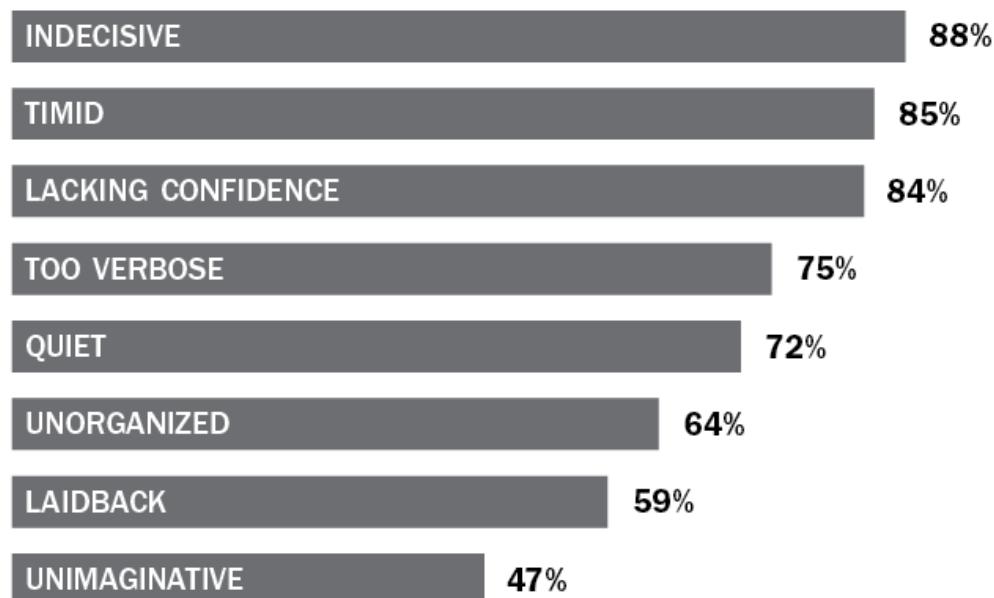
Learn which behaviors most undermine executive presence.

As you work to become a stronger leader, it's important to understand what an ineffective leader looks like. In the survey I conducted, I also asked participants which specific behaviors most hinder leaders and prevent them from exuding executive presence. Here's what they said.

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## WHICH BEHAVIORS MOST UNDERMINE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE?

% saying these behaviors show a lack of presence



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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People often display these behaviors unintentionally, without realizing they are undermining their executive presence. Overall, the study revealed 9 key behaviors that show a lack of executive presence, as outlined in the following chart, which illustrates how each of these behaviors undermines one of the three core domains of executive presence.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## **Qualities Showing a Lack of Executive Presence**

DOMAINS	COMPETENCIES
GRAVITAS	<b>Unconfident</b>
	<b>Easygoing</b>
	<b>Dull</b>
AUTHORITY	<b>Indecisive</b>
	<b>Timid</b>
	<b>Uninfluential</b>
EXPRESSION	<b>Nonvocal</b>
	<b>Uninformed</b>
	<b>Unclear</b>

We are about to do a deep dive into 3x3 Executive Presence Model, but this can all sound a bit abstract until you examine how you display (or don't display) these qualities in a particular situation. Let's take a look at how you show up with or without EP in the context of meetings.

### **How Do You Show Up at Meetings—with or without Executive Presence?**

Why meetings? Analyzing your behavior in meetings is the easiest way to understand and quickly assess how well you show up with executive presence in your daily work. Meetings are an excellent environment for you to evaluate yourself and others because you participate in them regularly and can therefore notice clear patterns in how you show up.

Think of two recent meetings. Jot down the theme or objective of those meetings and who was in attendance.

#### MEETING #1

**Theme:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Attendance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Which executive presence competencies did YOU display in the meeting?** Refer to the prior table (e.g. learn which executive presence behaviors matters most) and jot down the list of

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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competencies. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next, you'll observe the behaviors of others in attendance. **Jot down the executive presence competencies THEY displayed in the meeting.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Which lacking executive presence competencies did YOU display in the meeting?** Refer to the prior table (e.g. learn which behaviors most undermine executive presence) and jot down the list of competencies. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next, you'll observe the behaviors of others in attendance. **Jot down the lacking executive presence competencies THEY displayed in the meetings.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## MEETING #2

**Theme:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Attendance:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Which executive presence competencies did YOU display in the meeting?** Refer to the prior table (e.g. learn which executive presence behaviors matters most) and jot down the list of competencies. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Next, you'll observe the behaviors of others in attendance. **Jot down the executive presence competencies THEY displayed in the meeting.**

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**Which lacking executive presence competencies did YOU display in the meeting?** Refer to the prior table (e.g. learn which behaviors most undermine executive presence) and jot down the list of competencies.

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Next, you'll observe the behaviors of others in attendance. **Jot down the lacking executive presence competencies THEY displayed in the meetings.**

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Tracking how you show up at meetings (with or without EP) will help you clearly evaluate your development. Your regular work meetings give you an easy way to benchmark your progress and determine where you need to focus your efforts.

Now we'll delve into the 3x3 Model, which will serve as your roadmap to honing your executive presence and becoming the unleashed leader maximizing impact.

## Understanding the 3x3 Executive Presence Competency Model

The 3x3 EP Model explains how to overcome each of those undesirable behaviors and replace them with a solid foundation for executive presence. It delivers a comprehensive overview of the most important facets of executive presence. This allows you to see where your strengths lie as a leader—and where you could devote more energy and focus to enhance others' perception of your leadership. This model is a blueprint for becoming a leader with EP.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

## THE 3X3 MODEL, AT A GLANCE

### DEFINITIONS OF THE 3 DOMAINS OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

#### GRAVITAS

You radiate self-assuredness and power by projecting confidence and charisma. You naturally draw others to you, easily commanding a room and making your presence felt.

#### AUTHORITY

You are decisive, bold, and influential. You project certainty in your decisions. You are persuasive and compelling, as your assertiveness gives others confidence in your ideas.

#### EXPRESSION

You are consistently vocal, making great recommendations and asking excellent questions. You are well-spoken and share your ideas succinctly. You are polished, prepared, and professional in all your communications.

### 9 COMPETENCIES OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

RADIATE GRAVITAS	ACT WITH AUTHORITY	EXPRESS YOURSELF FULLY
GRAVITAS	AUTHORITY	EXPRESSION
Confident	Decisive	Vocal
Commanding	Bold	Insightful
Charismatic	Influential	Clear

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## HOW EACH DOMAIN LOOKS IN PRACTICE

<b>GRAVITAS IS:</b>	<b>AUTHORITY IS:</b>	<b>EXPRESSION IS:</b>
Who You Are	What You Do	What You Say
How You <u>SHOW UP</u>	How You <u>ACT</u>	How You <u>COMMUNICATE</u>
Exude Confidence	Make an Impact	Become Known

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

## THE 3X3 EXECUTIVE PRESENCE MODEL:

A Detailed Look at Each Competency

### GRAVITAS

#### CONFIDENT

You lead with the assuredness that you can do it. You're assertive, decisive, and willing to take risks. You state your opinions strongly. You believe in what you know and who you are.

### AUTHORITY

#### DECISIVE

You take initiative and move things forward. You act with conviction. You make up your mind quickly and arrive at a clear decision with certainty. You don't waver or hesitate.

### EXPRESSION

#### VOCAL

You share your thoughts and ideas without hesitation. You're forthcoming with your opinions. Your voice and presence are visible to others. You make your expertise, competence, and talents known.

### COMMANDING

You take charge, driving outcomes. People look to you for leadership. They defer to you. When you speak, people pay attention. Others perceive your formidable presence and power.

### BOLD

You are willing to make bold decisions, to put a stake in the ground and own your position. You stand by your beliefs and convictions. You are willing to challenge and push back.

### INSIGHTFUL

You make great recommendations. You ask excellent questions and share ideas precisely, confidently, and with conviction. You are known for smart thinking and critical analysis.

### CHARISMATIC

You radiate enthusiasm, personal charm, and an optimistic attitude. You motivate and inspire others. People are drawn to you. You feel approachable.

### INFLUENTIAL

You are convincing, compelling, and forceful. You incite and encourage others toward action. Your articulate and assertive points of view persuade others. You can effectively counter-argue.

### CLEAR

When you communicate, you are succinct and to the point. Your message is clear and crisp; you are straightforward and direct. You're polished and express yourself without qualifier or filler words.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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To be perceived as a leader who has executive presence, you need to build, develop, and fine-tune these 9 competencies.

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Having a balanced set of executive presence competencies is crucial. In some cases, when a person has a great deal of one quality but not complementary ones, it undermines their overall executive presence. For instance, a leader who comes across as always in command, but who hasn't cultivated charisma, probably won't seem approachable. Such people tend to intimidate others and seem domineering, which negatively affects their ability to lead. Similarly, a leader who is extremely decisive but can't vocalize the reason behind their decisions will have trouble getting buy-in. To have executive presence, you need to develop the overall package, not just a few select characteristics.

## Evaluate your executive presence

To be perceived as a leader who has executive presence, you need to build, develop, and fine-tune these 9 competencies. That means first determining where you stand on the EP spectrum. If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.

Many leadership assessments measure the skills, traits, or qualities that make a great leader. However, most of them don't measure the specific qualities of executive presence.

The following assessment will help you measure your current level of executive presence, giving you an accurate perception of your competencies. You'll find out how well you are doing on each of the 9 key areas, and where you may be self-sabotaging your own leadership potential.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## GRAVITAS

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONFIDENT

You lead with the assuredness that you can do it. You're assertive, decisive, and willing to take risks. You state your opinions strongly. You believe in what you know and who you are.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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### COMMANDING

You take charge, driving outcomes. People look to you for leadership. They defer to you. When you speak, people pay attention. Others perceive your formidable presence and power.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

### CHARISMATIC

You radiate enthusiasm, personal charm, and an optimistic attitude. You motivate and inspire others. People are drawn to you. You feel approachable.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Add up your total for each of the three competencies above to get your total Gravitas score: \_\_\_\_\_

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## AUTHORITY

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

### DECISIVE

You take initiative and move things forward. You act with conviction.  
You make up your mind quickly and arrive at a clear decision with certainty.  
You don't waver or hesitate.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

### BOLD

You are willing to make bold decisions, to put a stake in the ground  
and own your position. You stand by your beliefs and convictions.  
You are willing to challenge and push back.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

### INFLUENTIAL

You are convincing, compelling, and forceful. You incite and encourage  
others toward action. Your articulate and assertive points of view  
persuade others. You can effectively counter-argue.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Add up your total for each of the three competencies above  
to get your total Gravitas score: \_\_\_\_\_

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## EXPRESSION

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

### VOCAL

You share your thoughts and ideas without hesitation. You're forthcoming with your opinions. Your voice and presence are visible to others.  
You make your expertise, competence, and talents known.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

### INSIGHTFUL

You make great recommendations. You ask excellent questions and share ideas precisely, confidently, and with conviction. You are known for smart thinking and critical analysis.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

### CLEAR

When you communicate, you are succinct and to the point. Your message is clear and crisp; you are straightforward and direct. You're polished and express yourself without qualifier or filler words.

HOW WELL DO YOU EMBODY THIS COMPETENCY? (RATE YOURSELF FROM 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Add up your total for each of the three competencies above  
to get your total Gravitas score: \_\_\_\_\_

## EVALUATING YOUR RESULTS

### GRAVITAS

Tally up your total Gravitas score and find the corresponding number below.

**Gravitas Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

**24-30:** If your total Gravitas score falls between 24 and 30, you're radiating an impressive presence and show a high degree of confidence. People look to you for leadership. They trust you to guide them through any challenges that arise.

**18-24** If your score falls between 18 and 24, you're above average in terms of your ability to command a room and inspire others. You fall short of exceptional in certain areas, but you will get there soon with consistent effort.

**12-18** If your score falls between 12 and 18, you may sometimes show confidence and charisma, but not always. You may take charge and drive outcomes in certain contexts, like small group settings. Keep working on those competencies so you can reach the next level.

**Below 12** If your score falls below 12, you probably aren't perceived as being very assertive or in command. You may shy away from the spotlight. However, dedicate yourself to the concepts in this book and you'll begin seeing an upward trend in your ability to show executive presence.

### AUTHORITY

Tally up your total Authority score and find the corresponding number below.

**Authority Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

**24-30:** If your Authority score falls between 24 and 30, you are exceptional at making bold decisions, acting with certainty, and influencing outcomes. Others seek out your opinions,

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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which you deliver assertively. You stand by your beliefs and communicate forcefully.

**18-24:** If your score falls between 18 and 24, you are above average and demonstrate authority pretty well. You can be extremely persuasive, strong, and resolute. However, sometimes you struggle with decision-making and being assertive with people more senior. You are doing really well in this area, but a little extra effort will help you reach the next level.

**12-18:** If your score falls between 12 and 18, you have substantial room to grow, but you probably do have some nascent strengths to work with. You are decisive at times, but not assertive enough. You have difficulty convincing others to adopt your perspectives. Try to pinpoint whether you show authority in certain moments, and where you really need to demonstrate more of it.

**Below 12:** If your score falls below 12, you aren't demonstrating a lot of authority. You are perceived by others as being tentative and hesitant. You're uncertain and indecisive about making decisions. Work hard to build your competence in this domain so you can reap the rewards of having greater impact and influence.

## EXPRESSION

Tally up your total Expression score and find the corresponding number below.

**Expression Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

**24-30:** If your Expression score falls between 24 and 30, you are extremely good at speaking up, making your insights known, and communicating in a clear, succinct way. When you open your mouth, others tune in.

**18-24:** If your score falls between 18 and 24, you are an above-average communicator. You may struggle a bit in one area while excelling in many others. For instance, you may candidly share your ideas and ask smart questions in

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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meetings, though you need to become more concise and to the point when communicating.

**12-18:** If your score falls between 12 and 18, you need to hone your communication skills and work on cultivating more expression. To rise above average, you will need to be more forthright with your opinions, letting your insights and knowledge be known. Practice being well-spoken and condensed in your communication.

**Below 12** If your score falls below 12, your communication skills sorely need strengthening. Notice when you aren't contributing in meetings and immediately begin finding ways to be vocal. Every day at work is filled with communications and thus provides numerous opportunities to improve your expression. Apply what you learn from this book back into your work environment.

## OVERALL SCORE

Tally up your total for Gravitas, Authority, and Expression and find the corresponding number below.

**Overall Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

**80-90:** The maximum possible score for this evaluation is 90, although few people will get a perfect score. (In fact, if you gave yourself a perfect score, you should find out if others would score you in the same way!) If your total falls between 80 and 90, you're doing exceptionally well. You have room to fine-tune your EP or may have one or two competencies that need more strengthening, but all in all, you are exuding EP on a daily basis.

**70-80:** If your score falls between 70 and 80, your executive presence is above average. Now it's time to work on strengthening particular areas that you haven't quite mastered, so you'll shine in each of these competencies across the board.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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- 50-70:** If you have a score of 50–70, while you are not always shining as a leader with executive presence, in certain situations you may. Your EP is showing up in subtle ways or in particular contexts. With steady practice, you can allow it to shine *all* of the time.
- 40-50:** If your score falls from 40–50, you probably show some nascent signs of executive presence. However, you haven't developed and leveraged these areas of strength. Through proactive work, you can quickly move up to the above-average zone.
- Below 40:** If your score falls below 40, don't fret. Through daily practice, you can build your EP skillset. Get comfortable simply practicing the skills you'll learn about in this book, and eventually they will become a natural part of how you interact with the world.

Now that you have a stronger idea of where you stand, let's delve into each of these domains in more detail, starting with Gravitas.

# GRAVITAS

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Domain #1 of 3

## Gravitas

"When we feel powerful, even our voices spread out and take up more space than they do when we feel powerless. ... We don't rush our words. We're not afraid to pause. We feel deserving of the time we're using," writes Amy Cuddy in her book *Presence*.<sup>xxvi</sup> What she's describing here is gravitas—the quality that makes others instinctively feel a leader's great credibility, capability, and overall presence.

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If you have gravitas, your thoughts, ideas, and actions carry a weight.

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### What is gravitas?

The original of the word *gravitas* gives us insight into what it really signifies. Its root, the Latin word *gravis*, means "heavy." We speak of the *gravity* of a situation when referring to something serious or critical. If you have gravitas, your thoughts, ideas, and actions carry a weight. People can feel your presence immediately. You have a powerful effect on another person. You hold the room or that person's attention. People take note of your opinions and insights.

What does owning your power mean? It means being confident in what you have to say rather than being intimidated by your audience. When you give your power away, you become hesitant, cautious, timid, and unsure. In meetings with senior leaders, you focus on the idea that other people can make or break your career, giving them all of the power. You feel less than in their presence, placing yourself at a disadvantage. You've lowered your executive presence simply because of their authority. Owning your own power means viewing these senior executives as equals.

Possessing gravitas means that top leadership sees you as confident, commanding, and charismatic—the three core competencies that make up this quality. When you fully embody gravitas, people perceive you this way at all times, not just in certain situations. You don't give your power away—even when interacting with higher-level people in more senior positions. Rather, you treat them as equals.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Your gravitas inspires confidence in others. First, it helps subordinates to feel their own potential to do more, be more, and achieve more than what they thought possible. They know you are capably guiding them to reach the next level. Second, your peers are impressed by you, they respect the quality of your work, and they find you trustworthy—one of the top five most crucial qualities in a leader.<sup>xxvii</sup> They know they are on a winning team, and that your self-assuredness and abilities will buoy everyone else up. Third, superiors rely on you to produce excellent work, expand your influence, and go above and beyond what is asked of you. They know your confidence and powerful leadership will drive results.

In *Cracking the Code: Executive Presence and Multicultural Professionals*, Sylvia Ann Hewlett asserts that 67% of the senior leaders she interviewed for the book said gravitas is seminal to executive presence.<sup>xxviii</sup> They cited qualities such as showing grace under fire and radiating vision and charisma as being central to strong executive leadership. Your company's C-suite are looking out for this quality—and even if you're already among their ranks, continuing to hone your gravitas will have a tremendous influence on your ability to get the most from your team.

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Gravitas is the commanding presence that great leaders hold, radiating charisma and confidence to all those around them.

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## Sophia Masters the Art of Gravitas

My client Sophia, a leader at a large software company, received the following feedback from her boss: "You have a great communication style. You're conversational, and you share ideas in an engaging way. However, sometimes your most powerful ideas can be too easily brushed off, because you present them too casually."

Her voice and level of conviction didn't change to accentuate important points, so they went unnoticed. "If you speak in a more passionate tone when you're describing your most critical ideas, others will respond," her boss said. "Speak with firmness and strength in those moments. Make sure your voice carries a heavier weight. Then people will feel the power of your best ideas."

### Action:

In our next sessions, we practiced how Sophia could voice her ideas with the gravitas required to drive her points home. She learned to master the art of speaking with conviction. We also practiced how she could advocate for her own ideas persuasively when challenged, so she wouldn't lose footing in the moment.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## **Results:**

As she put these lessons into practice, Sophia started getting noticed for her great ideas and steadily increasing her sphere of influence. Many people were blown away by the value of her ideas and shocked that they had been flying under the radar all that time!

Whenever you are presenting your ideas to an audience, you need to be prepared to address pointed questions and diverse points of views. You need to be standing in a foundation of gravitas. Don't lose your composure. Be calm. Hold your ground. Show that you can take a few blows and not waver or be submissive. Don't lose your confidence, and don't cause them to lose their confidence in you. They need to see that you remain in command with a solid sense of authority, even when called to question. And if your superiors are questioning your ideas, you need to speak to them as if they are peers.

Let's delve into the main components of gravitas now in a bit more depth, so you can more fully understand this EP domain.

## **What qualities are most essential for gravitas?**

In my survey, I asked 1,400 U.S. employees, middle managers, senior leaders, and executives what they view as the top qualities of gravitas. Here's what they said.

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## **THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF GRAVITAS**

*% of leaders who say it is absolutely essential for a leader to be ...*



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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As my team analyzed the results of our survey, we found that “poised” strongly related to being in command and “inspiring” was a component of charisma. Thus, we arrived at “confident,” “commanding,” and “charismatic” as the three most essential qualities of gravitas.

## 3x3 Executive Presence Model Gravitas Defined



### The 3 Competencies of Gravitas

*Gravitas is the commanding presence that great leaders hold, radiating charisma and confidence to all those around them.*

## GRAVITAS

Confident

Commanding

Charismatic

While the domains of authority and expression relate to *what you do* and *how you express yourself*, gravitas is *who you are*. A leader with gravitas has a powerful presence that everyone can feel, from subordinates to senior executives.

## GRAVITAS IS:

Who You Are

How You SHOW UP

Exude Confidence

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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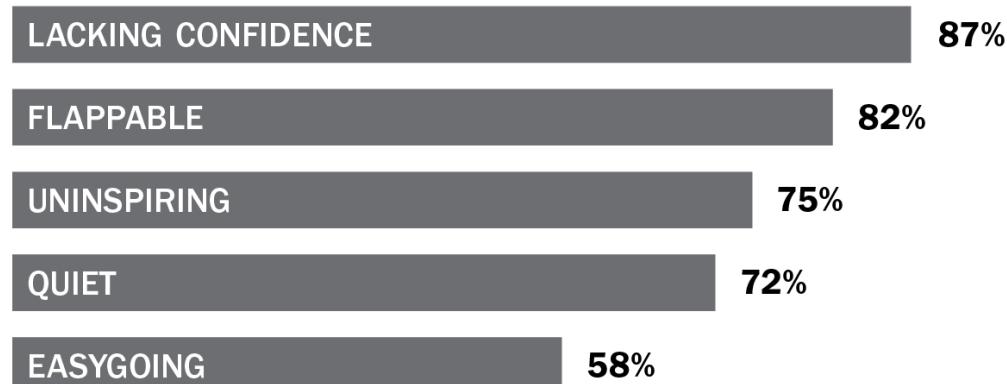
## Which behaviors shows a *lack* of gravitas?

Sometimes it's easier to notice the qualities that harm your chances of success than the ones that could help you succeed. In the survey, respondents asserted that the following qualities have the most negative effect on gravitas.

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## WHICH BEHAVIORS MOST UNDERMINE GRAVITAS?

% of leaders who say these behaviors show a *lack* of gravitas ...



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

## Comparison of qualities that cultivate or undermine gravitas.

The following chart will help you understand which qualities cultivate gravitas and which behaviors diminish it. If you're trying to develop one of the traits in column A, you need to know whether you're engaging in the behaviors in column B. If so, you need to work on shifting those behaviors in column B so you can truly exude gravitas—and executive presence.

15 WAYS TO BUILD OR UNDERMINE GRAVITAS	
QUALITIES THAT CULTIVATE GRAVITAS	QUALITIES THAT UNDERMINE GRAVITAS
<b>CONFIDENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-assured</li><li>• Grounded</li><li>• Formidable</li><li>• Certain</li><li>• Composed</li></ul>	<b>LACKING CONFIDENCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Insecure</li><li>• Self-doubting</li><li>• Questioning yourself</li><li>• Doubting your own abilities</li><li>• Flustered</li></ul>
<b>COMMANDING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong</li><li>• Powerful</li><li>• Filled with conviction</li><li>• In charge</li><li>• Poised</li></ul>	<b>EASYGOING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relaxed</li><li>• Too casual</li><li>• Laid-back</li><li>• Despondent</li><li>• Flappable</li></ul>
<b>CHARISMATIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Charming</li><li>• Engaging</li><li>• Passionate</li><li>• Inspiring</li><li>• Empowering</li></ul>	<b>DULL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reserved</li><li>• Unexciting</li><li>• Dispassionate</li><li>• Unaffecting</li><li>• Disempowering</li></ul>

## EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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If you want to see an example of gravitas in action, just look to Oprah. She radiates a natural confidence with her grounded, self-assured demeanor. She instantly commands a room with her powerful, poised presence. When she speaks, you know she's saying something important—you can feel it in the conviction in her voice. "She has a magnetic energy that pulls you in and keeps you captivated, under her spell. She owns her presence, the space around her, and she projects gravitas that easily pierces any screen," writes Stephanie Denning in *Forbes*. Oprah doesn't seek to intimidate others with this presence—quite the opposite.<sup>xxix</sup> Her charisma draws people in, leading them to be their most authentic selves. She seeks to empower and inspire; anyone listening to her can see that. Her empathy makes her incredibly relatable despite her power and prestige. At the same time, she has no problem speaking up when she disagrees with something. Finally, her mastery of communicating her vision to others has propelled her up the ladder of success one rung after another, igniting passion in her team.<sup>xxx</sup> (Oprah has mastered the domains of Authority and Expression as well, making her an excellent example of someone with exceptional executive presence.)

Hopefully you are beginning to develop a clearer picture of what gravitas looks like—and whether you have it. Now, we'll go through each of the three key competencies of gravitas, beginning with confidence. You'll gain a clearer picture of what a leader with each of these qualities looks like, behaviors that can undermine each quality, and how to cultivate them within yourself as well as your employees.

# CONFIDENCE

### Gravitas Competency #1:

“Self-confidence is a super power.  
Once you start believing in yourself, magic starts happening.”  
~ Anonymous ~

Your company needs leaders who are confident in their own abilities, and who let that confidence shine. Confidence is a key cornerstone of executive presence. Confidence affects every aspect of leadership, a recent study found.<sup>xxxii</sup> Using a mix of self-evaluations and 360-degree surveys, the researchers discovered that increased self-confidence correlates with stronger leadership performance, especially in the following key areas:

- Being persuasive
- Embracing change
- Radiating energy and enthusiasm
- Trying out innovative approaches
- Inspiring and motivating others
- Representing the group positively

Confident leaders demonstrate strong *self-leadership*, which means they're adept at engaging in positive self-talk to motivate themselves. Rather than berating themselves for failures or shortcomings, they reflect on what they can learn and empower themselves to try again, explains leadership consultant Ruth H. Axelrod. Thus, they overcome areas of weakness rather than feeling powerless to change.

How can you master this key executive presence quality? Let's start with understanding what having confidence means.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Your company needs leaders who are confident in their own abilities, and who let that confidence shine.

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## Confidence defined.

People with confidence lead with the assurance that they can do it. They're assertive, self-possessed, and willing to take risks. They state their opinions strongly. They believe in what they know and who they are.

Because confident leaders feel certain they can learn from failure and ultimately persevere, they don't just play it safe. They see the major rewards they can reap from testing what is possible rather than abiding by the status quo. Thus, they reach greater heights of success that wouldn't be possible without a high level of self-trust.

Confidence is sorely in demand in most workplaces. A recent survey by Gartner, Inc. found that only half of all leaders feel equipped to succeed in a leadership role.<sup>xxxii</sup> That means a large proportion of leaders aren't coming close to fulfilling their own potential!

In the following chart, the column on the left shows the set of behaviors you need to develop to radiate confidence. In the column on the right, you'll see the behaviors that inhibit confidence, which can make you appear a weaker version of yourself. Master the competencies on the left to shine as a confident leader!

Confident Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Confidence
• <i>Self-assured</i>	• <i>Insecure</i>
• <i>Grounded</i>	• <i>Self-doubting</i>
• <i>Formidable</i>	• <i>Questioning yourself</i>
• <i>Certain</i>	• <i>Doubting your own abilities</i>
• <i>Composed</i>	• <i>Flappable</i>

Confident leaders share their opinions often and powerfully. They don't hold back on sharing their ideas, because they know they are critical. Nor do they hold back from challenging others when they disagree. They grow their influence by speaking up with conviction at meetings, which also broadens their team's pool of ideas.

They don't shy away from new things, because they know they are up to the challenge, and they pursue their goals to fruition. They won't give up just because they hit a hurdle or two. Thus, they'll never stop learning and growing their competencies. They also take ownership of

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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their actions, listening to feedback and working to remedy their behavior and the situation. They don't fear criticism.

Leaders with executive presence act with confidence no matter who is in the room. They believe in their ideas enough to tell hard truths at times, even though others might be afraid to challenge their superiors. By doing this in respectful ways, they maintain the respect of others even when sharing an unpopular idea. They don't worry about skepticism from others, although they do prepare to handle it. When others push back against their idea, they share evidence to back it up.

Confident leaders boldly influence others and gain their loyalty because they believe in the value of their own input. People trust leaders with genuine self-confidence and want to go the extra mile for them. Thus, this type of commitment to building your own self-confidence will bring great success for the entire group. They'll learn from your example how to boldly accept new challenges, focusing on the desired results rather than any lingering fears. As colleagues, leaders, and direct reports feel your confidence, they'll become more confident in your whole team in turn.

Further, confident people make an excellent first impression. Because our brains are hard-wired to quickly form a perception of someone else, we unconsciously feel a greater sense of respect and admiration for a confident person.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Others enjoy being in their presence and gravitate toward them. Their dynamic, expressive personality makes them engaging and easy to talk to, drawing others out as well. They inspire clients' confidence in their organization as well, since they radiate an inner belief in what they are doing.

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Confident leaders boldly influence others and gain their loyalty  
because they believe in the value of their own input.

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## Behaviors of confident leaders.

You may still be having a hard time imagining exactly what you need to do differently in order to model each of these behaviors. Here are some examples of how you can make the shift to modeling confident behaviors in your daily work, to illustrate what confidence looks like in practice more clearly.

### **You can demonstrate confidence through the following behaviors:**

- Sharing opinions with conviction, expecting them to be well-received.
- Speaking in a calm, steady tone that shows your confidence is firmly rooted.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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- Being direct and clear when speaking to a higher-level leader. Not hesitating to voice your ideas, because you know they're important.
- Acting equal to those who are more senior than you, and feeling equal to people at all levels of leadership.
- Taking on challenges with enthusiasm, since you have lots of practice with stepping outside of your comfort zone.
- Backing up ideas self-assuredly if someone challenges them.
- Questioning anyone else's ideas if you disagree with them.
- Showing a clear rationale for the ideas you share, giving you immense credibility.
- Announcing decisions with certainty rather than trepidation, and believing in their ability to drive change.
- Not being afraid to take risks and make mistakes. Knowing that taking strategic risks is the only way to reach the next level of success, and looking at failure as a learning experience.
- Remaining poised even if you have to step outside of your comfort zone. While you might feel nervous at times, it doesn't show on your face or in your voice.
- Not constantly second-guessing yourself when you have an idea or hesitating to voice it.
- Preparing ahead of time for meetings and presentations, so your articulate and clear when speaking.
- Always looking "put together," which helps you to feel like a leader in every situation.
- If you need to have a difficult conversation, being able to guide it in a positive, productive direction.
- Showing vulnerability at times, but not erupting with anger, frustration, or fear.
- Using body language that conveys you are centered and balanced—shoulders back, chin up, back straight.
- Making strong eye contact, establishing a direct connection with people.

Displaying confidence starts from within. You'll exude more confidence when you trust your own ability and give yourself positive affirmation, reminding yourself of where you've excelled in the past. When making a choice, you'll know that you've carefully weighed all the options, and you'll trust your own judgment and intellect.

As you begin modeling these behaviors, you'll gradually show an increase in confidence—and others will notice. If one or more of these points stands out as an area where you need to grow,

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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focus on shifting your behavior in that area over the next several weeks.

## Isabel Improves Her Confidence with Careful Preparation

### ***Problem:***

Isabel had been working as a mid-level manager for several years, and she'd just received a promotion. She found herself giving report-backs to a table of leaders one level above her on a weekly basis.

Isabel didn't know most of these leaders well, and she felt far outside of her comfort zone. Her voice sounded anxious when she delivered her project updates. Since she just wanted to get it over with, she rushed through her words, which made her sound even more nervous. After this happened a couple of times, her boss pulled her aside and urged her to make improving her confidence in speaking her number-one priority.

### ***Action:***

That's when Isabel turned to executive coaching. We discussed several strategies she could use to both look and feel more confident. She began rehearsing her words in the morning before she went in to work, and creating notecards with the key deliverables she needed to mention. She also began doing a mini-meditation at her desk shortly before a meeting, so she'd feel more centered.

### ***Results:***

When Isabel didn't have to fear that she'd forget what to say, her cadence became more relaxed. After she pulled off a confident delivery a couple of times, she actually began looking forward to these weekly meetings, knowing she'd receive appreciation and praise for her great work.

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Displaying confidence starts from within.  
You'll exude more confidence when you trust your own ability and  
give yourself positive affirmation,  
reminding yourself of where you've excelled in the past.

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## Behaviors that undermine confidence.

Now let's take a look at some behaviors that can inhibit your efforts to show confidence. These potential derailers of success keep you from feeling and appearing like a poised and confident leader.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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You demonstrate a lack of confidence when you engage in behaviors like these:

- Acquiescing to another person's opinion during a disagreement to avoid conflict.
- Feeling afraid to speak up in meetings and share your opinions.
- Deferring to others instead of sharing your point of view.
- Feeling indecisive and doubtful when trying to make decisions.
- Caring too much about what other people think (always seeking validation or trying to please everyone).
- Getting easily rattled when something stressful or unexpected occurs.
- Second-guessing yourself rather than trusting yourself.
- Feeling hesitant to take on challenges or new projects because you might fail.
- Overanalyzing what you are going to say (often resulting in saying nothing).
- Apologizing for your behaviors regularly.
- Speaking in a quiet or soft voice.
- Rarely (or never) asking for feedback.
- Slumping in your chair and look disinterested rather than fully present.
- Not making eye contact with people you're speaking with.
- Sitting in the back of the room or outside the table where the discussion is happening.
- Seeming overcome with anger, frustration, or fear about a stressful situation.
- Laughing nervously or speaking in a shaky voice.
- If using Zoom, keeping your camera off or not looking at the camera when speaking (which comes across as making poor eye contact).

If you lack confidence, you may notice yourself engaging in these behaviors. Others will *definitely* notice. When leaders lack confidence, it reverberates throughout the organization. Their own people begin to second-guess them rather than boldly standing behind them. Thus, lack of confidence undermines their ability to guide their team to success.

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When leaders lack confidence, it reverberates throughout the organization.

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Your superiors need to see that you believe in yourself before they'll begin to trust you with greater responsibilities. Showing a high-level of self-trust will naturally inspire others to feel more confident in you—and it will also show them what you can do. As you grow your

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confidence, you'll start reaching for more ambitious goals and proving what you're capable of, which will lead your boss to entrust you with higher-level projects.

## Gary Gains Confidence and Credibility

### *Problem:*

My client Gary did have things to say and contribute, but it seemed like he always held himself back. Due to the amount of experience he had, one would think he would be more confident in sharing his opinions.

His tentativeness was keeping his boss from seeing him as leadership material. He needed to show that he could take charge and handle situations when his guidance was needed.

Gary also lacked confidence among his coworkers. When his boss asked him to mentor a colleague in a particular area, he felt daunted—what did he really have to offer? he thought. Surely there was a better person for the job.

### *Action:*

I encouraged Gary to push through his self-doubts by organizing his thoughts before each of their peer mentoring sessions and before meetings. This reminded him of how much he actually knew and how much experience he had. We discussed how much Gary's boss depended on his input, too, and he pushed himself to insert his opinions into the conversation.

### *Results:*

Gary felt surprised at first at the gratitude his colleague expressed for the knowledge he shared. The experience helped to affirm his own value. In fact, serving as a peer mentor reinforced his confidence so much that he found it easier to share his opinions in meetings, knowing he had an important perspective. As a result, his credibility and reputation grew among both colleagues and leaders. Gary's boss commended him for his efforts and said he'd witnessed a significant change.

## How would you rate your confidence?

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- You believe in your ideas and opinions.
- You stand up for what you believe in.
- You take calculated risks.

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- You make tough decisions and stand by them.
- You feel eager to take on new challenges.
- You easily gain others' confidence.
- You feel worthy of influencing those who are more senior than you.

If you scored above 52, you have an impressive level of confidence. Otherwise, work on growing your confidence by stepping outside of your comfort zone in each of these areas.

## Alicia Grows Her Rapport with Senior Leaders

### **Problem:**

Whenever my client Alicia had a chance interaction with a higher-level leader, she'd get tongue-tied and fail to make a strong impression.

I knew that in order for her to act confident, she first needed to *feel* confident. She needed to truly believe in her own value. Of course, that's easier said than done.

A very introverted person, Alicia realized she had been assuming she simply didn't have what it takes to come across as a leader in those situations. When she saw her more outgoing colleagues interacting with senior leaders, she couldn't imagine herself sounding so gregarious. She'd unconsciously thought to herself, *Why even try?*

### **Action:**

We discussed how she didn't have to project the exact same persona that her peers projected. Everyone wears confidence differently. Alicia learned to remind herself of what makes her truly proud of her work and the results she was achieving. She crafted a short but compelling elevator pitch based on these strengths.

### **Results:**

The next time she ran into a high-level leader, they had a great conversation that helped them develop a rapport. This leader remembered her and asked her how her work was going in their next interaction. By mustering up her confidence in that first interaction, Alicia had created a positive feedback loop that kept her confidence growing.

## Action steps to become a more confident leader

These action steps will help you cultivate a reputation as a confident leader. As others come to see you this way, you'll either be perceived as a leader with executive presence or someone

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who's on the road to that destination.

1. **Schedule time to explore what holds you back from having confidence at work.** As you take this courageous step forward and begin learning more about yourself, the obstacles will become less restricting and you'll open up to previously unknown possibilities. In your reflection time, answer these questions:
  - Why am I not showing up with confidence?
  - What excuses am I making to not be confident?
  - What obstacles are keeping me from being confident?
  - What fears are stopping me from feeling confident?
  - Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that prevent me from being confident?
2. **Get comfortable being uncomfortable.** If you want to keep growing, you'll continually be feeling uncomfortable, so get used to that idea now. As a leader, you'll experience more than your share of criticism, uncertainty, tough choices, and sometimes public failures. However, you can learn to cope with these challenges head-on so they don't overburden you with stress. And the more you step outside of your comfort zone, the wider your comfort zone will grow.

How can you learn to feel comfortable with discomfort? Instead of avoiding uncomfortable situations, practice saying "yes" to them. Accept and embrace them. Say to yourself, "I am capable of handling this situation." By doing so, you'll learn to operate from a place of self-confidence rather than a place of stress as you negotiate difficult circumstances. And every time you do so, you'll increase your sense of being ready to tackle any challenge.
3. **Volunteer for new types of projects.** Step outside of your comfort zone by signing up for a project that forces you to stretch your skillset. Choose something achievable but ambitious. Take the lead on a team project for the first time or pitch an innovative idea to your boss.
4. **Surround yourself with advocates and supporters.** When you spend time with people who truly believe in you, you'll find it easier to believe in yourself. They'll remind you of your strengths and the times you've overcome your weaknesses. Cultivate relationships with people at different levels of the organization, as well as colleagues from outside of it, who share encouragement and help you see yourself in a positive light.

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When you spend time with people who truly believe in you, you'll find it easier to believe in yourself.

5. **Do things that make you feel confident.** Even though you should be doing things on a daily basis that stretch your comfort zone, you should also pinpoint the things that make you feel supported and capable. They'll help you navigate new terrain with grace and skill, giving you a boost of confidence that will keep you motivated. For example, do you think best in writing or while brainstorming with a friend? Use that strategy to come up with ideas to share at a meeting. Do you feel tongue-tied when interacting with new people? Think of some conversation starters for that lunch with your boss's boss in advance. Do you get a quick burst of confidence from showing people how to do something that's easy for you, but new to them? The positive feedback you gain will help keep you motivated throughout the day.
6. **Look for evidence of your abilities.** Most of the time, we look for evidence that our abilities *aren't* good enough (*what we are missing*). Confident people look for evidence that their abilities *are* good enough. They expect to find that evidence most of the time. Prove to yourself what you are capable of doing. Gather data that show you are smart and talented. Be a lawyer arguing your own case.
7. **Practice positive self-talk.** We all fall into negative patterns of self-talk, which hinder our chances at success, unless we actively work to correct them. According to one researcher, we speak to ourselves at a rate of up to 4,000 words per minute!<sup>xxxiv</sup> That's a lot of negative self-talk, if we don't correct course. Notice the types of things you say to yourself about your abilities and efforts. When you catch yourself saying negative things, give yourself the advice you would give a friend or coworker instead. Practice using positive, motivational language, since it's sure to bring better results than negative statements.
8. **Make sure your voice sounds relaxed yet energized when speaking.** Instead of rushing your delivery in a meeting, varying your pacing to emphasize key points.
9. **Accept your own vulnerability.** Feeling vulnerable is an innate part of the human experience, not a weakness. If you repress your sense of vulnerability, you'll only become more afraid of feeling vulnerable. That increases your fear and insecurity, rather than decreasing it! Instead, acknowledge what makes you feel vulnerable. In an interview with Brené Brown, Oprah recognized vulnerability as "the cornerstone of confidence" because it shows that you're self-assured enough to take risks that ultimately allow you to identify with others around you.<sup>xxxv</sup> "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage," Brown says in her book *Daring Greatly*.<sup>xxxvi</sup> "Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness."

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**10. Embrace the opportunity to fail.** If you're taking risks that have the potential to take you to greater heights in your career—as you should be—there's always a chance that you'll fail. Embrace the possibility of failure, and then you'll no longer feel afraid of it. Do everything you can to set yourself up for success, then take the leap.

Switching from those low-confidence to high-confidence behaviors is an easy and quick way to start appearing more confident now. You'll feel more confident as you present yourself with confidence, allowing you to speak and act with more conviction in turn.

## Bonus section: How to show high-confidence behaviors in the meeting room

Through these behaviors, you can start shining as a confident leader the second you enter a meeting room. Practice them at lower-level meetings so you can exude confidence in higher-level ones as well.

### WHAT TO DO:

- Sit in front of the room.
- Engage before the meeting starts (get off your phone!).
- Treat senior execs as equals. Speak up, make eye contact, and add value.
- Project your voice, knowing that you deserve to be there.
- Stand up at your desk when on calls or one-on-one meetings.
- During meetings, sit at the head or middle of the table.

### WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Sit outside the table where the discussion is happening.
- Lower the seat of your chair.
- Look down and avoid eye contact with higher-level people.
- Second-guess yourself.
- Be apologetic.
- Sit in the back of the room.
- Speak in a quiet or soft voice.
- Slump in your chair and look disinterested.

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As you take these steps and engage in self-reflection, you'll come to know yourself in a deeper way than ever before. That will enhance your sense of clarity and purpose, allowing you to move through life with conviction and resolve. All those around you will sense your aura of confidence and aspire to emulate it as they too strive to blossom as leaders.

## Helping your employees to grow their confidence.

“Good leaders inspire people to have confidence in their leader.  
Great leaders inspire people to have confidence in themselves.”  
~ Eleanor Roosevelt ~

As their leader, you're responsible for helping your people grow this competency. It won't just benefit them at some future point in time when they get a promotion to a leadership position. Rather, it will help them to reach a new level of excellence in their work right now.

## How will enhancing employees' confidence build a stronger team?

Here are some key benefits you'll see in your whole team as employee confidence grows.

- They'll address issues as they arise, rather than letting them fester. The team will therefore function more harmoniously rather than being plagued by disruption.
- Others will listen to them when they speak, and they'll listen to others in turn, improving group communication.
- They'll push themselves to tackle new types of projects, setting stretch goals that grow their capabilities.
- They help create a culture of positivity within their team because they won't feel threatened by new or contradictory ideas, which fosters an atmosphere of open communication.
- They'll motivate others because their enthusiasm for their work is contagious, and they'll serve as excellent peer role models who bring out the best in each other.

For all of these reasons, confident employees are valuable contributors who are well-positioned to become future leaders.

## How to help your employees grow their confidence.

Your subordinates can grow their confidence with encouragement and repeated practice. Here are some action steps you can take to help them expand their confidence.

- Tell them how much their opinions matter. Often people forget that others are actually depending on them when they avoid speaking up.

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- Ask for their feedback and opinions, so they know you view them as intelligent and capable.
- Challenge them to take risks. Create a culture in which failure is celebrated as long as the person took a calculated risk.
- Assign them to projects that take them outside of their comfort zone in appropriate ways. Don't push them too hard too fast, but make sure they're tackling new challenges.
- Coach them rather than micromanaging them as they try new things. They need to know you trust them to carry out their responsibilities, but that you're also there to provide guidance when they need you.
- Praise their efforts often in genuine ways, so they know the full value they bring.

Each success your employees achieve will make them less preoccupied with the potential for failure and more certain in themselves. As their leader, work to model confidence yourself, and you'll take your people far beyond what they thought was possible.

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Confident employees are valuable contributors  
who are well-positioned to become future leaders.

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# COMMANDING

### Gravitas Competency #2:

“When placed in command, take charge.”

~ Norman Schwarzkopf ~

Leaders with executive presence are commanding. When people look at them, there's no doubt that they're in charge. Superiors gladly hand them the reins when they offer to take a leading role in a project, knowing they'll get things done. Others innately know they can trust these leaders to guide the team to success.

“Leaders lead *with* the authority of leadership...or without it. The authority is largely irrelevant—if you are a leader, you will lead when you are needed,” says pastor and motivational speaker Clay Scroggins in *How to Lead When You're Not in Charge*.<sup>xxxvii</sup> And that's exactly what commanding leaders do. They take charge and drive their team toward a clear goal with a laser focus. Others respond to their determination and conviction by springing into action.

Your company needs leaders with a commanding presence that will drive people toward a strategic vision. Let's take a closer look at what this competency is, and then how to cultivate and master it.

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Leaders with executive presence are commanding.  
When people look at them,  
there's no doubt that they're in charge.

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#### Commanding defined.

A commanding leader takes charge, driving outcomes. People naturally look to these people for leadership, regardless of title. They defer to their judgment. When they speak, people pay attention. Others perceive their formidable presence and power. These leaders are *socially brave*, as Gallup says; they seem to take control of situations effortlessly, without wavering.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

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It's not hard to spot the commanding leaders in your workplace; you probably intuitively know who they are. In times of crisis or transformation, these commanding leaders will help their team stay the course and navigate change successfully. They're the people you want steering the ship through stormy waters.

Here's what a commanding leader looks like, in contrast to a leader who does not embody this competency.

Commanding Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Your Ability to Be Command
• <i>Strong</i>	• <i>Relaxed</i>
• <i>Powerful</i>	• <i>Too casual</i>
• <i>Filled with conviction</i>	• <i>Laid-back</i>
• <i>In charge</i>	• <i>Despondent</i>
• <i>Poised</i>	• <i>Flappable</i>

Others never wonder what a commanding leader thinks—and these leaders' ability to be direct improves the flow of communication throughout the workplace. They don't shy away from difficult conversations that lead to real progress when people's behavior needs to change. And when they have these conversations, others listen fully.

Great leaders are adept at balancing their commanding presence with their nurturing qualities. They are not dictators; they often use their aura of authority to rally people for a productive brainstorming session, strategic discussion, or implementation of a new idea. They build comradery with employees rather than being domineering, helping the team feel like a cohesive unit. They don't need to bully people into going along with their ideas—they naturally inspire others' confidence in them. But no one would call them "laid-back," as they are firmly committed to ensuring the success of their projects—and their initiative propels the team forward. People who are in command readily spring into action, so they help the whole team accomplish much more than a passive leader does.

These leaders gain others' full respect. Their subordinates will know that they have the backing of senior leadership and won't second-guess their ideas. In turn, their subordinates receive valuable feedback and guidance that helps them advance in their own careers. They have a manager who actively coaches them to success. And by modeling courageous leadership, these leaders help others to find courage within themselves as well.

Further, commanding leaders inspire more confidence in your client base and guide clients persuasively. All stakeholders will have more trust in your organization as a result.

## Behaviors of commanding leaders.

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Commanding leaders prove to others that they will get things done. Others instinctively defer to them as they step up to the plate, allowing them to take the reins on a difficult project or in a tough situation. People trust them to guide the team through turbulent times, knowing they will stay the course.

**You can prove yourself to be a commanding leader through the following behaviors:**

- Taking charge and moving toward results rather than waiting to see if someone else steps up to the plate.
- Taking control of situations where leadership is lacking, even if you're not the official leader.
- Being direct and clear with instructions and expectations, rather than beating around the bush.
- Motivating and pushing your team toward more ambitious goals, driving projects and outcomes.
- Letting your expertise and enthusiasm for your projects shine.
- Not shying away from making unpopular decisions. You don't fear how others will react.
- Challenging others to assume more responsibility and take risks.
- Leaning into your fear so you can have a greater impact, confronting situations that feel difficult.
- Presenting your opinions and ideas boldly and being willing to speak the truth, even if it's uncomfortable for others.
- Standing up to authority and drawing a line in the sand when dealing with peers or subordinates.
- Compelling people to believe in your vision by showing your own implicit belief in it.
- Not allowing yourself to get exasperated, because you believe in your ability to manage any challenge.
- Radiating calm and a steady hand, especially under pressure.
- Taking things in stride rather than allowing yourself to be dominated by anxiety about any issue that arises. Focusing on staying level-headed enough to manage any tough situation with grace and skill.
- Making sure your appearance radiates professionalism rather than sloppiness.

People can quickly sense a leader's commanding nature even without knowing them well. As they witness the leader' power and presence in action, they only become more convinced of their strength and immense capability.

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We'll now examine the behaviors that leaders must often overcome in order to be commanding.

## Behaviors that undermine a leader's ability to be commanding.

Let's take a look at some behaviors that can derail a leader's ability to come across as commanding and in charge. These behaviors directly undermine a leader's EP, so if you engage in them, work to break these habits!

### You demonstrate a lack of command when you:

- Deferring too often to others instead of taking the lead.
- Not holding your team accountable for results.
- Being tentative in decision-making, presenting yourself as uncertain and insecure in your judgment.
- Making decisions based on the desire to appease people rather than based on what you know will drive results.
- Going with the flow, being laid-back and too casual.
- Avoiding giving constructive feedback that could help people and processes to improve.
- Being passive rather than taking action.
- Saying yes to most requests, even if you don't have capacity to handle them.
- Being too nice and accommodating rather than pushing back when you disagree.
- Failing to confront a challenging situation directly.
- Apologizing too often, including for minor things that were out of your control.
- Being unclear about your expectations for others and in your directives.

You may notice yourself engaging in some of these behaviors, or you may receive feedback from others that you're engaging in them. Either way, this is a red flag that you are undermining your EP. These behaviors all present you as a more passive, ineffective leader rather than someone who is in command.

Passive leadership has detrimental effects on the whole team, researchers have found.<sup>xxxix</sup> It leads to role overload and ambiguity among employees, mental fatigue, and ultimately even mental health impacts.

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## Angela Learns to Stop Giving Her Power Away

### **Problem:**

Angela too quickly gave her power away and let others direct. She needed to be the one who gave direction and took control of situations. Her strengths included being nice, approachable, likeable, collaborative, and inclusive. However, these strengths are a double-edged sword—they can have unintended negative consequences.

For instance, because Angela cared too much about what others thought, she could be indecisive. She would default to consensus-building instead of flexing more of her leadership muscle. She needed to become more commanding by learning how to present herself as composed, grounded, and strong.

### **Action:**

I urged Angela to tap into what she truly thought about a situation rather than deferring to the wisdom of the group, and then advocate for that position. This felt uncomfortable to her, because it pushed her outside of her comfort zone.

### **Results:**

She feared that others would see her as unlikeable and bossy. However, once she started asserting her opinions and maintaining her position, she saw that she actually gained more respect and admiration from others. They appreciated her strong leadership, because it helped everyone to feel more certain of their team's ability to succeed.

## How would you rate your ability to be commanding?

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- You take charge and drive toward outcomes.
- When confronting a challenge, you take action decisively.
- When you speak, people stop what they're doing and listen.
- When you give others direction, they take action immediately.
- You drive your team toward ambitious outcomes.
- You don't shy away from tough decisions.
- You remain steadfast and centered under pressure.

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If you scored above 52, you have an impressive ability to be in command. Otherwise, work on growing your commanding presence by stepping outside of your comfort zone in each of these areas.

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Owning your role as a leader, showing up to meetings as someone who is ready to take charge and take initiative.

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## Action steps to become a more commanding leader

What can you do to become a more commanding leader? Here are some action steps that you can start taking now. As you make your ability to take the reins more visible, people will start seeing you as a commanding leader.

1. **Schedule time to explore what is holding you back from being more commanding at work.** In your reflection time, answer these questions:

- Why am I not being more commanding at work?
- What excuses am I making to not be commanding?
- What obstacles are keeping me from being commanding?
- What fears are stopping me from being commanding?
- Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more commanding?

Becoming conscious of your fears and perceived limitations is the first step to overcoming them. As you take this courageous step forward, those so-called obstacles will become less relevant and you'll open the door to possibilities previously unknown. Once you identify them, you can counteract them with positive self-talk and lean into your fears through the following steps.

2. **Own your areas of expertise**, rather than deferring to others on topics you know a lot about.
3. **Present your ideas with confidence and conviction**, emphasizing your main points.
4. **Show that you're a big-picture thinker** by engaging in strategic planning for your own team and with other leaders.
5. **Speak with power** by projecting your voice in meetings and other interactions.  
Eliminate minimizing language like the following words and phrases:
  - "Not sure about this idea, but ..."

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- “I don’t really know, but ...”
  - “I’m no expert, but ...”
  - “I could be way off base, but ...”
  - “This might be a dumb idea, but ...”
  - “Sorry, but I just want to say ...”
  - “This is just my opinion,”
  - “I think”
  - “Sort of”
  - “Kind of”
  - “Almost”
  - “Maybe”
  - “Actually”
6. **Avoid uptalk: Ending declarative statements with an upward inflection.** Ending on a higher note makes it sound as though you are asking a question when you’re really trying to make a definitive statement.
  7. **Make yourself known as a visionary by bringing innovative big-picture solutions to the table.** Claim space for yourself even among higher-level leaders, showing you know you deserve to voice your excellent ideas.
  8. **Own your role as a leader, showing up to meetings as someone who is ready to take charge and take initiative.** If you’re not the formal leader of an initiative, but leadership is lacking, step up to the plate by guiding discussion, structuring the workflow, or doing whatever else is needed.
  9. **Understand the scope of your authority.** Know where you have leverage, both officially (in terms of your job description) and unofficially (your influence), and use it.
  10. **Don’t worry too much about being liked or having popular opinions.** Being authentic by speaking your truth and holding your ground will garner genuine respect and admiration. And that means far more than being seen as “a nice person” or “a people-pleaser,” who is unlikely to fire up their team and command action.
  11. **Focus on giving yourself approval and appreciation,** rather than needing it from others. Remind yourself every day of what you bring to the table.
  12. If an employee isn’t pulling his weight, isn’t following your instructions, or is contributing to a negative workplace culture, have a tough conversation without delay. Don’t put up with any dead weight, gossip, or inappropriate comments. The other employees will appreciate knowing that such things aren’t tolerated.

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13. **Set the right example, modeling the behaviors you want to see in your employees.** If you want them to stop working after hours and feeling frazzled, don't answer emails in the evening yourself. They're emulating your example, whether they realize it or not.
14. **Expect others to follow your instructions.** When you make an important decision, you're not asking for their permission to implement it. You may at times seek their input, but when you share guidelines, expect them to be followed. Sounding sure of yourself rather than hesitant or apologetic will lead others to automatically get on board.
15. **Dress as though you're one level above your position.** You'll project that you're in command by radiating the appearance of professionalism. This works in both virtual settings and in person, by the way!

As you become a more in command leader, your executive presence will grow immensely. When you speak, even without raising your voice, everyone will listen. You will command attention, and in turn, the full respect of everyone around you.

## Helping your employees to become more commanding.

Maybe you're hoping to prepare some of your direct reports for future leadership positions—or maybe they already manage other people. Either way, developing the qualities of a commanding leader will allow them to truly inspire others and drive toward results.

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People at all levels of the organization will appreciate having strong, commanding leaders.

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### How will helping them become more commanding build a stronger team?

Here are some key ways in which helping your employees strengthen this competency will benefit the entire team.

- They'll inspire a strong sense of purpose in others, instilling a belief in your mission and vision among the whole team.
- They'll bolster engagement and productivity among the whole team by showing them that their work has meaning.
- You'll know you can trust them with any project they take on, as they don't take responsibility lightly. Their direct reports and peers will trust them as well, inspiring loyalty and dedication.
- Others will seek them out when they need direction, meaning less weight falls on your shoulders. They'll solve problems on their own rather than always deferring to you.

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- You'll know you're not missing out on vital input from your people because they're not afraid to share their perspectives with you.

People at all levels of the organization will appreciate having strong, commanding leaders. Subordinates will progress in their careers with the support of a capable leader, coworkers will thrive on teams that reach higher goals, and superiors will know their managers are getting the most from their people.

## How to help your employees become more commanding.

How can you support your aspiring leaders' development of this competency?

- Start by instilling a sense of *psychological safety*, the authors of a recent study found.<sup>xi</sup> Inclusive leadership tends to promote psychological safety, the researchers assert. When employees feel safe to test their own limits and try a new approach—and encouraged to do so—they'll become bolder leaders.
- Give them consistent mentorship and coaching as they work to assert themselves with conviction. They're likely to have some self-doubts, wondering if they're coming on too strong or remaining too passive, so let them know how you perceive them.
- Give them a nudge when you believe they should volunteer for a leadership role. Before a meeting where you announce a project, suggest they step up to take the lead.
- Make sure they feel a strong sense of purpose in the work they're doing, and a belief in their team's vision. That's a prerequisite for taking charge and driving toward change.
- Share positive feedback whenever they demonstrate the ability to be in command, even in small ways. Instead of second-guessing whether they're being too bossy or presumptuous, they'll start to feel more secure in those behaviors.

# CHARISMATIC

## Gravitas Competency #3:

"Charisma is the intangible that makes people want to follow you, to be around you, to be influenced by you."

~ Roger Dawson ~

Leaders with executive presence also radiate charisma. Your senior management is looking for leaders with the charisma to rally their team around an idea and keep them engaged in pursuing it to fruition. These leaders exude a contagious passion for their work that more deeply engages everyone around them.

A recent survey of over 300,000 leaders found that the ability to inspire and motivate others is the most pivotal leadership quality<sup>xi</sup>—and charismatic leaders have it in spades. By becoming a charismatic leader you'll infuse your team with a passion for their work as well.

Charismatic leaders also make others feel good about themselves. Just being in these leaders' presence puts people in a good mood. Thus, they do wonders to create a positive and inspiring workplace culture.

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By drawing people to them and establishing a strong rapport with them, charismatic leaders build unity and cohesion among their team.

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### Charisma defined.

Charismatic leaders radiate personal charm, optimism, and enthusiasm. They're often described as having a magnetic personality because they naturally draw people to them. They're approachable and highly engaging. They may tell witty stories or have a poignant sense of humor. Those qualities often stem from their ability to feel more relaxed and self-assured in the presence of others. They feel comfortable in their own skin, and that makes them come across as more dynamic and enjoyable to interact with.

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Leaders with charisma also make themselves approachable to people at all levels, rather than being aloof and standoffish. Think of the leaders you know who are highly likeable, but not a pushover. People take them seriously. They look forward to talking over ideas with them. Because they naturally facilitate open conversation, they spark fascinating discussions that often result in innovative developments. Others find them deeply inspiring, and these conversations empower them to keep stepping into their own potential.

By drawing people to them and establishing a strong rapport with them, charismatic leaders build unity and cohesion among their team. For all these reasons, charisma is a key quality of executive presence.

Take a look at this comparison of behaviors that cultivate or undermine charisma:

Charismatic Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Charisma
• <i>Charming</i>	• <i>Reserved</i>
• <i>Engaging</i>	• <i>Unexciting</i>
• <i>Passionate</i>	• <i>Dispassionate</i>
• <i>Inspiring</i>	• <i>Unaffecting</i>
• <i>Empowering</i>	• <i>Disempowering</i>

Charismatic leaders ramp up employee engagement and loyalty. They draw promising talent into bigger-picture discussions, showing them how much they value their contributions. They let people know that they matter. Thus, their team feels more excited about coming in to work every day.

Marillyn Hewson, whom Forbes characterizes as “the most powerful executive that the modern defense industry has produced,” serves as an excellent example of a charismatic leader.<sup>xlii</sup> Named the most powerful woman in business by *Fortune*,<sup>xliii</sup> she also placed a priority on interpersonal relationships throughout her time in Lockheed Martin. She made sure that other leaders treated their subordinates as teammates, focused on being a good listener, and modeled how to be a defense industry dynamo while being friendly and affirming rather than abrasive.

“Leaders must exemplify integrity and earn the trust of their teams through their everyday actions,” writes Hewson in *Fortune*.<sup>xliv</sup> “When you do this, you set high standards for everyone at your company. And when you do so with positive energy and enthusiasm for shared goals and purpose, you can deeply connect with your team and customers.” All of these qualities make a leader deeply charismatic by fostering genuine human connections with everyone she interacts with, regardless of their position or status.

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## Behaviors of charismatic leaders.

What does charisma look like in practice? We often think of charisma as something you either have or you don't, but you can actually work to grow it within yourself. By adopting certain behaviors, you'll be embodying the quality of charisma in your own leadership.

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Charismatic people are often great at telling stories.

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### You can demonstrate charisma in all of these ways:

- Exuding joy, excitement, and passion for what you do. (This means letting yourself be visible to your team on a daily basis, rather than hiding in your office all the time.)
- Being authentic and true to yourself, showing you make decisions that align with your values.
- Fully showing up for every meeting and interaction.
- Finding ways to keep yourself energized so you can maintain a healthy level of enthusiasm.
- Communicating what you value, your beliefs, and your convictions with others, so they understand who you are—which makes you a more authentic leader.
- Making others feel special and important by pointing out their positive qualities and achievements.
- Driving toward a common cause or greater good, which makes your team's work feel more meaningful to everyone.
- Telling stories that inspire and move people toward action, since they often illustrate a point better than facts and data.
- Being optimistic by seeing the best in people and situations.
- Using humor to maintain an upbeat attitude.
- Inviting open-ended conversations and debates with a wide variety of people, including those who are both above and below you in seniority.
- Influencing people across the organization by sharing your ideas in compelling ways.
- Guiding people toward your team's strategic vision, keeping them focused on why it's important.
- Appealing to the emotions of the audience, using pathos to influence their response to your ideas.

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- Allowing your enthusiasm to show in your voice.
- Being approachable and pleasant to be around, so people want to share their thoughts with you and seek out your opinions.
- Sharing gratitude with people frequently.

Charismatic people understand what moves their audience, and they speak to it. They are emotionally intelligent people who tune in to others' feelings. Their social nature makes them highly approachable, and often they ignite rousing debates about ideas that result in productive brainstorming sessions. They radiate positivity and optimism because they believe in their team's ability to navigate any situation. Through these behaviors, you'll mark yourself as one of these socially adept leaders.

Now, let's take a look at some self-sabotaging behaviors that can make leaders less charismatic, so you can avoid them.

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Charismatic people understand what moves their audience, and they speak to it. They are emotionally intelligent people who tune in to others' feelings.

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## Behaviors that undermine charisma.

The following behaviors undermine charisma, and thus, executive presence. They're very common derailers of success, so reflect on whether you're engaging in any of them unintentionally.

### You're demonstrating a lack of charisma if you're engaging in these behaviors:

- Coming across as low in energy and enthusiasm.
- Not striving to inspire and invigorate others.
- Showing little personality rather than showing up as your full self.
- Staying quiet and not contributing at meetings.
- Seeming disinterested or disengaged from projects.
- Being reluctant to take risks.
- Constantly stating why things won't work, marking yourself as a pessimist or a naysayer.
- Resisting new ideas rather than embracing possibilities, and fearing change.
- Not showing appreciation for others or praising them often.

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- Acting disengaged toward others rather than sparking conversations.
- Staying immersed in tedious tasks and constantly busy.
- Presenting facts without conveying why they matter and establishing a human connection.
- Speaking in a monotone, with little enthusiasm for the words you're expressing.
- Settling for projects and responsibilities that don't truly feel meaningful to you.
- Not defining and expressing your values and how they connect to your projects and vision.

People who come across as lethargic, boring, and dull lack charisma. The same goes for people who always have a negative attitude rather than focusing on what is possible. People need to care about their work in order to become charismatic. If you've lost your passion for your work—or never had it to begin with—it's time to rediscover it, or to find something else that you feel more driven to do.

Similarly, losing sight of the big picture can undermine charisma. Many people get bogged down by mundane tasks at times. They might seem very busy, but they're focused on things they should be delegating or eliminating from their workload. They've lost sight of the need for strategic direction and idea sharing that could lead to exciting innovations. They've gotten into a rut, and to build their charisma, they need to get out of it. If this describes you, begin by rediscovering what excited you about your work in the first place!

## Yes, introverts can be charismatic too!

If you're an introvert, you may find yourself wondering if you have what it takes to become charismatic. When you picture a charismatic person, you may fall into the trap of imaging that bubbly, gregarious extrovert who always dominates the room. But that's not the only way to be charismatic. Let's recap on the key qualities of charismatic people, because when you really take a look at them up close, you'll realize they're not out of your reach at all. In fact, you probably already embody many of them.

First, introverts can be masters of sparking great discussions. With their propensity for reflection, they know how to bring great ideas and ignite discussions. They can guide the conversation without dominating it. They're also just as good as extroverts at radiating enthusiasm, joy, and optimism for their works, since they're equally passionate about it! With their thoughtfulness, they can conceptualize exactly how to motivate their team to move toward a strategic vision.

Further, because they know themselves well, introverts are good at being authentic, genuine people who remain true to their values and bring their full selves to their work. As they cultivate their executive presence, they can learn to become more expressive of their personal

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beliefs and opinions, but they already have an excellent foundation. In fact, the CEO Genome Project found that introverts tend to make better CEOs than extroverts (probably for all of these reasons!).<sup>xlv</sup>

Finally, introverts tend to excel at making others feel good about themselves. They know what it feels like to be an outsider looking in, so they are especially attuned to opportunities to draw in anyone who may feel left out. By honing these natural strengths, you will find yourself cultivating a subtle but powerful magnetism that many great introverted leaders possess.

Jennifer Holmgren, CEO of the biotech company LanzaTech, spoke to CNBC about how being an introvert has made her a better leader. ““The advantage, I think, of being an introvert is you listen more. You think before you speak, often, which means that you’re listening, and I think that’s important,” she asserts.<sup>xlvi</sup> “I have found that by listening more you enable more people and more ideas. You get a diversity of input because you aren’t just hearing one voice (usually the loudest one!) or worse, just listening to yourself speak.” In other words, introverts tend to be great at synthesizing the full brainpower of the group, rather than just focusing on their own ideas.

In a nutshell, there are different ways of being a quieter person, just as there are different ways of being loud. A quieter person who is truly engaged in what others think and feel can exude charisma as well as (or better than) the boisterous person who loudly tells jokes to the group. Find your own personal brand of charisma, knowing it will look different for every person.

## A New Approach Boosts Phil's Charisma

### **Problem:**

Phil came across as low in energy and a bit lethargic. He couldn't seem to arouse enthusiasm for his ideas among his team. At the same time, he was extremely competent, worked hard, and got his work done. However, this wasn't enough for someone in a leadership position. They needed him to show interest in them and excitement for their projects. His disengagement created low morale.

### **Action:**

Phil was naturally reserved and hadn't had any leadership training over the past year, so he decided to turn to an executive coach. We worked to unpack what he could do differently in some of his daily interactions to generate more enthusiasm. I asked Phil to pretend that I was one of his employees and he was coaching me. That exercise helped Phil to understand that he was making a lot of negative statements and communicating a subtle disregard for people and projects. He learned to reconsider his language and tone in a way that felt more upbeat and energized.

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Phil also began to devote time to big-picture strategic thinking, giving himself permission to block out time for it on his schedule. He realized he'd been devaluing himself by failing to make time for higher-level thinking.

## **Results:**

After making these changes, Phil soon became more enthusiastic about his own work, knowing his strategic contributions could make a real impact. Over the next couple of months, he began to see much more excitement and engagement among his team. Instead of plodding through the day, people animatedly talked about ideas, feeling empowered to explore new possibilities. One day, his boss's boss commented on the dramatic difference in motivation she noticed among Phil's team!

## How would you rate your charisma?

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- You feel genuinely excited about your work and convey this enthusiasm to your team every day.
- You invite conversations about new ideas, and you love hearing what other people have to say.
- You tell meaningful stories that inspire and move people toward action.
- People have a good sense of who you are and what you care about.
- You think about the big picture and inspire others to believe in your vision.
- People are drawn to you—they seek you out to hear your perspectives and discuss their thoughts.
- You have a great sense of comradery and an excellent rapport with all your people.

If you scored above 52, your charisma truly shines. Otherwise, work on growing your charisma by working to connect more with those you work with, developing a genuine rapport and showing your excitement for your work.

Now let's delve into how to fully cultivate your charisma as a leader, so you can motivate and inspire your team, peers, and senior management.

## Action steps for growing charisma.

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"Charisma is the transference of enthusiasm," says speaker and actor Ralph Archbold.<sup>xlvi</sup> It's how you convey your passion for what you do. Take these steps to begin dramatically boosting your charisma right away!

1. **Spend time exploring what holds you back from being charismatic at work.** As you dig deeper into these supposed obstacles, you'll find they'll become less restricting and you will open up to new possibilities unknown. Answer these questions:
  - Why am I not being more charismatic at work?
  - What excuses am I making to not be charismatic?
  - What obstacles are holding me back from being charismatic?
  - What fears are stopping me from being charismatic?
  - Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more charismatic?
2. **Encourage idea-sharing by facilitating brainstorming sessions and discussions.** Be supportive of outside-of-the-box ideas rather than shooting them down just because they seem unrealistic.
3. **Show your passion for what you do.** By exuding enthusiasm, you'll inspire your team to pursue their work with the same excitement. Charismatic leaders motivate their teams to act.
4. **Listen actively.** Show others that they matter by listening intently to their words and asking follow-up questions. Be fully present rather than focused on what you're going to say next.
5. **Pay attention to people's body language as well as the words they're speaking.** Make sure your own body language shows that you're interested and paying close attention.
6. **Vary your pacing and tone in your speech.** When you speak in an animated voice, you signal that your ideas are interesting to you and should therefore be interesting to others. You automatically become more compelling, persuasive, and charismatic.
7. **Nurture your people's growth.** Spend time getting to know them through one-on-one conversations about their goals and aspirations. Strive to make them feel important by showing genuine interest in their life and ambitions. Help them to map out a path toward professional success, connect them with learning resources, and mentoring.
8. **Give out plenty of praise and appreciation** (as long as it's authentic). Notice the small and large things people do. When you make people feel good about themselves through

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genuine praise, they'll enjoy being around you more.

9. **Enhance your emotional intelligence.** Practice focusing on how particular situations make other people feel. Ask how they feel about certain projects or circumstances often. Tune into what body language and tone of voice reveal about a person's emotional state. Simply thinking about their emotions more frequently will help you to tune into them.
10. **Seek out their input.** Proactively invite them to share their insights about ideas and current projects. Truly successful leaders aren't trying to outshine their people by being the source of all great ideas; rather, they're developing a team of innovators. Ask for feedback about your own performance as well.
11. **Become an advocate for others.** Speak about the small successes and big wins of your direct reports, coworkers, and others. Highlight them at meetings and in front of superiors. By illuminating their own victories, you become a champion for their success, and your charisma will grow in turn. Allow and encourage them to lead at times, while remaining on hand for support.
12. **Encourage people to push their own boundaries.** A leader who challenges them to boldly take a strategic risk will increase their self-confidence and be remembered as a wise, insightful, and committed mentor.
13. **Tell stories to drive your ideas home.** Charismatic people are often great at telling stories. Share stories based on your own life experience that instill lessons you want your people to learn, like how to persevere against the odds. The more you do this, the more naturally you'll tell them, and you might find moments of humor or suspense arising as well!

By cultivating your charisma, you'll also instill a positive, supportive culture. Your team will see you as someone who wants them to succeed, and they will strive to continue fulfilling your expectations.

Charisma doesn't grow overnight, but by taking these steps on a regular basis, you'll find yourself becoming a charismatic leader sooner than you may think. There's no mystery to how this transition happens—it's all about establishing yourself as someone who cares about the people around you, works to connect with them strongly, and takes steps to nurture their growth.

[Helping your employees to grow their charisma.](#)

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As a leader, you need to help your employees build up their charisma as well. Here's why that's so important and how to go about doing that.

## Why your employees need charisma.

Charismatic leadership plays a major role in a company's overall success. Here are some of the key reasons why.

Truly successful leaders aren't trying to outshine their people by being the source of all great ideas; rather, they're developing a team of innovators.

- Charismatic people readily influence others, which means they'll get people on board with organizational changes. When negotiating a challenging transformation, they'll easily rally people around them to navigate it together.
- They'll persuade all of their people to believe in the company's vision and mission, creating a sense of cohesion and unity among their team.
- They'll draw out everyone's insights and experience by engaging them in productive conversation. They'll coax out their more reserved colleagues and direct reports so the team can leverage their input.
- They'll raise productivity by inspiring others to believe in and love their work. Others will follow their example of giving it their all every day, so their team will continue raising the bar.
- They'll catalyze growth in their own people, serving as inspirational mentors.

Emotions are contagious; just as being around a negative coworker can make you feel more pessimistic, having a boss who is highly motivated and driven will make employees feel passionate about their work.<sup>xlviii</sup> This is true in both the short-term (the mood their boss is in on Tuesday) and the long-term (ongoing office morale).<sup>xlix</sup>

## How to help your employees grow their charisma.

As you can grow charisma within yourself, you can help others to grow it too. Here are some tactics for doing that effectively.

- Guide them through developing a vision for their own career—or at least for the next several years. This will help them feel more excited and energized about their work.
- Invite them into higher-level discussions when they show promise as future leaders.

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- When they share their beliefs and personality authentically, give them positive affirmation. Let them know this is a good thing, as a reserved person may feel self-conscious about it.
- Encourage them to speak up and speak their mind more. Give them tips on how to get the creative juices flowing if they find themselves stumped in social situations. For example, journaling or one-on-one brainstorming could help.
- Share advice on how to deliver captivating presentations. Stay positive and upbeat, reassuring them that most people can use tips on this subject.
- Give in-the-moment feedback when possible, so they can understand exactly what they could do differently. Share examples of how they could frame something in a more positive light, inspire others, and radiate enthusiasm.

# AUTHORITY

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Domain #2 of 3

## Authority

Having authority means being decisive, bold and influential—the three core competencies that comprise this domain. Every time you act with decisiveness, boldness, and influence, you earn another notch in your leadership foundation of authority.

The key word is *act*. While gravitas is about how you present yourself, authority is all about how you act and the impact it has on others.

### What is authority?

Authority isn't something that's bestowed on you just because of your position or title. Rather, it's earned.

Here's how authority looks in practice:

- Making clear decisions and sticking to them.
- Taking strategic risks.
- Persuading others to action.

Authority isn't something that's bestowed on you just because of your position or title. Rather, it's earned. Even if you step into the most prestigious leadership position in your company, you still need to earn your authority. You gain it when you've successfully modeled the ability to be decisive, bold, and influential.

Here's what authority is *not*:

- Trying to intimidate others.
- Leading with fear
- Striving to appear superior to others.

You don't gain authority by demonstrating power, control, dominance, or supremacy over others. Or by acting as a dictator who uses a command-and-control style of leadership. True

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authority doesn't result from fear and domination. Rather, you gain real authority when people instinctively *want* to follow you and strive to emulate your example.

In fact, those leaders who follow a dominant approach that relies on intimidating others tend to limit their team and organization's potential, as Jon Maner writes in an article published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.<sup>1</sup> Some dominant leaders in his study chose to work with less talented rather than more talented people (probably because they posed less of a threat to their egos). And some even "isolated their subordinates and prevented them from bonding with one another, because alliances among subordinates were viewed as posing potential threats." As a result, leaders who use a dominant approach undermine their organization's potential.

It follows, then, that the competencies of authority discussed in this book will absolutely benefit people following a servant leadership approach. A servant leader needs to empower their workforce, inspire people to trust them, and incite their belief in their ability to accomplish a shared vision. The three core qualities of authority will all help them to achieve those goals.

Authority takes time to establish, but you can begin taking steps now. Over time, you can gain a reputation as someone who makes things happen by being decisive, bold, and influential. Your credibility will increase, along with others' respect for you. You will then be projecting authority.

People with authority act assertively. They aren't tentative about making decisions, and they don't hesitate to put their ideas out there for all to see. They give clear direction in their interactions with others, providing clarity on ideas, needs, and expectations.

To be a decisive and bold leader, you can't just sit back and wait for the confidence to come. In this in-between place of waiting, you hope for the right time to come along, or for a situation in which you'll have enough conviction or self-assurance to take a big step forward. While you are waiting for the confidence to come, you become more indecisive, unsure, and hesitant. You're essentially telling yourself that you don't have what it takes, and you can only get there if the right moment magically happens upon you. The solution is not to wait, but to actually pull the trigger and make decisions. As you make decisions without being 100% secure in your choice, your confidence will grow exponentially. Each time you step out of your comfort zone by acting boldly, your confidence will dramatically increase. The key to being a decisive, bold and influential leader, is to dive in without knowing how cold the temperature of the water is.

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To be a decisive and bold leader,  
you can't just sit back and wait  
for the confidence to come.

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## Sarah Learns to Put a Stake in the Ground

### **Problem:**

I was coaching a leader named Sarah who modeled the competency of authority, especially in the area of decisiveness. Sarah had spent the past year working hard to cultivate her authority.

When she first stepped into a leadership position, Sarah had worried about offending people by expressing unpopular opinions or changing the way her team did things. Her trepidation prevented her from truly leading.

### **Action:**

Sarah pursued executive coaching at her boss's urging. She learned that a leader *must* take a bold stand for what she believes in, and the more she did just that, the more respect she gained from her team. We mapped out specific ways in which she could act decisive, show boldness, and grow her influence, like taking a stand for ideas she believed in. Sarah bravely took action, stepping a bit further out of her comfort zone week after week.

### **Results:**

I spoke with her manager about her performance, who said the following about her: "Of all the director-level employees, Sarah is the only leader. The rest are managers. Sarah will put a stake in the ground and own a position when others are afraid to do so. She holds her ground, showing she's willing to challenge and push back when needed. Others are afraid to make decisions and instead spend too much time building consensus and agreement, not making any decisions at all." As Sarah's example shows, authority is something that can and must be grown—not something a leader is born with.

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Others are afraid to make decisions and instead spend too much time building consensus and agreement,

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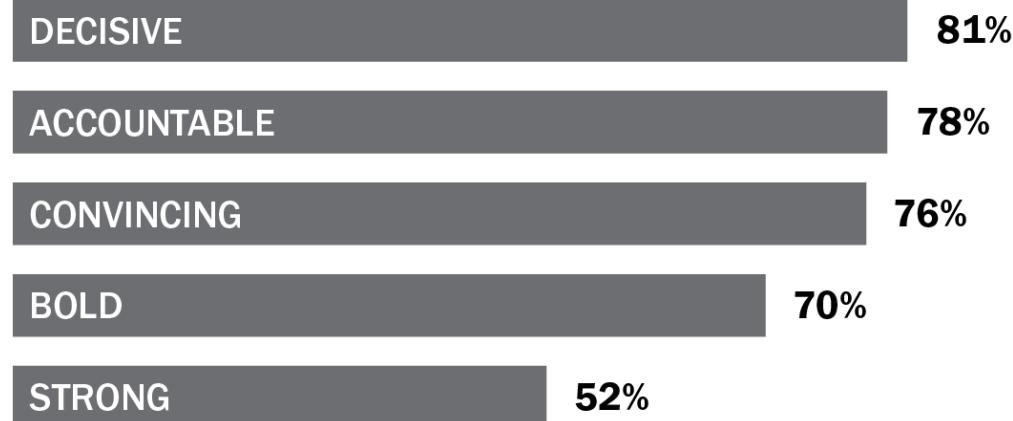
Let's delve into the main components of authority in a bit more depth, so you can more fully understand this EP domain.

### **What qualities are most essential for authority?**

I asked a sample of 1,400 U.S. workers, middle-managers, senior leaders, and executives what they believe are the most central qualities of authority. Here's what they said.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF AUTHORITY

% of leaders who say *it is absolutely essential* for a leader to be ...



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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As my team examined the survey results, we found “strong” closely related to being bold and “convincing” and “accountable” to be substantially linked to being influential. Thus, we arrived at “decisive,” “bold,” and “influential” as the three cornerstones of authority.

Let’s take another look at the three core domains of the 3x3 Executive Presence Model, with a focus on authority.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## 3x3 Executive Presence Model Authority Defined



### The 3 Competencies of Authority

By acting with decisiveness, boldness, and influence, you solidify your authority.

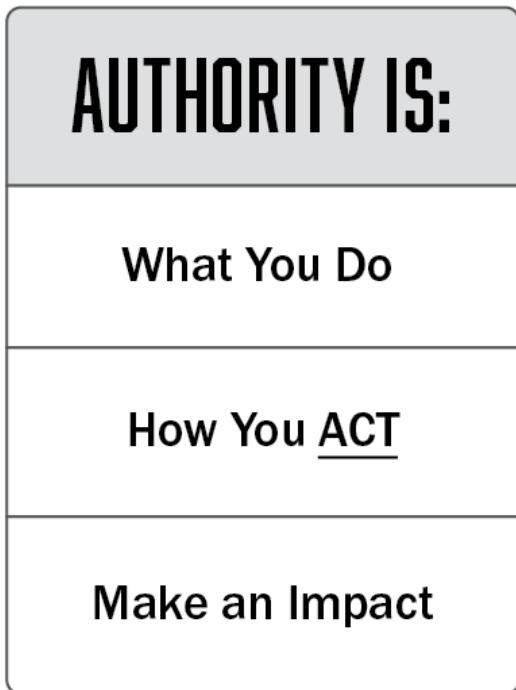


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While gravitas is about *who you are*, authority is *how you take action*.

Your authority shows up in the things you do, the actions you take, and the ways you make an impact.

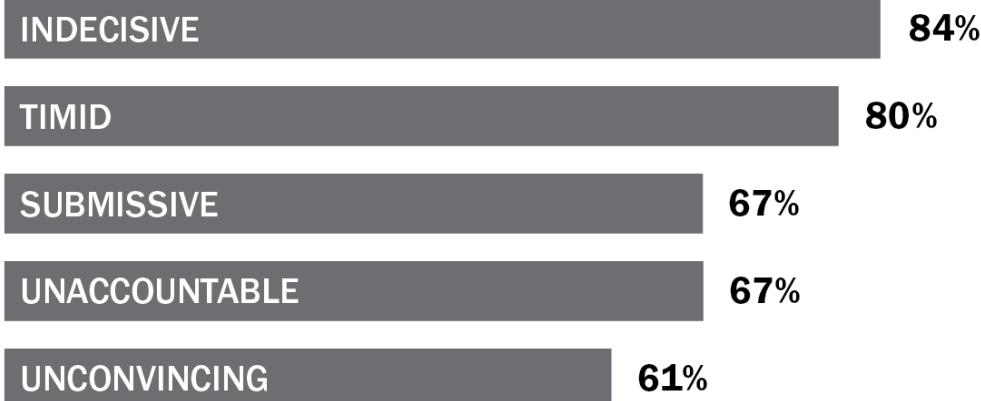


## Which behaviors show a lack of authority?

In the same poll, we asked participants which behaviors most negatively affect a leader's authority. Here's what they had to say.

## WHICH BEHAVIORS MOST UNDERMINE AUTHORITY?

% of leaders who say these behaviors show a lack of authority ...



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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### Comparison of qualities that cultivate or undermine authority.

The following chart outlines each of the top qualities of authority in more detail. The ones on the left enhance the competency of authority, while the ones on the right diminish it. For each line in the table, ask yourself whether you tend to project the quality on the left or right side.

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

## 15 WAYS TO BUILD OR UNDERMINE YOUR AUTHORITY

QUALITIES THAT CULTIVATE AUTHORITY	QUALITIES THAT UNDERMINE AUTHORITY
<b>DECISIVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Certain</li><li>• Unwavering</li><li>• Resolute</li><li>• Determined</li><li>• Forceful</li></ul>	<b>INDECISIVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tentative</li><li>• Unsure</li><li>• Uncertain</li><li>• Overanalyzing</li><li>• Submissive</li></ul>
<b>BOLD</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Courageous</li><li>• Risk-taking</li><li>• Assertive</li><li>• Gutsy</li><li>• Taking Ownership</li></ul>	<b>TIMID</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hesitant</li><li>• Shy</li><li>• Afraid</li><li>• Meek</li><li>• Complacent</li></ul>
<b>INFLUENTIAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Convincing</li><li>• Making change</li><li>• Persuasive</li><li>• Believable</li><li>• Inciting action</li></ul>	<b>UNINFLUENTIAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uncompelling</li><li>• Ineffective</li><li>• Inconsequential</li><li>• Uncredible</li><li>• Passive</li></ul>

For an example of authority in action, look to Richard Branson. He exemplifies decisiveness, boldness, and influence. Known for his adventurous stunts that build publicity for his brand, like crossing the English Channel in an amphibious vehicle, Branson genuinely revels in testing the

## EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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untested and exploring the unknown. No one would ever accuse the man who attempted to fly around the world in a hot air balloon (and was the first to cross both the Atlantic and Pacific<sup>li</sup>) of flying under the radar, and his exploits have forged a vast array of social connections that bring new opportunities. “If you allow the fear of failure to become a barrier you’re already putting road blocks in your way. ... Entrepreneurs take risks by attempting to change the status quo,” he says in *Forbes*.<sup>lii</sup> “No one ever reached for the stars from the comfort of their couch!” In the Audacious Project, he funds other revolutionary ideas with the power to transform society,<sup>liii</sup> and with Virgin Galactic, he’s also working to make space tourism possible.<sup>liv</sup>

Now we’ll dive into each of the three key competencies that make up authority in more depth beginning with decisiveness. Even if you don’t yet possess these qualities, you can absolutely develop a high level of authority as you move through the lessons in this book. As with Gravitas, we’ll take an in depth look of what each quality looks like in practice, along with key ways to cultivate it within yourself and each person on your team!

# DECISIVE

## Authority Competency #1:

"Be decisive. A wrong decision is generally less disastrous than indecision."

~ Bernhard Lange ~

A leader with executive presence is decisive. Decisive leaders take initiative and move things forward. They act with conviction.

The ability to make a decision is even more important than the ability to make the *best* decision. "High-performing CEOs do not necessarily stand out for making great decisions all the time; rather, they stand out for being more decisive," say researchers from the Genome Project. "They make decisions earlier, faster, and with greater conviction. They do so consistently—even amid ambiguity, with incomplete information, and in unfamiliar domains. In our data, people who were described as 'decisive' were 12 times more likely to be high-performing CEOs."

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Decisive leaders take initiative and move things forward.  
They act with conviction.

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### Decisiveness defined.

Decisive leaders make up their mind quickly and arrive at a clear decision with certainty. They don't waver or hesitate. When the situation demands urgency, they know how to quickly make a choice. They provide their team with prompt direction toward a well-defined objective rather than endlessly debating the options.

Once these leaders make a decision, they see it through. They don't falter halfway through a project and let the discouragement get in the way. They are accountable for the results of their choices. They believe in their ideas and see them through, remaining resolute even when confronting hurdles along the way.

Delaying decision-making has real impact. "Fretting excessively over the quality of our decisions unfortunately hurts our confidence, exacerbating our decision paralysis," explains Harrison Monarth in *Personal Excellence*.<sup>iv</sup> "While contemplating a decision, we are in a state of uncertainty, which can make us feel out of control and even pessimistic. Not only can these

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feelings make it harder for us to make choices, but the feelings may also be perceived by others, which can make us seem weaker than we are when we are in control and optimistic."

In contrast, decisive people inspire and invigorate their team. They effectively guide their people through times of transition, changing initial uncertainty into transformation. People trust them implicitly and form a united front pursuing the chosen plan. They can even turn a crisis into an opportunity by inspiring everyone to take cohesive action. Ultimately this leads everyone to feel more committed to and satisfied with their work. They gain the confidence of their direct reports, coworkers, and leaders because everyone tends to trust decisive people more than those who don't trust their own judgment.

Jeff Bezos speaks of the value of "high-velocity decision-making," asserting that "most decisions should probably be made with somewhere around 70 percent of the information you wish you had. If you wait for 90 percent, in most cases, you're probably being slow."<sup>vvi</sup> He continues, "If you're good at course correcting, being wrong may be less costly than you think, whereas being slow is going to be expensive for sure." Similarly Colin Powell has laid out the 40/70 rule: the idea that you should make a decision after you have 40% of the total information but before you reach 70%.<sup>vvii</sup>

Here's an at-a-glance comparison of behaviors that cultivate decisiveness vs. those that undermine it. For each line in the table, ask yourself whether you tend to embody the quality on the left or on the right.

Decisive Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Decisiveness
• <i>Certain</i>	• <i>Tentative</i>
• <i>Unwavering</i>	• <i>Unsure</i>
• <i>Resolute</i>	• <i>Uncertain</i>
• <i>Determined</i>	• <i>Overanalyzing</i>
• <i>Forceful</i>	• <i>Submissive</i>

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The ability to make a decision is even more important than the ability to make the best decision.

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## Behaviors of decisive leaders.

Think of the effective leaders you've seen in action. They probably all have one thing in common: They know how to take action with certainty. Because they know themselves and trust their own judgment, they know how to make choices. While many people wait and weigh

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the options indefinitely, these leaders know that they will never have perfect information. Rather, they must listen to their own intuition and their trusted advisors, and then determine the best course of action.

**You demonstrate decisiveness when you engage in the following behaviors:**

- Making decisions and sticking to them rather than second-guessing your choices.
- Quickly coming to a conclusion, making up your mind swiftly and firmly.
- Making things happen by taking action rather than delaying your response.
- Courageously making a decision, even if it's a hard one.
- Having conviction in the decisions you make, knowing you did your best with the available information.
- Stating your decision clearly, projecting your voice and speaking firmly.
- Boldly making decisions, even if they could lead to conflict or friction.
- Making decisions despite imperfect information and uncertainty, knowing that leaders rarely have all the facts before taking action.
- Trusting and relying on your gut instincts to make decisions.
- Speaking up and sharing your ideas, without hesitation, at a meeting.
- Taking charge of the situation when action is required, even if you're not the official group leader.
- Not wavering, hesitating, or displaying ambiguity in your decision-making.
- Bringing data to back up your decision, elaborating on how it will benefit people.
- Taking responsibility for decision-making rather than assuming that somebody else will.
- Assuming ultimate responsibility for your actions.
- Holding yourself accountable for the results of your choices.
- Making the right decision, even if others won't approve.
- Having a clear plan for how to act on your decision.
- Urging your team to immediately take action on the decision you've made.
- Following through by measuring progress with clear benchmarks of success.

Decisive leaders know that every decision won't be perfect. As they take action, they observe the results and adapt as needed. By relinquishing the focus on being perfect, they allow themselves to move forward rather than remaining paralyzed by fear of what could go wrong. Making decisions sooner allows you and your employees to begin *acting* as quickly as possible.

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In contrast, stalling on a decision means stalling on success.

As you adopt these behaviors, you'll prove yourself to be a decisive leader who relies on your own excellent judgement to guide the group in the right direction. Your influence will grow as others take note of your ability to make strong decisions and stand by them.

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By relinquishing the focus on being perfect,  
they allow themselves to move forward  
rather than remaining paralyzed by fear of what could go wrong.

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## Behaviors that undermine decisiveness

Now let's take a look at some potential derailers of your own decisiveness. If you're engaging in any of these behaviors, they're directly undermining your executive presence.

### You demonstrate a lack of decisiveness when you:

- Appear afraid to make decisions or be the decision-maker.
- Show ambiguity during the decision-making process.
- Don't project confidence when making decisions.
- Try to gain complete alignment of everyone and everything before making the decision.
- Let others with less knowledge, experience, and competence make decisions.
- Spend too much time trying to find common ground.
- Stay quiet instead of regularly voicing your insights and perspectives.
- Feel consumed by all the reasons why something can't happen.
- Worry that you've missed an important piece of the puzzle.
- Become bogged down with too much information, overanalyzing the situation.
- Want to debate and discuss ideas for an extended period of time.
- Aren't willing to make decisions based on your gut.
- Constantly ask others for their opinions.
- Hold back from sharing your opinions until more data is gathered.
- Take too much time to deliberate and think things through.

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- Hesitate to make a commitment due to fear of making mistakes.

The brain has two different decision-making systems, and many of us tend to rely more on one or the other. We have a faster, instinct-based system, as well as a slower, more deliberate one based on careful thought.<sup>lviii</sup> The latter, located in our prefrontal cortex, evolved later than the instinct-based system. Fortunately, we can use a combination of these systems by checking in with our gut and then confirming whether logic points us in the same direction.

Not making decisions quickly brings a heavy cost: The time wasted agonizing over every option, rather than putting a plan into action. Not trusting your own judgment also brings a hefty cost. Because indecisive people don't trust their own judgment and intuition enough, they often relinquish decision-making responsibility to others who are actually less competent. For instance, they may hand over power to a coworker who has less experience in that area, simply because the coworker projects more confidence. It's time for them to start owning their own experience and expertise, so they can show up in the way their senior leadership needs and expects them to!

Higher-IQ people often struggle the most with decision-making, say Botelho and coauthors. They may tend to have a strong awareness of all the potential considerations or repercussions, and their brain goes on overdrive to analyze them. Meanwhile, they could miss out on opportunities and fail to carry out appropriate damage control when needed.<sup>lix</sup>

Have you received feedback from others that you're engaging in these behaviors, or noticed them in yourself? If so, don't worry—we'll take a look at some action steps later in this section that can help you become a more decisive leader!

## Manuel Learns to Trust His Gut

### ***Problem:***

Manuel felt afraid to be the decision-maker who is ultimately responsible for the outcome. Cautious and conservative, he spent a lot of time thinking about all the things that could go wrong, getting overwhelmed with too much information. He would sit on the fence, asking for everyone's opinion, when firm action was needed. When he did ultimately make a decision, it wasn't backed by a solid foundation of confidence. Thus, he would quickly acquiesce toward others he deemed to have more expertise or better judgment than him. He constantly anguished over the options, going back and forth without actually taking a stance. Only after gaining agreement from everyone involved would he make a decision. Even then, he would be quick to change his view if others disagreed with it.

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In a private conversation, a coworker gave him some sage advice. “You’re too focused on what ‘they’ want to do—but there is no ‘they.’ You are the director, and your team needs to know what *you* want to do.”

## **Action:**

Manuel first needed to recognize that he was viewing others as being much more competent than they actually are—and devaluing his own judgment at the same time. He then started giving himself a time limit for reaching a decision, coupled with a new set of guidelines for how to make a choice. He would begin with his gut reaction, rather than other people’s opinions. During that timeframe, he could collect input from a few trusted people, weigh the options, and do research if needed. But then he had to take a stand, voicing his decision boldly.

## **Results:**

After using this process to make bold decisions several times, Manuel found himself less focused on consensus building and not afraid of making a choice. He received much acclaim for a few of his choices informed by his own intuition, and that bolstered his courage even more.

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“You’re too focused on what ‘they’ want to do—but there is no ‘they.’ You are the director, and your team needs to know what you want to do.”

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## **How would you rate your decisiveness?**

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- When you make a decision, you feel confident in it.
- You’re adept at making decisions in a tight timeframe.
- You consider input but don’t need to get consensus and agreement from everyone before making a decision.
- You make decisions even when you have imperfect information and uncertainty.
- You trust your intuition and rely on it.
- You know when you’ve gathered enough information to make an informed choice.
- After you’ve made a decision, you stand by it.

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If you scored above 52, you have an impressive ability to be decisive. Otherwise, work on projecting decisiveness through the action steps outlined later in this section.

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Colin Powell has laid out the 40/70 rule:  
the idea that you should make a decision after you have  
40% of the total information but before you reach 70%.

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## Action steps to become a decisive leader.

In a recent survey, researchers found that four key abilities help a leader to become more decisive: a deep level of knowledge, clear organizational direction, courage, and thorough implementation. In other words, those with expertise, courage, and a clear organizational vision are well-positioned to become great decision-makers.<sup>lx</sup> Following through with thorough implementation will help ensure success as well as growing their confidence. When people are above average in each of these areas, they reach the 82nd percentile for decision-making prowess, the researchers found.<sup>lxii</sup>

Here are some key steps to take as you work to establish yourself as a decisive leader. Keep a record of your progress so you can accurately observe how you've grown as you implement these strategies.

- **Spend time exploring what holds you back from being decisive at work.** As you strive to learn what guides your behavior, you'll find the obstacles becoming less restricting. Answer each of these questions:
  - Why am I not being more decisive at work?
  - What excuses am I making to not be decisive?
  - What obstacles are in my way from being decisive?
  - What fears are stopping me from being decisive?
  - Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more decisive?
- **Set a clear vision and goals.** That way, it will be easier to see which decisions support your long-term plans. “It’s much easier to make decisions when you’re abundantly clear on what you’re trying to achieve, why you’re trying to achieve it and how you plan on achieving it,” says Danae Ringelmann, founder of Indiegogo.<sup>lxiii</sup> “Your mission (why), values and strategy (how), and metrics (what) serve as guidance, bumper lanes and filters to your decision-making. With this foundation, many questions answer

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themselves, which is arguably faster than time spent engaged in exhaustive debate or mental wrangling. After building this foundation, I began making decisions many times faster.”

- **Embrace the certainty of uncertainty. You will never be 100% certain of any decision’s outcome.** No one is omniscient, and seeking absolute certainty is an exercise in futility. Only hindsight is 20/20—in the present, we only have our imperfect perspective.
  
- **Communicate with power and conviction.** Assert a clear point of view that doesn’t confuse your audience by wavering or focusing on nuances.
- **Block out time to make decisions.** It doesn’t need to be a lot of time. Focusing your attention on the decision-making process can help you think with more clarity and arrive at a solution more quickly. If you’re just devoting half your attention to the decision between (or during) other tasks, you’re not using your time wisely.
- **Practice trusting your intuition with the small decisions.** You may have five smaller decisions that you can practice making more quickly today. When you catch yourself deliberating, prompt yourself to decide. (It doesn’t really matter if you choose the strawberry or pistachio ice cream, so choose immediately and congratulate yourself on making the right choice!)
- **Take the plunge.** Make a decision once you have close to 70% of the information. Within that window, you have enough info to make an educated decision, but you’re not waiting so long that you’re stalling.
- **Own your choices.** Follow through on your plan, rallying your team to action. Stay the course to see it through.
- **Remove qualifiers from your speech.** When you announce a decision, never use words like “just,” “I think,” or “kind of”—and *never* apologize! Likewise, don’t devalue your own ideas with phrases like “I’m not the expert.” Those words only weaken your speech and make you sound insecure. Practice how you’ll announce your decision with conviction.
- **Think of your decisions as stepping-stones rather than life-and-death matters,** as Tony Robbins says.<sup>lxiii</sup> That will take off a lot of the pressure, allowing you to think more clearly and take more risks.
- **Rank the pros and cons of any potential options.** Determine how serious any potential pitfalls are, and how likely they are to happen. Assign them each a number based on potential severity. Then assign the “pros” a number based on their potential benefits. That will give you a better sense of your potential outcomes.

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Embrace the certainty of uncertainty.  
You will never be 100% certain  
of any decision’s outcome.

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- **Force yourself to act without hesitation**, says Chris Plough, serial entrepreneur and advisor. Accept a speaking engagement or a challenging project before you have time to think about it.<sup>lxiv</sup>
- **Limit your choices to the most viable ones.** Overcomplicating the decision-making process is more likely to lead to inaction than a better choice.

Remember the value of timeliness. The best decision made too late won't achieve optimal results. Successful people learn how to identify when it's time to take action, and then they get moving. They avoid overanalyzing a situation, knowing there are an infinite number of rabbit holes that they could dive down. Making a less than optimal decision is better than opting for inaction. If you're moving forward, you're putting your decision to the test, and you can adapt as needed! If you're standing still, you're holding back progress. Whichever choice you made, you'll feel more satisfied and energized as you maintain forward motion.

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Making a less than optimal decision  
is better than opting for inaction.

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## Helping your employees to become more decisive.

Instilling decisiveness in yourself is just the beginning. The next step is to help your employees cultivate this quality as well. As a manager, coaching your employees on how to become more decisive will benefit not only these individuals, but also your whole organization.

### How will increasing your employees' decisiveness build a stronger team?

You probably have more than one employee who needs to strengthen this quality. Here's how strengthening it will benefit the whole team.

- Decisive employees are more self-directed, allowing the team to operate more efficiently. They don't need to ask permission for everything they do. Thus, they don't take up as much of your attention and they enhance their own productivity.
- They will have sound judgment. Rather than being bogged down by worry and fear, they'll be able to synthesize the available information to the best of their ability and make stronger decisions.
- They'll know how to play a supporting role in group decision-making, since they'll understand that you can't gain complete consensus before taking action.

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- They'll raise morale and effectiveness in times of uncertainty by making others feel more secure.
- They'll feel more optimistic and empowered, giving them and the people around them greater drive.

For all of these reasons, you'll be able to increasingly rely on decisive employees to take on higher-level responsibilities.

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If you don't affirm the value of quick decision-making,  
they may assume that they should deliberate  
until they reach the absolute best decision.

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## How to help your employees become more decisive.

You can encourage your direct reports to become more decisive in the following ways.

- Commending them on making decisions swiftly, even minor ones. They'll see that this is a priority for you. If you don't affirm the value of quick decision-making, they may assume that they should deliberate until they reach the absolute best decision.
- Sharing stories about how you've made decisions with imperfect information. Often a leader's decision-making process is invisible to direct reports, so illuminate how you deal with uncertainty. This can be a good time to share some vulnerability, too. Tell a story that shows that you were able to triumph over uncertainty by trusting your judgment.
- Modeling strong decision-making for them. Allow them to be privy to the decision-making process at times. Choose a small circle of people to invite to the table when making a decision of some importance, and allow them to see what information you've gathered and how the process unfolds.
- Talk with them about why they feel indecisive, and help them to strengthen their confidence in their own judgment.
- Work to eradicate fear of failure. Emphasize that there is rarely an absolutely correct decision, and that we are all using trial and error to arrive at solutions.

As you take these steps, you'll see your team becoming stronger in its ability to make decisions collaboratively as well as individuals. People will waste less time worrying about making decisions and more time putting in the effort to bring their plans to fruition.

# BOLD

## Authority Competency #2:

*"Do not follow where the path may lead.  
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.  
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~*

Your senior management needs you to be a bold leader. Coupled with decisiveness, this trait will help your executive presence to shine. Your company is looking for leaders with the courage to be consistently bold rather than playing it safe, which dramatically increases a leader's perceived effectiveness.<sup>lxv</sup>

Only 11% of companies are truly bold and courageous, according to Deloitte.<sup>lxvi</sup> In a study of Canadian businesses, Deloitte found that 69% of courageous companies saw their profits rise in the year of the study, and 67% of them expected to increase their investment in R&D activities in the coming year. Conversely, just 46% of fearful companies saw an increase in profits, 34% saw falling revenues, and just 22% planned to increase R&D investment. By becoming a bolder leader, you can be your company's competitive advantage.

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Because they know their own worth and believe others value them highly, they don't feel they're putting themselves at risk by being forthright.

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### **Boldness defined.**

Bold leaders are willing to make bold decisions, putting a stake in the ground and owning their position. They stand by their beliefs and convictions. They are willing to challenge others and push back.

Bold leaders think outside of the box. They're always looking for new ways of doing things, even if they break with tradition. They don't spend time worrying about what others might think, because they don't worry about pleasing everyone. They don't think it's okay to challenge

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certain people's ideas but not others. They're willing to speak their mind to people at all levels of the organization. Because they know their own worth and believe others value them highly, they don't feel they're putting themselves at risk by being forthright.

Do understand that boldness is not the same as arrogance. Boldness doesn't involve having a superiority complex. Rather, bold leaders can be highly inclusive, working to empower others and bring them along. They boldly advocate for their direct reports and others. They have the courage to do what their moral compass tells them is right and to look for new ways of collaborating effectively. In contrast, arrogant people are attempting to project a façade of extreme boldness over their deep insecurities. Believing that their authentic self is not up to par, they attempt to mask it with misguided efforts to establish superiority. In contrast, executive presence—and boldness itself—is all about authenticity and being comfortable with who you truly are.

Keep in mind, too, that most people will never be accused of being bold to the point of arrogance. Most of us need to become substantially braver and bolder in our work lives, getting into the game rather than standing on the sidelines.

Of course, boldness doesn't come naturally to everyone. People are inherent risk-averse, research has found—when faced with high-stakes options, they gravitate toward the safer choice.<sup>lxvii</sup> Throughout much of our evolution, taking risks carried profound consequences—and like many other species, humans thus tend to avoid risks unless they are essential to our survival, the researchers note.

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People are inherent risk-averse, research has found—when faced with high-stakes options, they gravitate toward the safer choice.

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"We all have an inherent bias

against venturing into unknown territory," says Ed Harrington, co-author of *Outsmart Your Instincts: How the Behavioral Innovation Approach Drives Your Company Forward*.<sup>lxviii</sup> "We're descendants of risk-averse ancestors whose self-preservation instincts served them well in a time when potential danger lurked behind every boulder or bush. But in today's world, where innovation rules the day, our survival necessitates overcoming these ingrained behavioral biases that hinder new ideas and stifle creative solutions." Fortunately, most of the choices we make today are not life-or-death decisions, and we can teach ourselves to become less risk-averse.

Here's a quick look at the core behaviors that project boldness, in contrast to those that undermine this quality.

Bold Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Boldness

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• <i>Courageous</i>	• <i>Hesitant</i>
• <i>Risk-taking</i>	• <i>Shy</i>
• <i>Assertive</i>	• <i>Afraid</i>
• <i>Gutsy</i>	• <i>Meek</i>
• <i>Taking ownership</i>	• <i>Complacent</i>

George Hu, CEO of Salesforce, describes his rise to the top in a *New York Times* interview.<sup>lxix</sup> Starting out as an intern with the company, he got ahead by making bold moves that no one expected. When he first began working there, the CEO sent out a note to employees telling them, “We’re having some problems in Europe,” he says. “I talked to 20 people, did an analysis and sent it to him,” says Hu. “He called me to his office and said, “I want you to tell me what’s wrong with the company.” This bold and unexpected move earned him recognition and credibility.

Steve Jobs showed great boldness at a very young age in his own rise to the top. At twelve, he called up the CEO at home to ask for the parts he needed to build a frequency counter. That bold act landed him not only the parts, but a job as well. In 1997, when he returned to Apple, he found the company producing a dozen versions of the Macintosh computer. “Stop!” he shouted. ‘This is crazy,’” Walter Isaacson writes.<sup>lxx</sup> “He grabbed a Magic Marker, padded in his bare feet to a whiteboard, and drew a two-by-two grid. ‘Here’s what we need,’ he declared. Atop the two columns, he wrote ‘Consumer’ and ‘Pro.’ He labeled the two rows ‘Desktop’ and ‘Portable.’ Their job, he told his team members, was to focus on four great products, one for each quadrant. All other products should be canceled. There was a stunned silence. But by getting Apple to focus on making just four computers, he saved the company.”<sup>lxxi</sup>

Now we’ll take a look at the behaviors that demonstrate boldness.

## Behaviors of bold leaders.

Think of the leaders you know who act boldly. They set themselves apart from the crowd in the way they fearlessly introduce groundbreaking ideas and take action. You demonstrate boldness when you engage in any of these behaviors, proving yourself to be a courageous leader.

### You can demonstrate boldness through the following behaviors:

- Taking action in the face of uncertainty and risk.
- Challenging and improving current standards, practices, and processes rather than settling for the status quo.
- Identifying areas that are ripe for transformation, even if it would mean implementing a major change.
- Pushing toward unknown and uncharted directions.

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- Producing or embracing innovative ideas that haven't yet been tested.
- Pushing boundaries beyond what is safe and acceptable, even though you can't guarantee success.
- Courageously thinking big and striving to make huge leaps of progress rather than only incremental success.
- Encouraging opposing viewpoints and welcoming robust debates.
- Fearlessly taking on riskier projects, after determining the potential benefits are worth the risks.
- Creating opportunities for growth, change, and improvement.
- Trusting others to take on increased responsibilities when your intuition tells you they are ready.
- Holding on to your position, not giving ground.
- Being willing to make mistakes and be wrong.
- Pushing back on leaders' ideas when you disagree.
- Confronting challenging situations head-on without delay, so they don't fester.
- Taking on ambitious and uncomfortable goals that stretch your capabilities.
- Being disruptive and provocative when you spot a way to give your team a strategic advantage.

Through these bold actions, you can establish yourself as a leader who gets things done and isn't afraid to challenge the status quo. Leaders who don't play it safe are the ones who drive innovative solutions that transform organizations and industries. Trusting your intuition is key—just consider how strongly Jobs trusted his own gut when slashing production of most of the company's computers to focus on a critical few. Learning to follow your instincts will help you project boldness in all situations. By modeling boldness for others, you'll also inspire the people you lead to become more courageous themselves.

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Leaders who don't play it safe are the ones who drive innovative solutions that transform organizations and industries

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## Behaviors that undermine boldness.

Leaders who are *not* bold stand out for all the wrong reasons. Rather than being viewed as courageous and impactful, they come across as insecure and ineffective.

## When you engage in the following behaviors, you demonstrate a lack of boldness:

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- Wanting to leave things as they are rather than changing them.
- Pushing back on opportunities for growth, change, and improvement.
- Feeling comfortable with your daily routine, current progress, and job performance.
- Not being willing to tackle bigger issues.
- Not feeling comfortable or willing to take a risk.
- Resisting new and innovative ideas.
- Acquiescing to what others want or need.
- Giving in rather than holding a position you believe in.
- Focusing too much on why something can't be done or won't work.
- Worrying too much about what other people think.
- Being okay with easy, attainable, and incremental goals.
- Not challenge leadership when you disagree.
- Being complacent and content with where you are.
- Being timid and afraid of taking big steps.
- Waiting around for “the right opportunity” rather than creating it.

Look back over the last few weeks and ask yourself how often you engaged in these limiting behaviors. Were there many times when you could have been more courageous, taking big or small steps to assert yourself at work? If so, this is a red flag that you are undermining your EP.

## Maggie Learns to Shape Change Through Bold Thinking

### ***Problem:***

Maggie wanted to stay in her comfort zone and avoid doing anything that would rock the boat. Risk-averse by nature, she hesitated to take on any opportunities that involved lots of change. She rarely pushed back against others' ideas and would quickly acquiesce to what other people wanted, especially if they held any seniority over her. "I can't help deferring to elders. It's just in my DNA," she told me. The respect for elders in her culture caused her to automatically give their ideas more respect than her own. "If they have any authority or power over me, I see them as always being right," she added.

Maggie's unwillingness to challenge the status quo ensured that she'd never get noticed as a leader—unless she made some big changes. As she reviewed her annual goals with

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her boss, Tim, he pointed out that none of her proposed goals were truly pushing her limits.

## **Action:**

Tim worked with Maggie to set some stretch goals that would help her step outside of her comfort zone. “The status quo is change and transformation, Maggie,” he told her. Something clicked in her mind when he said that. She realized that if she failed to take risks, challenge existing beliefs, and try out new ideas, she’d be letting senior leadership down. So, with the help of ongoing coaching and mentoring, she got serious about learning to take chances and embrace uncertainty.

In our first sessions, we discussed the kinds of communication that she’d held back from that week. I provided affirmation that what she’d wanted to say didn’t feel disrespectful. In fact, quite the reverse—it felt much *more* respectful to trust the other person to hear his point of view. Her coworkers and superiors needed her to be willing to have a genuine conversation with them that actually had the power to shape change. Maggie recognized a clear pattern: She’d been giving his power away to others. The shift he needed to have is that they are *both* right at times. She deserves to be there and have her say. Moreover, her company *needs* her to assert that right. Her need to show them respect was inhibiting her ability to share a conflicting or opposing point of view or express her point of view with clarity.

## **Results:**

With mindful practice over the next several months, Maggie became a more forthright leader who became comfortable sharing her genuine thoughts—no matter how much seniority the other person held. In turn, others began to respect and seek out her opinions more and more.

Like Maggie, many women who are rising up in the leadership ranks have difficulty making their ideas known. Even if they know they have great ideas that need to be heard, they often have trouble getting them noticed. At the executive level, I’ve often seen big, strong personalities in male employees. Women leaders I am coaching have stated, “Men dominating meetings makes it difficult for me to share and be impactful. I feel like I’m getting run over by you guys.” Honing in on the quality of boldness will empower women leaders—and *all* leaders who don’t fit the mold of an extroverted male with a forceful personality—to make their ideas heard and recognized.

## **How would you rate your ability to be bold?**

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

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- You constantly seek out opportunities for growth, change, and transformation.
- You take action in the face of uncertainty and risk.
- You push back on ideas you disagree with, even if they come from your superiors.
- You seek out innovative and disruptive ideas that could have a major impact.
- You regularly challenge the status quo, not feeling comfortable with being complacent.
- You hold your ground when others challenge you.
- You confront difficult situations head-on rather than procrastinating.

If you scored above 52, you display an impressive degree of boldness on a regular basis. Otherwise, work on projecting boldness through the action steps outlined later in this section.

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## Reward and praise innovation and risk-taking

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### Action steps to increase your boldness.

Here are some specific actions that you or your employees can take to increase your boldness. Every step you take will be nurturing boldness within yourself until it ultimately becomes a core trait that you exude naturally.

1. **Schedule time to explore what holds you back from being bold at work.** As you dive into the task of learning more about yourself, you'll find those obstacles less restricting. (In fact, most of them may be all in your head!) Work to answer these questions:
  - Why aren't I being more bold at work?
  - What excuses am I making to avoid being bold?
  - What obstacles are keeping me from being bold?
  - What fears are stopping me from being bold?
  - Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more bold?
2. **Voice some of your ideas before they're fully baked.** Speak with confidence even if you don't have it all mapped out yet. Take a chance!
3. **Challenge others when you believe you've spotted a problem or want to improve upon an idea.** A debate often enhances an existing idea by building upon it. Don't shy away from going against the grain, even if you think you have an unpopular idea.

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4. **Create a detailed vision of your future, populated by ambitious goals.** Excitement about your future will inspire you to take risks in the present and give you the energy to follow through.
5. **Look for challenges that can teach you.** Every problem you solve and hurdle you overcome should sharpen your experience and expertise, equipping you to handle other situations more effectively.
6. **Push yourself to voice your opinion in a variety of situations.** Speak up in meetings, in interactions with your boss, when talking with your peers, and with clients. Make suggestions, even if they haven't invited them explicitly. Know your input is valuable and needed.
7. **Think outside the box,** continuously asking how things could be done in new and different ways.
8. **Seek out new perspectives** so you can debate your ideas, putting them to the test. Show you're not afraid of controversy.
9. Next time you find yourself trying to find neutral ground between different ideas, stop yourself. Choose a position and defend it.
10. **Pretend you're a bold role model or character you admire.** Strive to emulate how they would handle challenges. As you follow their example, you may find yourself acting more boldly in situations where you'd normally recoil. And guess what—it was *you*, not them, making those choices!
11. **Take action before you have time to think of the reasons why you shouldn't.** Set up a chat with your boss's boss; tell your team you have an idea to pitch at your next meeting. Just take the plunge before you talk yourself out of it.
12. **Write a list of things you're giving yourself permission to do.** You probably have ideas brewing in your own mind that aren't as out of reach as you believe they are. Then do them without feeling 100% ready! Aim to dive in when you're about 80% ready—you'll continue learning and preparing as you implement your plan.<sup>lxxii</sup>
13. Build your momentum by setting a plan that lets each success propel you toward a larger one. After you reach a goal, set your sights on the next one. Start small and work your way up.
14. **Do something you think you're not capable of doing** (or that others would never expect you to do). Create a list of things you haven't yet dared to try, and choose one of them to try now. For example, train for a 10K, learn to dance the tango, or deliver a presentation at the next town hall.<sup>lxxiii</sup> You don't have to be great at it—you just have to take the plunge.

As you grow adept at taking these steps yourself, urge your direct reports to take them as well. Reward and praise innovation and risk-taking. "Pursue the path of excellence by defining

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expectations above and beyond what's easily attained to stretch the imagination of your team," urges leadership strategist Tameka Williamson.<sup>lxiv</sup> "By doing so, you will cultivate a tribe of leaders not afraid to go above and beyond, while overcoming fear."

## Helping your employees become bold leaders

As a manager, you have a duty to encourage your people to step into their potential by becoming bold leaders. If your company has reached a plateau in terms of its competitiveness, bold leaders can open new doors.

### How will strengthening employees' boldness build a stronger team?

How does boldness benefit not only individuals in their careers, but the entire organization as well?

- Bold employees often become thought leaders who provide strong guidance that influences your company's direction.
- They'll challenge their own people to go beyond what they believed they could do. Others will see that it's okay to make mistakes, and that taking risks brings great rewards.
- They'll find their work exponentially more rewarding and engaging as they provide creative direction to their organization.
- They'll tackle challenging issues head-on when they arise, rather than letting them fester.
- When the team refuses to maintain the status quo, your organization can become a disruptive force in your industry. Rather than being followers, you can guide the direction of change.

In all of these ways, having a team of bold employees brings tremendous advantages.

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If your company has reached a plateau in terms of its competitiveness,  
bold leaders can open new doors.

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### How to enhance your employees' boldness.

As a leader, take initiative to close the "courage gap," as Deloitte puts it.<sup>lxv</sup> Here are some key ways to do that.

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- Transform how your people view mistakes and failures. Show them that striving for challenging goals creates opportunities beyond what they deemed possible. Failure is sometimes inevitable, especially when you keep trying to achieve something great that lies beyond your comfort zone. Failure and mistakes will help you to learn what doesn't work so you will be more successful next time.
- In one-on-one sessions, point out specific ways in which each person can be bolder. Do they need to make riskier choices to pursue more ambitious goals?
- Give immediate feedback on how they could have been bolder in recent meetings or decisions. Giving just-in-time feedback can help them correct course in time to achieve different results.
- Emphasize the value of boldness. As with decisiveness, being bold can feel counterintuitive at first. Your people need to know you value boldness above perfection.
- Share examples of how boldness has helped you and other leaders you respect to get ahead. Tell them how you pushed yourself to embrace your inner boldness, and describe how you felt in those moments.

You'll become more innovative and productive as you unleash your people's courage. Model how to embody boldness through the action steps outlined in this chapter, and you'll embolden your entire team.

# INFLUENTIAL

## Authority Competency #3:

“All leadership is influence.”

~ John C. Maxwell ~

A leader with executive presence is influential. If you have influence, you deliver a high level of value to your company. Leaders with influence accomplish more high-level achievements and guide their company's strategic direction. Senior management looks to them for solutions and trusts their ideas. Master the competency of influence to expand your executive presence.

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If you have influence, you deliver a high level of value to your company.

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### Influence defined.

Influence doesn't stem from a title; it comes from within. Influential leaders are convincing, compelling, and forceful. They incite and encourage others toward action. People follow them not because they're afraid of going against their judgment, but because they truly believe in their vision. Their articulate and assertive points of view persuade others to believe in their ideas. They can effectively counter-argue.

Furthermore, strong leaders can influence in all directions:

- Downward, among the people they manage.
- Horizontally, among their peers.
- Upward, among their superiors.

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They don't just influence the people they supervise; they influence people at all levels of the organizational hierarchy. They know their ideas are worthy of being heard by whomever they can benefit. They build social capital by developing a strong rapport with all those they interact with, making others eager to hear their ideas. They demonstrate thought leadership, meaning they put forward innovative ideas that guide the direction of their company or even their entire field, which 88% of decision-makers believe is vital to the success of a company.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Influential people also have a high emotional IQ. They know how to read people and appeal to emotions as well as reason. "Focus on the emotional versus the rationale," urge Rich Berens and Jim Haudan in *What Are Your Blind Spots? Conquering the 5 Misconceptions That Hold Leaders Back.*<sup>lxvii</sup> "When organizations manage change, they almost inevitably gather all the critical facts, prepare extensive communication plans to share those facts, and then are frustrated when nothing changes. We then often hear that 'our people don't get it' and 'they don't want to change.'" In contrast, influential leaders know how to use pathos to get the importance of those facts and figures across.

Furthermore, influential leaders drive their team to believe in and pursue a cohesive vision. When teams and their organization have the same vision, commitment goes up by 32% and satisfaction by 46%—and they have 125% less burnout, reports McKinsey.<sup>lxviii</sup>

People with a high level of influence also have more autonomy over the types of projects they pursue. Their work becomes more and more satisfying as they gain the ability to shape more of their job responsibilities.

Influential Qualities	Qualities that Undermine Influence
• <i>Convincing</i>	• <i>Uncompelling</i>
• <i>Making change</i>	• <i>Ineffective</i>
• <i>Persuasive</i>	• <i>Inconsequential</i>
• <i>Believable</i>	• <i>Uncredible</i>
• <i>Inciting action</i>	• <i>Passive</i>

Having more influence allows people to accomplish more. It creates a positive feedback loop—as people respond enthusiastically to their ideas, they develop more confidence and drive, causing their influence to expand even further. Growing your influence will also have reverberating effects on the people around you. You'll inspire your colleagues and direct reports to innovate in particular areas, making the organization more competitive. By instilling a shared sense of purpose, you'll keep your team driven and engaged.

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Take the example of Elon Musk, who was voted the most inspirational leader in the tech field in a survey of industry professionals.<sup>lxxix</sup> He has earned his status as an incredibly influential leader by putting forth a compelling vision of progress, even in terms of developments that no one else was seriously considering. He's a master at driving his team to achieve what others thought impossible—like creating a civilization on Mars—which takes some serious persuasion.

"Through original thinking, technical precision and smart marketing, Elon is making space transport rise up to our biggest ambitions," writes *Time*.<sup>lxxx</sup> "Along the way he has reinjected the most powerful fuel of all into the mission: public enthusiasm. For the first time since the

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Don't wait until you're appointed to a certain position or level  
to start growing and leveraging your influence.

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1960s, space once again feels like the greatest adventure." Like Musk, great leaders know how to influence not just the people in their organization but *all* stakeholders, convincing them to believe in the greatness of their vision and mission.

## Behaviors of influential leaders.

Think of the influential leaders you've known in your career. What qualities do they display? They are probably dynamic, engaged leaders who don't passively sit by and let things happen.

How can you become one of those influential leaders? As with every other executive presence quality, this requires consistent choices on a daily basis.

### You demonstrate influence when you engage in all of these behaviors:

- Motivating others to achieve a goal.
- Presenting ideas assertively and persuasively to your team or senior leaders.
- Putting together arguments that incite action, convincing others to adopt your plan wholeheartedly.
- Leveraging your expertise to back up your ideas, establishing credibility.
- Pursuing broader initiatives that go beyond the scope of your role.
- Offering your insights and perspectives to those who can benefit from them, including people in other functions.
- Promoting projects you believe in and gaining buy-in for them.
- Focusing on the game-changing ideas that have the biggest impact, even when they take your organization in a new direction.

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- Building relationships with people across the organization and at all levels.
- Mentoring others as they reach for more ambitious goals.
- Offering guidance for projects you believe in, sharing consistent input.
- Telling powerful stories that support your point of view.
- Enrolling people in your vision for change.
- Rallying the team to find solutions to challenges.
- Advocating for controversial ideas and convincing others of their merit.
- Securing the necessary resources for something you deem important.
- Engaging in strategic planning for your organization that helps set its future direction.
- Getting key stakeholders on board before you finalize a decision, so you know you have widespread buy-in.
- Providing ongoing support for your projects to make sure they succeed.

Influential people lead the charge toward change. They're comfortable being the louder voice driving a certain issue, process, or project forward. They continuously strive to expand their scope of responsibility to a much wider and more impactful level, which keeps their influence growing.

Don't wait until you're appointed to a certain position or level to start growing and leveraging your influence. In fact, influence is critical within relationships where you hold no formal authority. You need to start building influence first, and it will help propel you to the next level. As psychologist Daniel Goleman says, "Remember, leadership is the art of getting work done well through other people. And influence is the most powerful way to do that. By the same token, influence is also crucial when you work with a division over which you have no direct authority, yet their work is necessary to your own success. You can't order them to do what you want, you must persuade or inspire them to put forth their best efforts toward the clear objective you have defined."<sup>lxxxi</sup> This horizontal influence is growing more and more important as organizations develop increasingly flatter structures.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

## Behaviors that undermine influence.

Leaders who lack influence are minimizing the scope of their impact within their organization. They prevent others from truly knowing and leveraging their abilities, and they miss out on the satisfaction of driving transformation.

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The following behaviors demonstrate a lack of influence:

- Looking to someone else to take responsibility and ownership of projects; acting in a supporting role when you could be leading.
- Not sharing a compelling enough argument to persuade others.
- Delegating higher-level responsibilities to your peers or superiors.
- Being quiet rather than pushing your ideas forward.
- Focusing too much on the tactical rather than the strategic; getting consumed by more mundane tasks.
- Pushing through short-sighted ideas with limited value.
- Not taking action to expand your limited resources.
- Keeping to yourself rather than building relationships with people across functions and at all levels of the organization.
- Not spending time generating innovative ideas.
- Not taking risks or being willing to make change.
- Stepping back and withdrawing from ideas you believe in.
- Not offering direction to others who can benefit from it.
- Being too humble about your achievements, which prevents others from knowing your true impact at work.
- Not leveraging your expertise to persuade others.

Leaders without influence get immersed in the weeds of their job rather than setting their sights on broader, more impactful initiatives. They act as though their own ideas aren't worth pursuing, rather than leveraging their experience, conviction, and relationships to push them through. If you're engaging in these behaviors, it's a red flag that you're undermining your executive presence. It's time to course correct now!

## Dominic Learns to Take Charge and Build Influence

### **Problem:**

Dominic couldn't seem to motivate his team to take action or generate buy-in for ideas he believed in. He'd receive a lackluster response for his proposals at best, even among the people he managed. We sat down to unpack the reasons why he appeared to lack influence. First, it quickly became clear that Dominic felt more comfortable in a

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supportive role rather than taking charge. If an opportunity to lead arose, he would never volunteer, instead waiting to be asked. That didn't build his credibility as a leader with others. Second, he didn't present his opinions in a compelling and persuasive way. He didn't masterfully show how his ideas fit into a broader strategic vision. He remained so focused on the tactical parts of his job that he didn't see, embrace, or advocate for the more important broader initiatives.

## **Action:**

To become an influential leader, Dominic needed to concentrate on making bigger-picture contributions. He needed to reflect on his strategic priorities and discover his capacity to drive change. By offloading some of his lower-priority tasks, he made time to delve into strategic ideas. Through coaching, he learned how to make compelling arguments by appealing to both emotion and reason. He learned to pitch his ideas with authority. And by building relationships with peers, senior leaders, and direct reports, he created a network of connections who would advocate for his ideas.

## **Results:**

After months of steady effort, Dominic looked back and could hardly believe the difference he saw in himself. He had a strong network of people who backed his ideas and believed in him, and he was focusing his energy on exciting higher-order issues. In turn, his job satisfaction and enthusiasm for his work steadily increased.

## How would you rate your influence?

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- You know how to motivate people to take action and get things done.
- You've been able to expand your scope of responsibility to a much wider and impactful level.
- You build strong relationships with people throughout the organization and at all levels.
- You're adept at persuading others to get on board with your own ideas.
- You know how to get the resources to implement your ideas effectively.
- You're a strategic thinker who keeps your eyes on the big picture.
- You effectively champion the game-changing ideas that have the greatest impact.

If you scored above 52, you exert broad influence in your organization. Otherwise, work on growing your influence through the action steps described later in this section.

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## Action steps to build your influence.

Whether you're in a high-level leadership position or not, actively grow your influence across the organization so you can have a wider impact and drive greater change. These action steps will help you do exactly that.

1. **Schedule time to explore what holds you back from being influential at work.** As you enhance your self-knowledge, the obstacles will become less restricting and you'll open up to possibilities unknown. In your reflection time, answer these questions:
  - Why am I not being more influential at work?
  - What excuses am I making to not be influential?
  - What obstacles are preventing me from being influential?
  - What fears are stopping me from being influential?
  - Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more influential?
2. **Be convincing when sharing your data.** You and your team can shape strategy. Present a convincing methodology, content, and data when standing in front of important stakeholders. Tell people exactly what needs to be done, and why. Using the boldness you've been cultivating, be direct. You need to be a shaper of strategy, not just a data sharer. You have to put yourself on the line, being willing to take a stand with powerful and persuasive arguments.
3. **Nurture early adopters of your ideas.** Promoting your ideas among a small group of supporters before introducing them to everyone else can facilitate successful adoption. If you want the group to use a new technology, for instance, cultivate a handful of advocates for that software first.
4. **Listen to those with different perspectives.** People will gain more respect for you when they see you genuinely take in all points of view. This strengthens your relationships with them, helping them to hear you better in turn. Good listeners practice *dynamic* rather than *defensive* listening.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> While defensive listening involves being constantly reactionary to what the other person is saying—and planning your next response—dynamic listeners are truly trying to learn from the other person and understand what is being said.
5. **Create an influence map,** as Dorie Clark says in HBR.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> “Draw a power map, using circles that show who has the most influence over your career—and, in turn, the people who have the most influence over them,” she advises. “Figure out what you can offer the influential people—expertise, assistance on a project, help with networking—and ways to cultivate

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unique knowledge or skills they'd find valuable." If you don't yet know some of them, figure out whether you can influence them through your relationships with others whom they respect and admire.

6. **Build relationships based on trust throughout your organization.** Show you genuinely care about your coworkers, leaders, subordinates, and clients, and that you remember important details about their lives. Ask them how their new hobby or work project is going. By doing so, you'll establish authentic relationships with people who truly like and appreciate you.
7. **Remember the principal of reciprocity:** Giving something to others will predispose them to make a concession or buy in to your idea.<sup>bxxxv</sup> It doesn't need to be anything major—giving praise to their idea will make them more likely to get on board with your endeavor. Make this part of your routine interactions, not just something you do when you want agreement on a specific initiative.
8. **Cultivate first followers who will advocate strongly for your ideas.** Choose people in positions of authority who will influence those in their social circles to support your plan.
9. **Acknowledge potential counterarguments.** Prepare for how to address them in advance. Briefly explain why they are not a cause for concern, showing you've carefully considered the situation.
10. **Study what moves the people you're trying to influence to action.** What do they care most about? Appeal to what they believe in, showing how it connects to your initiative. Emphasize your common ground in these areas.
11. **Give others a seat at the table.** Though everyone doesn't need to be involved in every aspect of a project, you can gain a great deal of buy in from asking for their input. They'll feel more invested when they've played a role in designing the project. Invite high-profile people to share their insights, as well as a range of other people from other levels of the organizational hierarchy.
12. **Listen to feedback.** Show you're genuinely interested in listening and responding to concerns so your project can move forward as smoothly as possible.
13. **Welcome collaboration with others.** Look for areas where your interests overlap, and propose mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with them.

The more you grow your influence, the more support you'll garner for your initiatives, and the more effective you'll be as a result. You'll also shape the direction of others' endeavors and growth, guiding peers as well as direct reports to fulfill their potential as leaders. And as you step into your own potential as a master influencer, you'll guide organizational strategy and vision. By doing so, you'll mark yourself as a leader who knows how to steer the group toward transformative solutions that reconceptualize what is possible.

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## Helping your employees expand their influence.

By now it should be clear how growing your own influence will benefit your career. But as a leader, you need to go a step further by helping your employees cultivate their own influence as well.

### How will growing your employees' influence build a stronger team?

Here's how taking the time to help your employees cultivate their influence will benefit your whole team and organization.

- Their ideas will be heard and utilized, so you'll take advantage of all the ingenuity that exists within your team to generate stronger solutions.
- Everyone will be driving toward a shared vision. Employees with influence will guide others to get behind that vision, and they'll come up with strategies to support it.
- Collaboration will soar as people compellingly share their ideas and feel empowered to take action. People will increasingly connect across functions to leverage all the available talent, rather than remaining in their silos.
- They'll persuade clients to adopt the best solutions for them by making a strong case for the ideas they believe in.
- Influential people are great communicators, and having a team of highly communicative people will help work to flow more smoothly.

In a nutshell, influential people give their team a clear sense of direction. Even if your employees don't hold formal leadership positions, they'll motivate and inspire their peers as they expand their influence.

### How to help your employees grow their influence.

If you're someone who naturally has a lot of influence, it can be easy to overlook employees' need for growth in this area. You may unconsciously think of it as something you either have or you don't. Or you might simply lack self-awareness in this area, since it's something you excel at without having to think about it. But with perseverance, anyone can grow their influence.

- Identify employees who especially lack influence. Consider how each individual employee could bolster their influence over others. Why do they lack it? Are they consumed by tasks rather than strategies, or do they avoid championing new ideas due to a lack of confidence?

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- Talk with each employee about how they could exercise more influence. Affirm the importance of strategic thinking and urge them to block out time for it regularly.
- Help them to pinpoint three situations in which they can exert more influence over the next two weeks. Challenge them to take initiative to do that.
- Give them feedback on how they craft a pitch when sharing a new idea. Share tips on how to be more persuasive.
- Ask them to identify five people they could be networking with to grow their influence, at various levels of the organization.

By mentoring your employees to success with these tips, you can help them become more effective leaders in their own right.

# **EXPRESSION**

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**Domain #3 of 3**

## Expression

Leaders with executive presence have mastered the art of expression. They are eloquent communicators who know how to make themselves heard and understood.

The three competencies that make up the domain of expression are being vocal, insightful, and clear in your communication. Every time you speak up, share insights, and explain your ideas clearly, you earn another notch in your leadership foundation of expression.

Your speech is the vehicle that carries your authority and gravitas. Without speaking up regularly, you can't make those qualities known. In this section, we'll delve into the nuances of how to leverage expression to establish yourself as an articulate and powerful leader.

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Every time you speak up, share insights, and explain your ideas clearly, you earn another notch in your leadership foundation of expression.

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### What is expression?

Expression is all about how you convey your thoughts, ideas, and insights. The first step of expression is actually speaking up to make your thoughts known—not just within your group, but throughout the organization. Second, when you communicate, what you say needs to be insightful, elevating the conversation. It's not just about taking up space; you actually have to have a point of view worth hearing. Third, you also need to be clear and succinct when you communicate. The less words you use, the more confident you'll sound.

All leaders affect the spaces they inhabit, whether intentionally or not. When you express yourself and actively participate, you fill more of this space with *you*. If you remain silent and expressionless, you impact the space by acting like a nonentity. Your boss and other leaders need you to voice your opinions. Your company needs to hear from you. If they don't, you become an underutilized leader who has less influence and contributes less than your potential.

Whenever you express yourself and voice your opinions, you need to make sure you own that message. Don't be quiet, passive, or timid in your delivery. Instead, be striking, distinct, clear, and impactful every time you speak up. If you don't, two things will happen: 1) your message will not be truly felt or known by other participants, and 2) you'll leave open the door for someone else to voice the same idea, in their own words. Then, people will jump on their idea

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instead of yours. This happens all the time. One person shares an idea and someone else says the same thing more forcefully five minutes later, and everyone goes along with their idea without realizing where it originated. The first idea gets ignored because it was delivered in a way that wasn't memorable; it doesn't gain traction or hold the audience's attention. It's as if you throw a small pebble in the water and it barely makes a ripple. When you own the idea by sharing it with confidence, command, and power, the pebble becomes a boulder and when dropped into the water, it makes a huge wave. Amplify your messages so they land with a splash when you speak up at meetings. People will then digest the ideas as your own and remember that you are the person behind them.

Owning the fact that you're here for a reason. People in the company have assigned a value to your point of view. This is why you belong in the room and have a seat at the table. Speak up and be heard. By doing so, you'll make sure your value is fully leveraged rather than being wasted.

Your presence needs to be felt in each space you step into. There is always room for you to express yourself. Your impact must be known. Others must observe your engagement and involvement, or you'll remain unknown and overlooked. As Rebecca Shambaugh writes in HBR, "Whether you are an associate manager or a senior executive, what you say, how you say it, when you say it, to whom you say it, and whether you say it in the proper context are critical components for tapping into your full strategic leadership potential."<sup>lxvvi</sup>

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People in the company have assigned a value to your point of view.  
This is why you belong in the room and have a seat at the table.

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## Tammy Makes Her Talents Known

### **Problem:**

Tammy's manager commented on her lack of expression, saying, "*I don't hear her speak up or share in meetings. She lacks visibility. I don't really know the things she's involved in. This really hurts her because she is then less influential and less relied on. She doesn't get opportunities to take the lead on projects because she's not seen as a driving force and go-to person. She needs to put herself out there more. I want to hear her opinions. How is anyone to know what's on her mind, if she doesn't tell us?*"

### **Action:**

Tammy was shaken when she heard this, but then she realized she'd been making a common mistake: Trying to let her work speak for itself. Instead, she needed to focus on cultivating expression so people would hear her thoughts and know what she was doing. At every meeting, she began speaking up at least three times. Soon she was regularly

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chiming in and making her presence felt. She shared expertise people hadn't even realized she possessed.

## **Results:**

Soon Tammy's boss offered her an exciting project in one of her areas of expertise, realizing he'd been missing out on leveraging the full scope of her knowledge. More high-profile projects followed, making Tammy's job far more rewarding than it had ever been before.

Whether you're engaged in a presentation, a one-on-one discussion, or a team meeting, you need to be clear, crisp, and to the point in your communication. When you aren't concise and succinct, you will lose your audience. They will begin tuning you out and questioning your competence and presence.

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When you aren't concise and succinct,  
you will lose your audience.

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Let's delve into the main components of expression now in a bit more depth, so you can more fully understand this EP domain.

## **Which qualities are most essential for expression?**

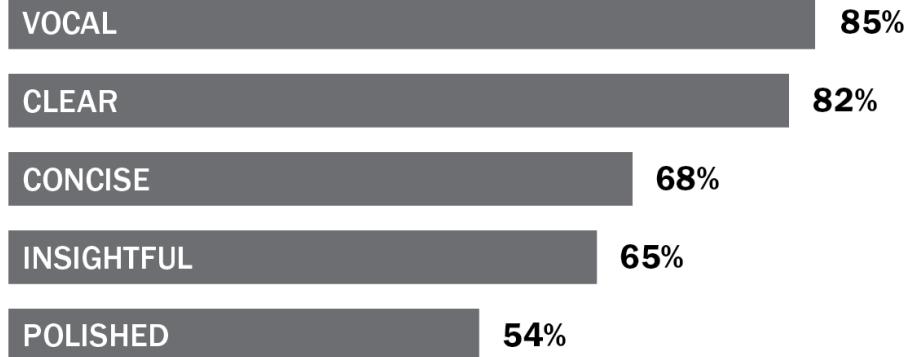
In the survey I conducted on the most critical executive presence competencies, I asked a wide spectrum of people what they considered to be the most central qualities of expression. I interviewed 1,400 U.S. employees, middle managers, senior leaders, and executives. Here's what they said.

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## THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF EXPRESSION

% of leaders who say it is absolutely essential for a leader to be ...



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

While analyzing the results of our survey, my team surmised that “concise” and “polished” both strongly pertained to “clear.” Thus, building up those two qualities will be addressed in the chapter on becoming clear.

Here’s the three core domains of the 3x3 Executive Presence Model, with a focus on expression.

### 3x3 Executive Presence Model Expression Defined



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## The 3 Competencies of Expression

To cultivate expression, you need to become vocal, insightful, and clear.



At its core, expression is all about how you use your words to communicate like a leader in all your interactions.



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The higher you advance in your organization, the more integral expression becomes. When you hold a position of leadership, the messages you communicate carry much more weight. People will attach extra importance or meaning to them. What you say gets amplified as if you are speaking into a megaphone. The higher up you are, the more amplified your message becomes. When you speak, your words carry greater impact. People are watching and observing what you say. They are listening extra carefully and reading more into what you say than you might have intended.

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The higher up you are, the more amplified your message becomes.  
When you speak, your words carry greater impact.

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Body language also subtly affects your executive presence by affecting how you express yourself. When you sit up straight at meetings as you present your ideas, your words take on more power. When you place yourself in a position of high visibility, like the front of the room rather than the back, you also communicate your own importance. Paying close attention and dressing one level above your own role shows that you take your work seriously, so you should be taken seriously in turn.

## Lorraine Learns to Show Up Fully in Meetings

### *Problem:*

Lorraine excelled in one-on-one meetings. She was open and conversational with both leaders and direct reports, inspiring trust and building a strong rapport. In fact, in our coaching sessions, she presented herself as very engaged and charismatic. In meetings, however, it was a different story. She completely lacked awareness of how her body language as well as her words (or lack thereof) were presenting her as disengaged and ineffective. She'd slouch back in her seat and look down at the table as she listened to a coworker. She'd sit back and listen as others debated ideas. Lorraine needed to learn to bring her A-game to meetings as well as one-on-ones.

### *Action:*

We came up with a list of five key body language changes Lorraine needed to start making immediately: Making strong eye contact, sitting up straight, placing herself in a prominent position in the room, showing interest with her facial expressions, and using open body language. She also needed to prepare detailed thoughts on the topics to be discussed, and then push herself to vocalize them.

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## **Results:**

Knowing she had thought through her ideas ahead of time gave her the confidence to voice them frequently. The changes she'd made impressed her boss, who commented on the value of her contributions.

## **Which behaviors show a lack of expression?**

In our survey, we also asked participants which behaviors most undermine expression. Here's what they told us.

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## **WHICH BEHAVIORS MOST UNDERMINE EXPRESSION?**

*% of leaders who say these behaviors show a lack of expression ...*



Source: GEC Research Center Survey, poll of 1,400 U.S. Workers

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Not speaking up or being concise is the quickest way to undermine your executive presence. These are the two most easily noticeable of the nine EP competencies. You really stand out when you lack them—either by being quiet and completely unknown, or by being long-winded and rambling. However, these are also the easiest to fix of all the EP qualities. At meetings, you can quickly begin speaking up more and practicing being concise.

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Not speaking up or being concise  
is the quickest way to undermine your executive presence.

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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Comparison of qualities that cultivate or undermine expression.

Take a look at the following qualities. The ones on the left enhance the competency of expression, while the ones on the right diminish it. You need to be embodying the qualities on the left in all your interpersonal interactions, from the most highly public to one-on-one discussions. When you've mastered these qualities, you'll show up as a leader who excels in communication.

## 15 WAYS TO BUILD OR UNDERMINE EXPRESSION

QUALITIES THAT CULTIVATE EXPRESSION	QUALITIES THAT UNDERMINE EXPRESSION
<b>VOCAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forthright</li><li>• Opinionated</li><li>• Communicative</li><li>• Outspoken</li><li>• Projecting</li></ul>	<b>NONVOCAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uncomfortable sharing</li><li>• Unopinionated</li><li>• Hesitant to communicate insights</li><li>• Withdrawn</li><li>• Soft-spoken</li></ul>
<b>INSIGHTFUL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledgeable</li><li>• Experienced</li><li>• Innovative</li><li>• Intelligent</li><li>• Prepared</li></ul>	<b>UNINFORMED</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lacking knowledge</li><li>• Inexperienced</li><li>• Unimaginative</li><li>• Simpleminded</li><li>• Unorganized</li></ul>
<b>CLEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Articulate</li><li>• Coherent</li><li>• Candid</li><li>• Polished</li><li>• Concise</li></ul>	<b>UNCLEAR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inarticulate</li><li>• Confusing</li><li>• Meandering</li><li>• Unfocused</li><li>• Rambling</li></ul>

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To understand expression in action, let's look at the example of Greta Thunberg. Despite her age—she earned global recognition for her efforts to bring about a halt to climate change as a young teenager—her poignant statements and articulate delivery have made it impossible to ignore her message. Whether she inspires or strikes a nerve, her candor is undeniable. She is filled with passion and conviction in what she says, but she often speaks softly and deliberately to accentuate the gravity of her words. She never shies away from speaking her truth, even to sympathetic political allies whom she perceives as not taking bold enough action, telling them, “You are too scared of being unpopular” and that it’s time to pull “the emergency brake.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> She is, above all, forthright. Thunberg is also an introvert who has publicly discussed having Asperger’s syndrome, calling it her “superpower,” which shows that people who fall outside of the stereotypical mold of a gregarious leader often possess incredible strengths.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Now we’ll delve into each of the three core competencies of expression that I’ve outlined in the 3x3 model: vocal, insightful, and clear. Together, they synthesize the key expression competencies highlighted in the results of our survey. The following sections will walk you through what each of these three qualities looks like, and how you can take action to develop it now.

# VOCAL

## Expression Competency #1:

“Your time for participating is now.

You owe it to the company and you owe it to yourself.

Your criterion for involvement should be that you’re heard and understood.”

~ Andy Grove ~

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Your company needs leaders who are vocal.

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Your company needs leaders who are vocal. Leaders who speak up regularly make themselves a vital part of every meeting and interaction. They don’t settle for sitting on the sidelines and simply observing others. Their presence is felt by making their voices heard.

According to research by Fierce Communications and Quantum Workplace, about half of all employees don’t speak their minds on a regular basis—not even to peers.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Thus, this quality is in high demand.

Your senior leadership needs you to put the effort in to becoming a vocal leader. When you candidly share your thoughts, you deliver more value to your company rather than suppressing your ability to think strategically, communicate, and lead.

### Vocal defined.

Vocal leaders share their thoughts and ideas without hesitation. They’re forthcoming with their opinions, making their voice and presence visible to others. They make their expertise, competence, and talents known, recognizing that they are a subject matter expert in a particular domain, which gives them knowledge that those

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Vocal leaders share their thoughts and ideas without hesitation.

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above them don't possess. When they have something to contribute, they express it. People view them as comfortable speaking up and standing in the spotlight, which underscores their leadership ability. Speaking up also bolsters innovation, challenging the status quo and expanding what is possible for a team to accomplish.

By speaking up, vocal people multiply their influence and open up the door for new opportunities. Senior leaders notice them more, perceive them more favorably, and assign them to projects that make full use of their strengths. "The number of senior executives who know you and have a good impression of you will directly correlate with your career success," writes Robert Chen in *Fast Company*.<sup>xc</sup> It gives people a chance to prove that they're capable of handling high-priority tasks, rather than standing in the shadows.

Furthermore, people will better understand your ideas when you present them assertively. When voiced confidently and thoroughly, your ideas will truly make a splash.

You can also help your team navigate times of transition or crisis more adeptly as you learn to voice your perspectives more. "When employees feel comfortable candidly voicing their opinions, suggestions, or concerns, organizations become better at [handling threats as well as opportunities](#)," write Hemant Kakkar and Subra Tangirala in *HBR*.<sup>xcii</sup>

If you're an introvert, don't panic! Extroverts aren't the only people who can become vocal leaders. People who are naturally more reserved can learn strategies that allow them to become more vocal. If you don't tend to have a lot to say at meetings, we'll be discussing some ways to change that.

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People who are naturally more reserved  
can learn strategies that allow them to become more vocal.

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Here's a quick look at vocal competencies in comparison with characteristics that undermine a person's ability to be vocal.

Vocal Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Being Vocal
• <i>Forthright</i>	• <i>Uncomfortable sharing</i>
• <i>Opinionated</i>	• <i>Unopinionated</i>
• <i>Communicative</i>	• <i>Hesitant to communicate insights</i>
• <i>Outspoken</i>	• <i>Withdrawn</i>
• <i>Projecting</i>	• <i>Soft-spoken</i>

If you hold back on sharing your ideas, it conveys fear or disconnection—which undermines your capacity to lead. But you're in good company—a recent study found that 17.5% of employees don't speak up at all, while 47.1% speak up on 5 or fewer issues, which usually relate directly to their work.<sup>xcii</sup> Only 13.6% voice their opinions on more than 10 topics.

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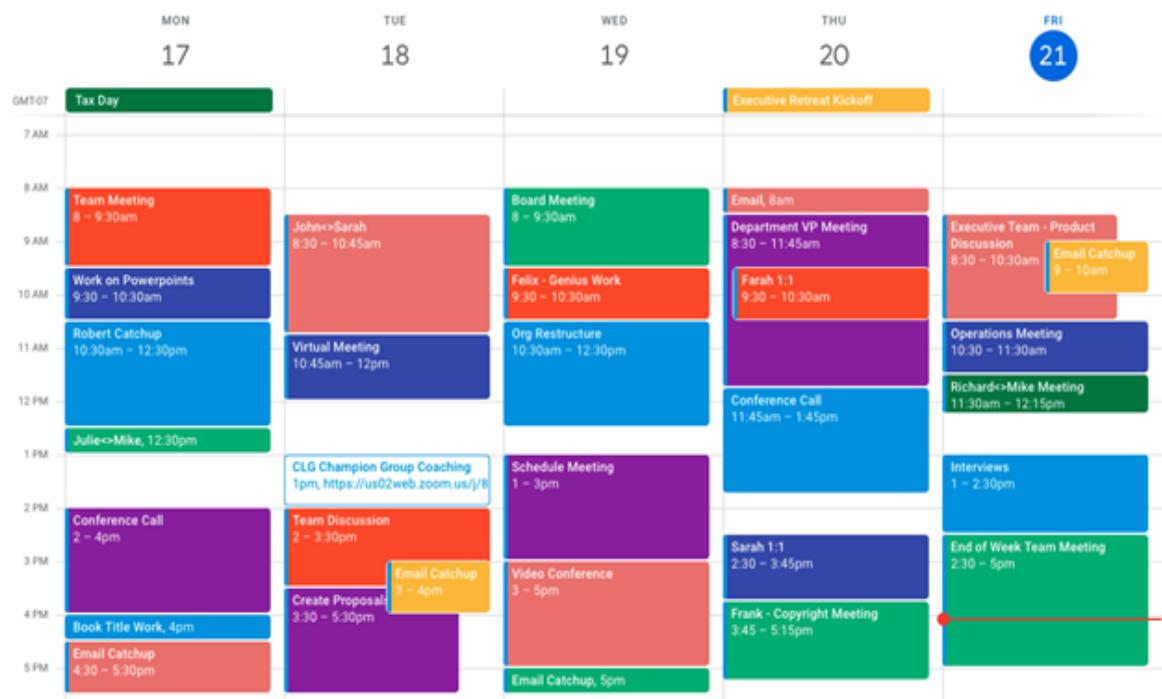
Staying silent means remaining underutilized as a resource, which affects your whole organization. A full 60% of employees say they have trouble getting their colleagues to share essential information with them, a recent study found.<sup>xciii</sup> Their silence undermines the effectiveness of their whole team.

As you make your voice heard regularly, you'll increasingly grow your influence. People who develop a strong presence by speaking up in every situation are the ones who are asked to lead new initiatives or head meetings. Peers and leaders will look at you with respect and trust you with higher-level responsibilities. You'll also find new ways to collaborate with individuals who have complementary skills, including those in other functions. As you learn to lay your capabilities on the table to make them known, you'll launch new partnerships that will expand the value you bring.

Staying silent means remaining underutilized as a resource,

## Be vocal in meetings.

As a leader, the majority of your time is spent at meetings. Most people have a calendar that looks something like this:



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Many leaders spend 60–75% of their day in meetings. Thus, it's extremely important to show up fully in these meetings. Most people don't think about how they are being perceived in meetings—and if they do, they aren't focusing on their executive presence. However, if someone is lacking EP, others really notice it. They stand out in ways they don't want to stand out.

It's vital for your success to speak up at every meeting you attend. Make your voice heard in order to radiate executive presence in all your meetings. Expressing your thoughts will also spark more productive group discussion. Regardless of whether your idea rises to the top in a particular meeting, your participation will foster more ideation and productive brainstorming sessions. Bringing energy to the conversation will prompt others to share ideas more freely.

When people self-censor simply because they don't know if their ideas are good enough, the team misses out on some potentially brilliant ones. When they voice half-formed ideas, they give the team a chance to flesh them out in creative ways, which often leads to ingenious solutions.

Vocal people also know how to voice their ideas in ways that get attention rather than getting lost in the shuffle. Few things are more demoralizing than quietly voicing an idea that gets no attention, only to hear someone else receive ecstatic praise after reiterating it a few minutes later. By voicing ideas in ways that get them noticed, you'll gain recognition and improve your job satisfaction rather than feeling frustrated.

Speaking up in meetings can feel daunting when you're first trying to hone this ability. The solution is coming in overprepared. Barbara Adachi, Regional Head of Human Capital Consulting at Deloitte (and the first woman to hold this position) says overpreparation helped her transform from never speaking up at meetings to confidently speaking her mind. "I used to go to meetings and just not say a word," she recalls. "People wondered why I was even there. Unless asked to comment, I wouldn't volunteer. Speaking up was so hard for me. And I still need to push myself in new situations. But if I go in well-prepared and knowing I know more than I need to, I find it easier to speak up and not go back to my cocoon."<sup>xciv</sup>

## Behaviors of vocal leaders.

Vocal leaders consistently demonstrate a particular set of behaviors that make their ideas known and their presence felt. Through these actions, they make themselves highly visible throughout their organization.

**You'll present yourself as a vocal leader by engaging in the following behaviors:**

- Making sure your opinions and ideas are heard by voicing them regularly.

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- Taking up air time at meetings consistently.
- Vocalizing ideas even when they aren't fully baked.
- Being direct and specific in your communications.
- Sharing opinions at senior-level meetings rather than just among peers.
- Advocating for your ideas and making your rationale heard.
- Interjecting with new and creative ideas that no one expects to hear.
- Being the first to share your perspective when someone asks a question.
- Enhancing others' ideas with great suggestions.
- Projecting your voice with the appropriate volume so you're sharing your ideas with power.
- Driving the discussion, asking pointed questions and making thought-provoking comments.
- Highlighting the problems that you see in a plan or idea so the team can fix them.
- Sharing constructive feedback directly and continually with a broad range of people.
- Giving real-time constructive feedback whenever possible.
- Interjecting, in a constructive way, to bring the discussion back on track.
- Listening carefully so you can fully participate in the discussion with relevant comments and questions.
- Knowing how to insert your comments in the discussion even when dealing with dominant personalities who take up a lot of space.

"When you have a seat at the table, use it," says Kerone Vatel of Goldman Sachs.<sup>xcv</sup> By proactively placing your opinions in the spotlight, you'll make yourself known to both peers and senior leadership. By being direct and honest, you'll showcase your ability to be a candid leader who is committed to developing others' abilities and the group's ideas.

While vocal leaders do strive to speak articulately and concisely—as we'll discuss in the upcoming chapters—they establish their presence in every interaction. They are agile communicators who know how to be valuable contributors without taking up too much space by rambling. Think of the vocal leaders you know, and consider how they model these behaviors in their daily work. Emulate them as you begin working to practice these behaviors on a daily basis.

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"When you have a seat at the table, use it,"  
Kerone Vatel of Goldman Sachs.

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## Behaviors of less vocal people

To establish yourself as a vocal leader, first identify whether you're engaging in the following non-vocal behaviors. They are each quite common, and they tend to persist until a person gets serious about consciously changing them.

**You undermine your ability to be a vocal leader when you engage in these behaviors:**

- Not sharing your thoughts and ideas with others.
- Taking up little air time during meetings.
- Letting others dominate meetings and do the majority of the talking.
- Shying away from vocalizing new and creative ideas.
- Avoiding asking questions in meetings.
- Holding back from engaging in discussion and debates.
- Not articulating a strong point of view or advocating for your perspectives.
- Not sharing ideas until they're fully baked.
- Using a soft, quiet voice; not projecting.
- Letting others speak over you; taking a back seat to more assertive group members.
- Not being able to find a way into the conversation.
- Speaking tentatively.
- Staying outside or on the periphery of discussions.
- Only speaking if spoken to or asked questions.
- Not being willing to give honest feedback.

Engaging in these behaviors is a red flag that you're undermining your executive presence, but it's incredibly common. In one study, 40% of respondents said they've wasted at least two weeks ruminating over whether to speak up when a colleague was not meeting expectations.<sup>xcvi</sup> "Instead of speaking up, people report engaging in resource-sapping avoidance tactics including complaining to others, doing unnecessary work and ruminating about the problem," write the researchers. "In extreme cases of avoidance, the bottom line is hit especially hard."

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If you're not vocal, you position yourself as more of a participant than a driver of discussions. At the rare times when you do speak up, others are likely to quickly forget your ideas—or not even hear them. They need to see you as a key player in your organization. Fortunately, you can quickly begin to remedy the situation by speaking up regularly in all your meetings and interactions. By doing so, you'll make yourself more visible and receive the recognition you deserve.

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If you're not vocal,  
you position yourself as more of a participant  
than a driver of discussions.

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## Teresa Gets Proactive about Participation in Meetings

### **Problem:**

Teresa didn't speak up very often. Quiet and passive, she even hesitated to ask questions. She was taken aback to learn that her male subordinate had been mistaken for her superior in a meeting because he exuded more executive presence than she did. A senior-level executive pulled her aside and told her, "I want you to have more of an executive presence. To communicate your positions articulately and hold firm to them. Stand behind your viewpoints; hold your ground. You are an expert who needs to own what you know."

Her boss affirmed this advice, saying he wanted to hear from her more. She needed to stop letting others dominate meetings and actively work to add more substance to the discussions taking place.

### **Action:**

Teresa had believed that as an introvert, she would always come across as more reserved in meetings. She didn't see that as something she could change. But her boss had seen other introverts learn to take up more space and make their voices heard, and he knew Teresa had valuable opinions to share. And he was right—through executive coaching, Teresa learned that her beliefs about what she was capable of had been holding her back. We discussed different ways in which she could contribute to the discussion, and she set goals for participation in each meeting that would allow her to track her progress.

### **Results:**

By applying strategies she learned in the coaching sessions, she became more outspoken and guided the direction of conversations rather than sitting back and

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listening. She didn't have to relinquish power to the extroverts; instead, she was taking up the space she deserved.

## How would you rate your ability to be vocal?

For each of these statements, give yourself a score of one to ten:

- You regularly speak your mind in meetings.
- You voice your ideas to people at a higher level of leadership than you.
- You share honest and open feedback about others' ideas.
- You frequently speak up first and drive the discussion.
- You voice your ideas and opinions even when they are half-baked.
- You speak up when you disagree with an opinion.
- You project your voice when you speak to make your contributions heard.

If you scored above 52, you are highly vocal in your organization. Otherwise, work on growing your ability to voice your ideas through the action steps outlined in this chapter.

## Paula Stops Second-Guessing Her Ideas

### ***Problem:***

Don had an employee, named Paula, who delivered brilliant insights in their one-on-ones, yet would hardly say a word in their team meetings. She was minimizing her visibility in the organization, and few others saw her true capabilities. "It's time to get serious about having a presence in meetings," Don told her one day. Paula admitted that she feared her ideas being rejected. She would usually second-guess herself when she thought of something to say, convincing herself it didn't measure up to others' contributions. "That's a normal fear to have, but it's far from the reality," Don said. "In actuality, you have some of the best ideas on this team—and your internal filter is silencing them."

### ***Action:***

Knowing that Don had her back and expected her to become more vocal, Paula gathered her thoughts before the next meeting and met her goal of speaking up three times with confidence. At the next meeting, it was five times, and after that, she lost

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count.

## ***Results:***

What had felt nearly impossible now only gave Paula minor butterflies—which at this point were more excitement than anxiety. She now enjoyed actively participating in team meetings and even looked forward to them.

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You have some of the best ideas on this team—and  
your internal filter is silencing them.”

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## Action steps to become more vocal.

If you’re not vocal enough in your workplace, now is the time to correct course. Speak often, and every time you speak, use it as a chance to raise your profile.

These action steps will empower you to become more vocal, establishing yourself as a strong, insightful, and expressive leader. By being vocal, you’ll make all of your other executive presence qualities more visible as well.

### **1. Schedule and spend time exploring what holds you back from speaking up at work.**

Answer these questions:

- a. Why am I not speaking up more at work?
- b. What excuses am I making to not speak up?
- c. What obstacles are holding me back from speaking up?
- d. What fears are preventing me from speaking up?
- e. Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from speaking up?

### **2. Set a goal for how many times you'll speak at a meeting.** For example, you could decide to speak up three times: making a comment you've prepared ahead of time, asking a question, and voicing a thought that comes to mind in the moment.<sup>xcvii</sup>

### **3. Voice ideas to someone you trust before bringing them to the meeting.** You'll feel more confident and prepared as a result.

### **4. Read over the meeting agenda in advance and think about what you'd like to say.** Jot down notes about the contributions you want to make for each topic. Consider whether you have an important topic to add to the agenda, too. Do you have an announcement to make about your project, or a new initiative to propose?

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5. **Over prepare for the meeting.** This can help you become quicker to speak up—and more articulate when you do. Bring questions, thought-provoking comments, and insightful point of views. Have two talking points to share at each meeting. Thorough preparation will eliminate the dread of waiting for just the right moment of inspiration and courage to speak up.
6. **Do some outside research on your topic to learn about industry trends or the latest studies.** Knowing you're well informed will help you to speak up with confidence.
7. **Choose an agenda topic to focus on.** Take ownership of that topic, preparing detailed thoughts you want to share. Pick something you feel strongly about, so you can speak with strength and conviction.
8. **Avoid planning back-to-back meetings.** Or, if you have to plan them back-to-back, leave 5 minutes early to give yourself at least a small window of time to collect your thoughts and prepare talking points for the upcoming meeting.
9. **Read an article on a topic related to one of the agenda items.** Bringing fresh insights from a respected outside source can greatly enhance the discussion and show you're invested in the topic.
10. **Speak up first.** Be the first to respond to an idea or voice your thoughts on an issue. Have a goal of saying something, even if it's a small comment, within the first several minutes of the meeting. That will help you break the ice and feel more comfortable speaking up again.
11. **Say the first thing that comes to mind.** Instead of censoring yourself, practice trusting your gut reaction. It's okay to be wrong—others are wrong all the time.

Remember, you don't need to sound perfectly polished all the time. Insisting on perfection only hinders dialogue and the development of ideas. Instead, focus on becoming an active participant in the conversation.

## Arianna Reshapes Her Boss's Perception of Her Competence

### ***Problem:***

Arianna received outstanding performance reviews, and people respected her. However, she was naturally soft-spoken. She didn't usually share or speak up very much in meetings. When I interviewed her boss to learn how she was perceived, we learned that her boss saw her as "not confident" even though this wasn't the case—she was just quiet. Her boss felt hesitant to give her higher-visibility projects, believing they needed a more dominant personality who could influence and persuade others. Arianna actually could do all of this, because others did respect her, but her boss remained stuck on the idea that a soft-spoken person couldn't do those things.

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## Action:

Arianna began learning to project her voice and to speak up more. She began challenging herself to speak off the cuff more often, voicing ideas before she'd fully thought them through. She vocally supported ideas she believed in and provided constructive critiques of those she didn't.

## Results:

Leaders began to see Arianna in a different way as she took these actions. They're asking her to take part in higher-profile initiatives where her talents could really make an impact. They are reaching out to her because they now understand who she is and what she can offer her organization.

## Bonus section: Tips for interjecting in meetings.

If some of your coworkers are engaged in a robust dialogue, it can be challenging to find the right moment to speak—or the right thing to say. These tips and strategies for how to interject will give you a little more guidance if you're feeling flummoxed about how to make yourself heard among your more vocal colleagues.

### Learn how to assert yourself into a conversation.

What if you've been *trying* to speak up, but you can't get a word in? Here are some surefire solutions to this all-too-common problem.

- **Lead with an authoritative statement.** Phrases like "here's my idea," "I strongly suggest," and "I completely support that plan, and here's why" command attention, signifying that you're going to say something important.<sup>xcviii</sup> They also give you a moment to gather your thoughts as you take the floor.
- **Continue speaking if someone tries to interrupt you.** Don't cede the floor. If need be, say something like, "Let me just finish my thought."
- **Interrupt tactfully as the other person begins to trail off.** Ask, "Can I just add a point?" so your interruption doesn't feel rude. In many workplace cultures, interrupting is the only way you'll ever make yourself heard!<sup>xcix</sup> Saying something that affirms the value of the other person's thoughts as you interrupt can also have the same effect. For example, "I agree, Dawn, and to add some perspective on that issue ..." or "To build on that point ..."
- **If the discussion has moved on from the topic you wanted to speak on,** reel it back in and make your point heard.
- **Use your body language.** Leaning forward or using a gesture can help you claim space when it's your turn to speak.

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## 10 ways to interject in meetings

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The more you speak up at meetings, the more natural it will feel.

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memorable. Comments that don't have earth-shattering importance are crucial to the flow of the conversation.<sup>c</sup> Having these strategies in your back pocket will help you become a more dynamic part of the conversation, contributing in a variety of ways throughout meetings.

### 1. *Supporting someone else's idea.*

Providing enthusiastic support for someone else's idea will help the best ideas to rise to the top of the discussion. It will also help you to build mutually beneficial alliances with coworkers. For example:

- "I think that's an excellent point because ..."
- "I think that idea has a lot of promise and we should flesh it out a bit more."
- "Susanna, you've clearly done your homework on this, and I feel confident in this plan."

### 2. *Asking questions.*

Good questions can prompt a more robust conversation on the issue being discussed.

For example:

- "What about the issue of \_\_\_?"
- "How will stakeholder X view this idea?"
- "What hurdles will we have to overcome to implement this idea?"
- "I like idea X—do others agree?"

### 3. *Voicing your own idea.*

This could be a big idea or a simple amendment to a larger idea. Announce it with enthusiasm so others will grow excited about it too.

- "I have a proposal: That we ..."
- "I think we should make one key amendment."
- "I think we should focus our energies on ..."

### 4. *Paraphrasing an idea.*

Confirm you've understood the speaker's idea correctly by simply paraphrasing it and asking if that's what she meant. Particularly with complex or outside-of-the-box ideas, this helps make sure everyone is on the same page. For instance:

- "Are you saying that ..."
- "Did I understand correctly that ..."

What if you're motivated to speak up, but you're having trouble thinking of a valuable comment to make? First, remember that every statement you make doesn't have to be jaw-droppingly

memorable. Comments that don't have earth-shattering importance are crucial to the flow of the conversation.<sup>c</sup> Having these strategies in your back pocket will help you become a more dynamic part of the conversation, contributing in a variety of ways throughout meetings.

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- “So in a nutshell ...”

## 5. *Sharing expertise.*

Maybe you've done some reading on one of the agenda topics, and you have some outside insights to contribute. Or maybe you already possess expertise in that area. Here are some examples of how you can share what you know:

- “I just read a really interesting study on this topic. It suggests that ...”
- “Even though Y has been a popular approach, some companies are finding it beneficial to return to X, because ...”
- “Here are the results of the project Bob was referring to ...”

## 6. *Synthesizing ideas.*

Synthesizing the ideas discussed or what the group has agreed upon is an extremely valuable contribution, keeping the group focused and productive. Often it helps people realize that they do have consensus on their goals and can move forward into the specifics. Here are some examples of how to do that:

- “Just to recap, we have agreed that X would be beneficial but only if we can find a solution to Y.”
- “So the key ideas we're looking at are X, Y, and Z, with X being the most viable and Z the most risky.”
- “It sounds like we want to find a disruptive solution rather than playing it safe.”

## 7. *Raising concerns.*

If you have a fear of appearing rude by disagreeing with others or bringing concerns to light, it's time to get over it. A healthy debate will help your team arrive at the best options. Plus, you can be diplomatic by framing your response “as a question rather than a challenge,” says workplace strategist Lisa Barrington.<sup>ci</sup> (That is especially effective if the answer isn't “yes” or “no.”) Here are some ways to interject by disagreeing:

- “I think idea B is feasible but just too safe. How can we take a smart risk that could really pay off?”
- “That sounds promising, but don't the results from Project A show it's not quite so straightforward?”
- “You've shared some solid insights, but I think the opportunity cost is just too great.”
- “I wish that were true, but I've found that ...”

## 8. *Asserting the significance of a point.*

Maybe someone has alluded to an important point without emphasizing it adequately. Hone in on that point, expressing why it's so pivotal. For instance:

- “That is a crucial point, because ...”
- “That idea is vital to our success, so let's dig in deeper.”
- “I'd like to see us focus on \_\_ a bit longer, because it's central to the plan.”

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## 9. *Clarifying the next steps.*

Illuminating the next steps in a plan will help the group to move forward productively.

Check in with the group about how the key elements of the plan will be carried out:

- “Who else do we need to gain buy-in from before starting?”
- “Who will present the idea to them?”
- “Can we go over the workflow process for this project?”

## 10. *Pointing to someone else with expertise.*

Did you notice that a colleague with expertise on the topic at hand has remained silent?

Direct a question specifically to that person. For example:

- “Joanne, I’d really love to hear your thoughts on this topic.”
- “Bernie is the resident expert on this, so let’s see what he thinks.”
- “Maggie, I think you have a lot of insight on this topic because ...”

The more you speak up at meetings, the more natural it will feel. A positive feedback loop will take shape: As you grow more comfortable, you’ll gain more positive feedback about your value and performance in meetings. In turn, you’ll enjoy these conversations and become an even more vocal contributor. Continue encouraging your employees to become more outspoken as well, so you’ll have a strong flow of communication among everyone on your team.

## Helping your employees become more vocal.

As Todd’s boss knew, developing vocal employees is a vital part of strengthening the organization. Vocal employees bring more value to their team through their consistent contributions.

## How will helping your employees become more vocal build a stronger team?

If your direct reports and many on your team aren’t being vocal, they’ll be constantly undermining their own potential as well as the team’s collective potential. Shy and reserved employees often possess a wealth of knowledge and ingenuity that remains scarcely utilized, which poses a major issue in most workplaces. Here are some key reasons to cultivate this ability in everyone on your team.

- They will make sure everyone knows their areas of specialization, so others know where to turn when they need their expertise and leaders know how to leverage them.
- Information will flow more freely across functions, rather than getting bottlenecked. Thus, decision-makers and teams will have access to the knowledge they need.

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- You'll gain valuable insights that can influence your company's marketing, client relationships, and other aspects of business. Companies are desperate for new ways to generate new revenue, improve customer service, streamline operations, and reduce expenses. By speaking up consistently, employees give them access to these insights. They'll help you keep your finger on the pulse of operations, giving you a close-up view of what is actually happening on the ground.
- They'll get credit for their great ideas, which leads to greater job satisfaction.
- When employees are forthright and assertive, they can quickly correct mistakes they notice rather than failing to speak up about an issue.
- Ensuring that diverse voices feel empowered to speak up will enhance the quality of your team's decision-making. "Minority viewpoints have been proven to aid the quality of decision-making in juries, by teams, and for the purpose of innovation," writes Nilofer Merchant in Harvard Business Review.<sup>cii</sup> "Even when the minority points of view are wrong, they cause the rest of the group to think better, to create more solutions, and to improve the creativity of problem solving."

Employees who voice their ideas to colleagues and collaborate on them together are far more likely to bring them to fruition than those who work alone, say researchers from Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM).<sup>ciii</sup> "Business leaders should understand that working in teams increases the chances of success of an idea by at least three times—so they should be encouraging employees not to work alone when generating innovative plans, products, services or processes," they explain.

## How to help your employees become more vocal.

Many employees feel intimidated about speaking up in a big group, especially when certain personalities tend to dominate meetings. As a leader, you can take steps to help all your employees feel more comfortable speaking up. As a result, you'll have more ideas on the table and more minds working together at full capacity.

Here are some key ways to help your employees become more vocal. This list is longer than those for many of the other competencies because speaking up and making yourself heard is so vital for employees at all levels. Their ideas and insights are your company's competitive advantage, yet a large proportion of employees self-censor their valuable opinions. Here's how to help them unleash their contributions in order to dramatically extend their impact.

- Tell your employees you want to hear from all of them. Emphasize this at every meeting, and say it to employees individually when they need to hear it. Affirm that all ideas are welcome and must be heard. This creates a culture of sharing rather than holding back.

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- Encourage them to share half-formed ideas rather than second-guessing themselves. Share stories of when a half-baked idea became a game-changer.
- Don't dismiss ideas too quickly, even if they seem implausible at first glance. Give your team a chance to mull them over. It could be that a merger of two ideas, or an amendment to the seemingly impractical one, could make all the difference.
- Assign meeting roles. Giving employees the responsibility to introduce particular topics that they have a stake in will help break the ice.
- Prior to the meeting, let quiet employees know you plan to ask for their input on a particular topic. That way, they can collect their thoughts in advance.
- Start the meeting with a new rule – people aren't allowed to interrupt each other. This will help quieter employees to feel more comfortable speaking up. When interruptions are eliminated, people will feel more heard and respected.
- Ask for suggestions to add to the meeting agenda. This will encourage employees to take more ownership of a topic.
- Send out your meeting agenda well in advance. Encourage less vocal employees to prepare their thoughts on particular agenda items where they have a lot to contribute.
- Ask employees what they think when they've been silent on an issue. If an employee has a lot of knowledge on the topic, ask directly for their input.
- When certain people are dominating the conversation, take a moment to pause, saying you'd like to hear more from the employees who haven't shared, yet.
- Hold a breakout session. Have employees pair up and brainstorm on an idea for five minutes. Then, ask each pair to share what they came up with.

By taking these steps, you'll foster a more collaborative team that knows how to more fully draw upon each person's knowledge and strengths.

# INSIGHTFUL

## Expression Competency #2:

“Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight.  
~ Thomas Carlyle ~

Leaders with executive presence are insightful. They make great recommendations. They ask excellent questions and share ideas precisely, confidently, and with conviction. They are known for their smart thinking and critical analysis.

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Insightful leaders allow their wisdom, experience, and intelligence to shine.

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### Insightful defined.

Insightful leaders allow their wisdom, experience, and intelligence to shine. They often bring forward novel solutions that enhance an existing plan or open new doorways for their organization. They are thought leaders who offer a fresh perspective.

The people around these leaders see them as incredibly proficient and knowledgeable. Others want to get their input before implementing a new project, knowing they're adept at fine-tuning an idea. Thus, insightful people are extremely valuable team members who shine not just for the projects they spearhead, but for the ways they help others refine their ideas.

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Insightful leaders help identify and seize upon new opportunities for disruption and innovation. Their organization reaps greater rewards from the initiatives their team pursues as the quality of ideas and collaboration rises. Thus, they expand what is possible for their team to accomplish. As creative thinkers, they can envision and direct their team toward new horizons rather than doing things the way they've always been done.

Here's a quick comparison of qualities insightful leaders possess, in contrast to characteristics that undermine insightfulness. Master the qualities on the left side of the chart to become known as an insightful leader.

Insightful Qualities	Qualities That Undermine Insightfulness
• <i>Knowledgeable</i>	• <i>Lacking knowledge</i>
• <i>Experienced</i>	• <i>Inexperienced</i>
• <i>Innovative</i>	• <i>Unimaginative</i>
• <i>Intelligent</i>	• <i>Simpleminded</i>
• <i>Prepared</i>	• <i>Unorganized</i>

Insightful leaders devote time to critical and strategic thinking, which allows them to bring their best ideas to the table. They lead problem-solving initiatives that leverage the creativity of all participants. They often contribute their own valuable solutions while drawing upon the wisdom of the group.

A recent Gartner study found that design thinking and strategic management are the two most integral "soft skills" that today's leaders need to develop.<sup>civ</sup> That means all leaders should be working to cultivate their insightfulness, in part through big-picture thinking.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page, co-founders of Google, serve as excellent examples of innovative thinkers who refuse to stop honing in on game-changing ideas. They developed the concept of ranked search results in the mid-'90s, along with the technology to make this idea feasible.<sup>cv</sup> Their efforts at encouraging employees to voice their own insights have led to innovations like Google Earth, AdWords, and self-driving car technologies, as TED says. They also co-founded X, the Moonshot Factory (formerly Google X), a division of the company that explores the most outlandish ideas their innovative team can imagine. X is currently working on technologies like Wing, a drones delivery service; Makani, a system of harnessing energy from kites; and Brain, which aims to bring AI to many everyday products, among numerous other initiatives.<sup>cvi</sup> As Brin and Page exemplify, great leaders not only share powerful insights; they also draw out the best insights from the people around them and champion their groundbreaking ideas.

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Insightful leaders help identify and seize upon new opportunities for disruption and innovation.

## Behaviors of insightful leaders.

What does insightfulness look like in practice? Think of the leaders you've known whom you would consider insightful. Chances are, they embody a particular set of qualities in their daily work.

### You can demonstrate insightfulness through the following behaviors:

- Suggesting solutions to problems that arise.
- Asking thought-provoking questions in meetings and discussions.
- Sharing astute insights that reveal significant reflection.
- Illuminating concerns or ideas that lead to improvements of a plan, even if they haven't thought of a full solution yet.
- Making great recommendations.
- Highlighting significant ideas that people might otherwise miss.
- Thinking logically about all the available information and synthesizing it for the group.
- Providing sound advice to others based on credible evidence.
- Helping others to see from a different perspective.
- Sharing their depth of knowledge and expertise in an approachable way.
- Igniting interactive discussions that draw out others' ideas by asking pertinent questions.
- Backing up arguments with supporting data drawn from credible sources. Doing their homework in advance of meetings to gather this evidence.
- Predicting questions that others may have about your ideas, so you'll be prepared.
- Sharing outside-of-the-box ideas that no one has yet voiced.
- Showing a clear understanding of the issues because they've spent time learning about and reflecting on them.
- Communicating information that is directly relevant to that audience, and sharing persuasive examples that resonate.

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- Gathering adequate information in advance of an interaction, presentation, or meeting. Preparing well for an important conversation.
- Proactively seeking and sharing valuable knowledge, which provides them with fresh and relevant talking points.
- Creating a pathway forward in any challenging situation.

As you can see, being insightful isn't about always having the best idea or advocating solely for your own ideas. Rather, insightful people illuminate the key ideas that others need to hone in on. They don't always have all the answers (though they quite often have great ones), but they know how to shine light on a pathway forward. They put the most relevant ideas on the table and draw smart conclusions that inform their choices. Their great questions and suggestions prompt further inquiry and discussion among the whole team. In this way, they help everyone around them become more insightful and inventive. Sharing your insights regularly will make your work more engaging and enjoyable as well.

Their great questions and suggestions prompt further inquiry and discussion among the whole team.

## Behaviors that undermine insightfulness.

Now think of the leaders you know who don't demonstrate insightfulness. They probably engage in the following counterproductive behaviors, which sabotage their success as a leader.

### You demonstrate a lack of insightfulness when you engage in the following behaviors:

- Showing up unprepared for a conversation or discussion.
- Remaining quiet rather than sharing their views freely.
- Communicating an unclear point of view that leaves others confused.
- Asking mainly "yes or no" questions that don't spark dialogue.
- Not drawing upon their experience to inform their suggestions and ideas.
- Stating information that shows they don't understand the issues.
- Sharing ideas and insights without evidence or proof.
- Not contributing to solutions for the problems arising.
- Getting mired in the details, preventing them from seeing the bigger picture.
- Being an unenthusiastic participant in brainstorming sessions.

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- Not sharing recommendations for how to improve on a plan.
- Seeming to speak for the sake of talking rather than to contribute something useful.
- Providing poor advice that isn't grounded in reality.
- Not continuously seeking out new knowledge to inform their perspectives.
- Sharing information that is irrelevant to the audience.

Insightful people are not necessarily smarter than others. They simply take the time to reflect on their ideas. By doing so, they nurture their own ability to be insightful. If you don't give yourself space to reflect, you'll come across as uninsightful. It's as simple as that.

Furthermore, insightful people also push themselves to back up their assertions with evidence based on their own experience and knowledge. They strive to ground their suggestions in a foundation of solid proof, so others will take them seriously. Doing their homework before making a suggestion allows their knowledge and intelligence to shine.

## **Josh Takes Initiative to Develop Insights**

### ***Problem:***

Josh had a major reality check in his 360 review. His coworkers expressed that he didn't seem to prepare well for meetings. He often didn't share his thoughts or ideas, remaining disengaged from the conversation. When others asked for his thoughts, his ideas lacked substance. The comments he made were surface-level. He did ask questions at times, but they were basic and uninteresting. When he made a point, others had trouble understanding it. He acted as if he didn't fully understand the key ideas being discussed and had no real investment in the conversation.

### ***Action:***

In discussing these issues with Josh, it became clear that he hurried into meetings rather than taking time to prepare for them. He always seemed to be just barely hanging on by the seat of his pants. He had to unload some of the mundane tasks and unnecessary meetings from his schedule and block out time for reflection. And then he had to follow through, making strategic thinking a core priority. Frequent check-ins helped him stay accountable to himself.

### ***Results:***

As Josh took these steps, his coworkers noticed a big difference, marveling at the quality of his input. "I never knew you had so much knowledge," one of them remarked to him privately. He continued receiving appreciative remarks about the quality of his insights after meetings, which emboldened him and made him feel more deeply engaged in

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group discussions. His boss put him in charge of an exciting initiative, saying she needed the most creative minds on the job.

## How would you rate your insightfulness?

How would you rate your ability to consistently show insightfulness? Give yourself a score of one to ten for each of these statements:

- You regularly share your valuable insights, ideas, and recommendations at meetings.
- Your questions provoke further discussion that often leads to new ideas.
- You are adept at helping others see from different perspectives.
- Others would characterize you as an innovative thinker who voices novel ideas.
- People often turn to you for help with figuring out a solution or fine-tuning an idea.
- You frequently underscore a significant idea so the group can devote more attention to it.
- You strive to ground your suggestions in evidence and experience.

If you scored above 52, you've established yourself as a deeply insightful person in your organization. Otherwise, work on developing your insightfulness through the action steps discussed in the following pages.

## Action steps to become more insightful.

Tap into your own capacity to be insightful with these actionable steps. By doing so, you'll make a name for yourself as a key player with winning ideas.

### 1. Block out time to explore what holds you back from being insightful at work.

Answering the following questions:

- Why am I not being more insightful at work?
- What excuses am I making to not be insightful?
- What obstacles are holding me back from being insightful?
- What fears are stopping me from being insightful?
- Do I have certain limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being more insightful?

### 2. Gain more knowledge in your subject area.

Do you need more technical knowledge to rise to the next level of prowess in your field? Or could you stay more up-to-date on

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current trends and new research? Consider taking a course, scheduling time to catch up on the latest industry articles, or contacting expert colleagues in your domain.

3. **Partner with a peer mentor who can teach you about a relevant area you're less familiar with.** Learning about cross-functional areas of business is a sure way to broaden your perspective. Groundbreaking ideas about how to leverage skills and resources from different functions may emerge when you have a strong grasp of what each of them does.
4. **Build your problem-solving muscles.** The more you delve into opportunities to solve problems, the better at it you'll be. You'll learn to think creatively about problem-solving rather than feeling intimidated by these situations.
5. **Schedule time to reflect regularly.** Journal about your ideas if that helps you to think better. Or, bounce ideas off of someone you respect. Devote a specific time each week to reflection.
6. **Seek out opportunities to work with new people** who will challenge your existing thinking patterns and ways of doing things. Shaking up your routine will help you awaken to new possibilities.
7. **Get away from your desk from time to time.** Go for a walk. Be active. The best insights often arise when you aren't grinding away at your computer, but when you're taking a breather and allowing your mind to wander freely.
8. **Be curious about how others have done things.** Facing a serious problem? Someone else has probably gone through the same thing. Do your homework on how they worked to solve it. Ingenious solutions often aren't totally novel.
9. **Talk to someone new.** Enrich your perspective by having in-depth conversations with people you don't normally talk to. Expanding your social circle—either outside of work or in your organization—will bring new food for thought. Talking to someone in a different field or function about ideas you're both interested in can sometimes spark groundbreaking innovations.
10. **Read voraciously.** Soak in new ideas from books, articles, and news reports. Read about pioneers in other fields as well as your own, looking for opportunities for cross-pollination or adaptation of ideas.
11. **Spend time on absurd ideas.** Like Brin and Page, delve into ideas that sound too “out-there” to take seriously. Find out if they hold hidden promise. You just might be surprised.
12. **Take a lesson from improv groups.** “The first rule of improvisation is AGREE. Always agree and say YES,” says Tina Fey in *Bossypants*.<sup>cvi</sup> You won’t always love every idea that emerges in a brainstorming session, but keep an open mind. Allow a scenario to play out fully.

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"Start with a yes, and see where that takes you. As an improviser, I always find it jarring when I meet someone in real life whose first answer is no. 'No, we can't do that.' 'No, that's not in the budget,'" she continues. "What kind of way is that to live?" Then add something to the other person's idea—you're essentially saying, "Yes, AND." Focus on ways to make the idea better—things that accentuate it or resolve potential issues.

As you and your team tap into your collective insights, your organization will thrive. You'll have a wealth of excellent ideas and minds that are adept at problem-solving and critical thinking. As a result, you'll generate novel solutions ahead of the competition, fine-tune your ideas to eliminate hiccups, and soar over any bumps in the road with skill. Your insights will allow you to triumph over any type of adversity by thinking creatively and leveraging the full brainpower of your team.

## Helping your employees to cultivate insightfulness.

Insightfulness doesn't just benefit you as an individual—it benefits your whole company. Read on to learn why, and then how to help your whole team cultivate this competency.

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Only 25% of employees  
feel they can freely express their ideas at work

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## How will growing your employees' insightfulness build a stronger team?

Here are a few key reasons why you should encourage your employees to cultivate their insightfulness.

- Insightful employees will build a culture of innovation. Teams will bring in a higher quality of ideas from all directions, not just from the top down.
- Your team will master the art of decision-making as people learn to candidly share insights steeped in experience and evidence.
- People will break free from traditional silos, recognizing and seizing opportunities to collaborate across functions. As they discuss ideas with people outside of their immediate circle, they'll come up with breakthrough solutions.
- Employees will gain more satisfaction from their work as they exercise their creative potential and gain recognition for it. Thus, overall morale will improve, and you'll have a culture in which everyone feels appreciated and integral to the organization.

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- Your insightful thinkers will notice emerging trends and come up with brilliant ways to respond to them rather than allowing opportunities to pass them by.

By harnessing the full brainpower of your team, you'll move toward more ambitious goals, enhance your bottom line, and increase everyone's job satisfaction.

Leaders must work to draw out their team's insights and create a culture of sharing them. According to research by the communications firm Smarp, only 25% of employees feel they can freely express their ideas at work.<sup>cviii</sup> A quarter of all employees often don't speak up even when they feel they have something valuable to say. Nearly half of employees are not asked to share their ideas regularly, which depletes their confidence about sharing them.<sup>cix</sup> Leveraging their insights can pay off in a big way. When Toyota took over an unproductive GM facility in California, it decided to ask the employees how they'd improve operations, Smarp explains. Toyota ended up implementing 80% of their suggestions. "As a result, the plant went from the industry's worst to being a shining star example," the firm asserts.

Employee insights are vital across industries. "Frontline employees especially are intimately familiar with the problems in systems, internal processes and day-to-day operations that manifest as difficulties for the customer. It's hard to make an intelligent correction without their insights," says TLNT.<sup>cx</sup> "Most employees have frontline insight that top management just doesn't. Top management may devise the operational and business strategy, but the employees execute it, and therein lies success or failure."

## How to help your employees become more insightful.

Cultivating insightfulness will make a tremendous difference for your employees in their careers. Encourage your employees unleash their own insightfulness with the following steps.

- Share your feedback regularly. Through feedback, employees can learn which types of suggestions and ideas are most valuable. Let them know where they've really made an impact.
- Ask *courageous questions*: open-ended questions that have a targeted focus rather than being overly vague, as researchers with Let's Grow Leaders and the University of Northern Colorado explain. Courageous questions show you want an honest (and insightful) answer, even if the truth is surprising or hard to hear. Instead of asking, "How can we improve?" ask a more specific question like one of these:<sup>cxi</sup>
  - "What are our biggest customer's greatest frustrations?"
  - "What is a problem we have that no one talks about?"
  - "What must I do better as a leader if we are to be successful?"
  - "How are we sabotaging our success in this project?"

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- Create forums for idea-sharing. Having a few different options (like a virtual idea box) will help all employees get more comfortable with sharing their ideas—even the shy ones. Hold brainstorming sessions in which you assert there is no such thing as a bad idea, and set up an “innovation zone” (virtual or in-person) for discussion and collaboration.<sup>cxii</sup>
- Don’t steer the discussion away from an idea just because it seems unfeasible. Instead, encourage people to remain open-minded and explore options not considered before.
- Change the composition of teams from time to time. “Repurposing the same teams for similar tasks may seem like the easiest approach to resource allocation, but switching things up can stimulate new brainstorming ideas,” says Seamas Egan of j2 Global, who suggests rotating desk arrangement, teams, and assignment types to spark new interactions and ideas.<sup>cxiii</sup>
- Ask pointed questions that help people to arrive at the truth themselves, or as a group. Share your own thoughts after others have had a chance to speak.

When you ask thought-provoking questions that ignite discussion, be prepared to hear new ideas. “Courageous questions also require the asker to listen without defensiveness,” the researchers at Let’s Grow Leaders explain.<sup>cxiv</sup> “This is where well-intentioned leaders often get into trouble. They ask a good question, but they weren’t prepared to hear feedback. When you ask a courageous question, allow yourself to take in the response: Take notes, and thank everyone for taking the time—and having the confidence—to share their perspectives.” As you genuinely welcome these questions and take the other steps described here, you’ll foster a team of insightful thinkers.

# CLEAR

## Expression Competency #3:

“Executive presence is not necessarily about being formal or abundant in your communication, but rather straightforward and brief. The more you keep speaking, or explaining yourself, the more you cloud or dilute your core message.”  
~ Kerrie Peraino ~

Your company needs leaders who are clear because they effectively deliver messages throughout the organization. They are efficient communicators who make themselves understood quickly. Thus, a leader with executive presence communicates clearly at all times so that others truly hear the message.

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Clear leaders are succinct and to the point.  
They present a crisp message  
in a straightforward and direct style.

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### Clearness defined.

Whenever they communicate, clear leaders are succinct and to the point. They present a crisp message in a straightforward and direct style. They express themselves in a polished way without qualifier or filler words. People remember what has been said long after the conversation when the speaker presented the message in a clear way. There's no struggling to understand the speaker's meaning or instructions.

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Think about the leaders you know who communicate especially well. Do they drone on and on in a meeting, or do they get right to the point? Do they meander slowly toward a conclusion, or are they extremely direct?

To make themselves heard—and to show the importance of their message—effective leaders are straightforward and candid. They don't slowly ramble toward a conclusion. They speak in a polished, succinct way that lets listeners immediately understand what they mean. They don't believe in wasting time on a long-winded speech that ultimately leaves their audience confused. When they communicate instructions, they want people to take action. When they describe a problem, they want people to grasp what they're saying so they can drive toward a solution together.

They also understand that a miscommunication by a leader can have reverberating effects throughout the organization, causing people to put their efforts into the wrong course of action or creating interpersonal conflict. Struggling to understand a message laden with complex terminology also wastes time.

Take a look at this comparison of the characteristics of leaders who are clear and those who are not:

Qualities of a clear communicator	Qualities that undermine clearness
• <i>Articulate</i>	• <i>Inarticulate</i>
• <i>Coherent</i>	• <i>Confusing</i>
• <i>Candid</i>	• <i>Meandering</i>
• <i>Polished</i>	• <i>Unfocused</i>
• <i>Concise</i>	• <i>Rambling</i>

In a study by Gartner, 46% of leaders said they view audience overload as a major problem to overcome in their communications.<sup>cxv</sup> Strong communicators understand how to cater to their audience's limited attention span and time restraints by distilling a message into succinct, easily understandable language.

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Strong communicators cater to their audience's limited attention span and time restraints by distilling a message into succinct, easily understandable language.

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McCormack's Brief Lab found that most people don't have long attention spans when the speaker doesn't quickly get to the point:<sup>cxvi</sup>

- They spend just 30 seconds reading an email.

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- They tune out after 15 seconds when colleagues are speaking.
- They stop listening to presentations in a minute or less.

Clear, concise speakers are *much* more likely to get their point across than people who don't choose their words carefully. Thus, they will undoubtedly grow their influence and impact. Since people don't have long attention spans, brevity ensures they hear the full message. When speaking with senior leaders, clear speakers recognize that they have a small window of time to get their point across, so they make their message crisp, brief, and poignant.

Further, when speakers are consistently succinct, others will trust that they are going to deliver a message with a clear purpose. Thus, they'll listen more intently. In contrast, when a person known for rambling speaks up at a meeting, people may begin to zone out before she's even opened her mouth.

When leaders communicate clearly, employees and colleagues will also feel they can reach out to them for information. They'll know they can get a quick answer to a question, so they won't delay or avoid communicating. Similarly, clear leaders have more productive conversations with people at all levels because they immediately let them know what they want from them personally.<sup>cxvii</sup> They don't leave them guessing, "What are you asking *me* to do here?" or "Why are you telling this to *me*?" In turn, employees will set priorities effectively when they understand what their leader and colleagues want.

For all of these reasons, people perceive their leaders as more capable and reliable when they communicate with clarity. Strive to become a clear leader, and you'll greatly boost your effectiveness and perception.

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Since people don't have long attention spans,  
brevity ensures they hear the full message.

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## Behaviors of clear communicators.

Let's take a closer look at how clear leaders work in action, so you can fully grasp which behaviors to hone in on. Consider how leaders you admire speak and act with clarity in all of these ways outlined below.

### You'll present yourself as a clear, communicative leader through the following behaviors:

- Providing just the right amount of information, communicating with precision and simplicity.
- Being succinct when sharing a message, whether in a presentation, interaction, or email.

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- Being direct, candid, and straightforward.
- Getting right to the main point.
- Summarizing the most important points.
- Connecting each supporting point to the main point.
- Mentally rehearsing what you're going to say, especially before you explain a complex concept.
- Leveraging the power of the pause in communication so listeners can absorb what you've said.
- Concisely communicating important details and essential elements.
- Using easy-to-understand language that listeners can grasp immediately.
- Checking for expressions or body language that suggest confusion, and quickly clarifying your message if need be.
- Delivering relevant messages to the target audience so you're not wasting their time with information they don't need.
- Sharing a compelling and easy-to-understand point of view in your messaging.
- Providing the right level of detail.
- Letting people know where they can find more information rather than stating it all upfront.
- Tailoring communications to the audience's level of authority.

"Simplify and be direct. Say what you mean," says the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL).<sup>cixviii</sup> "Don't hide behind complexity or pile on a ton of information. Simple communication can be smart communication."

Clear communicators understand their audience and know what information is most pertinent to them. They tailor their message to the people they're speaking to. They don't make their audience struggle to understand their rationale or comprehend the point they're making. They don't strive to impress people by making ideas sound overly complex. They also pay attention to their pacing, speaking slowly enough for the audience to understand what they're saying but varying their cadence at times to build interest. They place emphasis at key points by varying their tone to highlight key ideas, too.

These leaders understand how important clarity is to organizational efficiency. When people speak to them, they want them to be concise and straightforward. They need to be efficient with their own time, which also means delivering effective messages as succinctly as possible.

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Teams will quickly launch into effective action when given clear directives. They'll arrive at decisions swiftly and understand exactly what their leader wants them to do.

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Simple communication can be smart communication.

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## Behaviors that undermine clearness.

Conversely, leaders who haven't mastered the art of clarity are setting themselves up to be misunderstood, diminishing what they can accomplish. If you're engaging in any of these behaviors, it's a red flag that you're undermining your executive presence by not being a clear communicator.

### You demonstrate a lack of clearness when you engage in the following behaviors:

- Rambling instead of getting to the point.
- Elaborating too much, overwhelming your audience with information.
- Repeating similar points over and over again.
- Thinking out loud, sharing your unedited train of thought.
- Using convoluted and sentences rather than simple language.
- Communicating with indecisive, weak language and filler words.
- Going too deep into the details.
- Spending too much time ramping up to the important points.
- Making ideas sound more complex than they actually are.
- Overdoing the amount of data and facts needed to get your message across.
- Overusing business jargon, idioms, or corporate speak.
- Not adapting your communication style to your audience's level of authority.
- Failing to notice that the audience isn't paying attention and tracking you.
- Focusing too much on processes and background details.
- Not checking in to gage understanding and give people a chance to ask questions.

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"The more you keep speaking, or explaining yourself, the more you cloud or dilute your core message," says Kerrie Peraino, the head of international HR for American Express.<sup>cix</sup> Being long-winded and providing too many details detract from your message. You might think you're being diligent and thorough, but everyone doesn't need to know every aspect of the issue. Don't try to impress people with the volume of information you know about a topic or complex language. They simply can't absorb it all at once. Providing the most vital points in a concise way will leave them feeling more impressed. Let them know they can speak to you if they want further details. That way, you'll have a chance to share them later if need be, but they won't derail your main point.

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The more you keep  
speaking, or explaining yourself,  
the more you cloud or dilute your core message

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Unclear communicators also tend to overuse filler words and phrases, like these:

- **"Noise words,"** like "umm," "ah," "like," and "you know."
- **Filler phrases** like "I was thinking," "In my opinion," "I'm not sure, but I think," "I'm not the expert, but," and "Sorry, but I just want to explain my point of view," which weaken your speech. It's already obvious that you are sharing your own opinion, and you should never act as though you need to apologize or justify your speech.
- **Qualifiers** like "usually," "sometimes," and "probably," which tend to soften your statements. While they have their place, ask yourself if you can make your point without them. They can make you sound like you're hedging your bets just in case you're wrong, rather than exuding certainty.

These unnecessary words take up unnecessary air time. They also indicate you're not exactly sure what you're going to say next, which makes you sound less confident. Thus, clear communicators strive to avoid them in their speech.

## Diana Redefines Her Delivery

### **Problem:**

Diana was insightful and very good at her job, but she didn't communicate in a concise and clear way. When she spoke to executives, she didn't realize they were anxiously awaiting for her to arrive at her point. They didn't have time to listen to her slow ramp up that she believed built anticipation.

### **Action:**

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Her boss took her aside one day. “Diana, these executives don’t have all day,” he said. “You need to hook them in the first thirty seconds by getting to the main idea. Lead with your recommendation, and then give your rationale. Your important ideas are getting lost in the muddle, and I want them to be heard. Senior leadership needs to hear them.”

Diana practiced her delivery with her boss, and the next time she spoke to high-level leaders, she held them in rapt attention.

## **Results:**

“That was astounding,” said her boss. “They were riveted. You spoke for only five minutes, but you really showed the full importance of the project you’re proposing—and I think they want you to lead it.”

## **How would you rate your clearness?**

How clear are you? Assign yourself a score of one to ten for each of these statements:

- You are succinct when sharing a message, whether in a presentation, interaction, or email.
- You always get right to the main point.
- You collect your thoughts before you speak rather than thinking out loud.
- You present just the most relevant information rather than getting mired in details.
- You make a great impression on senior leaders due to your brevity and clarity.
- You simplify your communication by using easily understandable language, especially with complex concepts.
- You express yourself in a polished way without qualifier or filler words.

If you scored above 52, you’re communicating clearly and making yourself understood. Otherwise, work on developing your clarity through the action steps presented at the end of this chapter.

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Remember the power of “less is more”

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## **Action steps to become a clearer communicator.**

What can you do to become clearer in your communication? Here are some action steps to begin taking now.

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Remember the power of “less is more” by striving to be a minimalist communicator. Do away with unnecessary details, only providing what is most relevant. Here are some concrete ways to do that in all your interactions.

1. **Block out and spend time exploring what holds you back from being a clearer communicator at work.** As you get to the root of the issue, the obstacles will become less restricting and you’ll embrace new possibilities. Answer these questions in your reflection time:
  - Why am I not being a clear communicator work?
  - What excuses am I making to not be a clear communicator?
  - What obstacles are preventing me from being clear?
  - What fears are stopping me from being clear?
  - Do I have limiting beliefs about myself that stop me from being a clear communicator?
2. **Pause to accentuate key points rather than rushing and rambling through your speech.** A *New York Times* story illuminates the importance of silence in music. Just as pauses play an essential role in a musical composition, well-placed pauses add eloquence to a leader’s speech.<sup>cxx</sup>

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Just as pauses play an essential role in a musical composition, well-placed pauses add eloquence to a leader’s speech.

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3. **Consider why you’re speaking to a particular audience.** That will help you to frame your message, sharing the most relevant info and giving the appropriate call to action. Put yourself in your audience’s shoes to determine what they really want to know.
4. **Begin with the main idea, and tell them why you’re telling them about it.** Avoid a lengthy buildup to the main point—arrive at it in the first thirty seconds of speaking.
5. **State the 5 W’s of journalism**—the *who, what, when, where, and why*.<sup>cxxi</sup> That will help you ensure that you haven’t left out anything crucial or added too much fluff. “Before you initiate any communication, ask yourself, ‘What am I trying to accomplish?’ Even chitchat should have a purpose, even if it’s just to build camaraderie,” writes Geoffrey James in Inc.<sup>cxxii</sup> “If somebody else is initiating the conversation, ask yourself, ‘Why is this conversation taking place?’ If the answer isn’t obvious, guide the dialogue to the ‘why’ of it.”
6. **Especially when speaking to senior leaders, lead with your recommendation and then provide your rationale—not the other way around.** You’ll not only hold their attention; you’ll sound more commanding as well.

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7. **Pay attention to how much space you take up in meetings and conversations.** If you're speaking more than your fair share, start dialing it back and spending more time listening.
8. **Pay attention to people's nonverbal communication as you speak.** Does their eye contact, expression, and other body language show that they're intently listening? Or are their eyes beginning to glaze over? Learn to read the room and adjust accordingly. This vital feedback will help you prepare for your next conversation, comment, or presentation as well.
9. **Don't try to impress others by sharing everything you know on the topic at hand.** Share a couple tidbits of information to establish credibility, but don't go off on a tangent.
10. **Keep your emails short.** Write five sentences or less. Review them before sending and weed out any superfluous words, sentences, or even paragraphs. Leave nothing but the essential message you're trying to communicate.
11. **Edit your slides thoroughly before delivering a presentation to senior executives** (or anyone else, for that matter). Put your most important points—your key recommendations and calls to action—on your first slides, so the audience knows what your presentation will be about. Next, have summary slides that give quick overviews of your key points, followed by an appendix of slides. Follow the 10% rule: If the appendix is 40 slides, include 4 summary slides.
12. **Avoid "uptalk" and "downspeak".** Uptalk makes you sound like you're asking a question rather than confidently making a statement. Steer clear of "downspeak," too, which means allowing your volume to taper off as you finish your statement.
13. **Choose phrases that succinctly convey your confidence in your own judgment.** "I believe" and "I know" have much more power than "I think," asserting clarity and conviction. "While 'I think' makes us feel that the person speaking is still unsure or thinking it over, 'I believe' is a persuasive declaration," explains Judith Humphrey in *Fast Company*.<sup>cxxiii</sup> "I assure you," "I am confident," and "I envision" are also strong word choices that build your audience's confidence in your thinking, she adds.

As you become a clear communicator, your words will have more power and impact.

## Helping your employees become more clear.

As a leader, it's your duty to help your whole team become more succinct, to the point, and clear. Read on to learn how this will benefit your organization and how to help your direct reports express themselves clearly.

### How will helping your employees communicate with clarity build a stronger team?

Increased clarity doesn't just benefit individuals in their careers; it benefits whole organizations. Here are the main reasons why.

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- Communication will flow far more clearly in all directions. Subordinates will understand their leaders' instructions; colleagues will work together more smoothly.
- Teams will improve their efficiency by avoiding wasted time. Clarity creates well-oiled teams that quickly launch into the correct course of action and drive toward results. They also have more mental energy for what matters most.
- You'll gain valuable information from all directions when people understand how to communicate with you efficiently. You don't have time to wade through lengthy emails or sit through a long presentation on something that may not even be relevant to you.
- Meetings won't take more time than necessary, allowing teams to put more time into high-priority tasks. Discussions will be as efficient as possible.
- Colleagues will effectively share feedback and guidance with one another. Work will flow more smoothly because people are accurately hearing one another's suggestions.
- Team morale will increase because everyone will feel heard and will know their time is being respected. People will be more engaged in debates and discussions since they can easily understand one another's ideas.

For all of these reasons, clear communicators have immense positive effects throughout an organization. Teams will improve their ability to decide on the best plan of action, implement it smoothly, and discuss any modifications needed.

## How to help your employees communicate with clarity?

Through the following steps, you can coach your employees on how to become clear communicators.

- Encourage them to edit their speech before they begin talking. Extroverts are particularly prone to thinking *as they speak* instead of *before they speak*.<sup>cxxiv</sup> Work to spot this tendency in your employees and coach them on how to speak in a more polished way. By mentally rehearsing what they're going to say—or practicing saying it out loud—they'll make themselves heard more effectively. Asking a trusted friend or colleague to provide feedback is a great idea.
- For employees who are prone to rambling (which can apply to both introverts and extroverts<sup>cxxv</sup>), consider why they might overtalk. Are they longwinded because of nervousness, or do they mistakenly believe that by taking up more airspace, they'll make themselves seem more important? Help them get to the root of the issue so they can
- Finish one thought before you begin the next one. Consider how to structure your message before you begin, so you're not interrupting *yourself* time after time by beginning a new idea before you arrive at the first point.

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- Provide feedback on their communication style after they deliver a presentation. Stay positive, but point out ways they could strengthen their performance next time.
- Prompt them to slow down their speech to give the audience time to absorb what they're saying. Many people rush through their speech, causing important points to get lost. Presenting the most vital information more slowly will help others to truly grasp what they're saying.
- Set up a "buddy system" in which employees give each other pointers on how to strengthen their communication in meetings. This can be a friendly way to suggest easy improvements and gage progress on an ongoing basis.
- Encourage employees to avoid the filler words and phrases discussed earlier in this chapter. Eliminating weak words from their vocabulary will make them more articulate speakers.

Through all of these steps, you'll help your employees develop into clear and effective communicators whose words and ideas get results.

## Bonus section: Speaking down.

If you don't have any issue speaking *up*, making your opinions and ideas heard, then this is a special section just for you. This is for the people who never hesitate to vocalize ideas and express themselves—the extroverted and outspoken members of the team.

We've talked a lot about speaking *up* in the chapter on becoming more vocal because it tends to present more of a challenge to most people. However, a select few people do tend to dominate meetings and interactions by speaking up *too much*. If you're one of them, you need to learn how to speak *down*.

This issue deserves its own special section because many of the traits of dominant personalities don't pertain to *everyone* who struggles with clarity. If you're one of them, I have some specific advice just for you.

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On a team of eight people, one or two members often do up to 70 percent of the talking.

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## Do you need to learn to speak down?

First ask your peers for feedback on your behavior in meetings to determine whether you're truly being too vocal. Tell them you're genuinely trying to understand how you can improve, assuring them that you want honest feedback. Then listen.

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If you are a person who needs to learn how to speak down, you are a naturally expressive, talkative, wordy, and loquacious person. You don't want to be contained. You don't want to stop talking. You can't stop your great ideas and strong convictions from coming out during meetings. You're comfortable excessively asserting yourself in both groups and one-on-one interactions. You may not even realize that you are dominating a meeting by doing most of the talking.

## Why talkative people need to learn how to speak down.

In meetings, a small proportion of people often control the conversation. They may not intend to do so, but they prevent their quieter colleagues from sharing their valuable ideas. "On a team of eight people, one or two members often do up to 70 percent of the talking," says Leigh Thompson of the Kellogg School of Management.<sup>cxxvi</sup> "The topper is that the dominant people do not realize this," she explains in Fortune.<sup>cxxvii</sup> "In fact, they vehemently argue that the meetings are egalitarian. They lack self-awareness."

Talkative people too often aren't aware of the others in the room who are quiet—and who aren't speaking very much at all. They are very poor at discerning when to stop speaking, be silent, and listen. They don't know how to get out of the way by taking up less room so that others have the space to step in and share.

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Quieter employees  
should get as much airtime  
as the talkative ones.

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The truth is that the quieter employees should get as much airtime as the talkative ones. However, they find it nearly impossible to get a word in. They don't know how to speak over or interrupt the dominant talkers. Even when they try to speak, they are talked over. The message they internalize

is, "My input and ideas aren't wanted," which leads them to undervalue their own recommendations.

The talkative person who is dominating meetings lacks a heightened sense of situational awareness. If you dominate meetings, you need to strengthen your observational skills, consciously paying attention to what people say, who is driving the discussion, and why more people aren't actively sharing.

Take a look at this comparison of qualities. People who display the traits on the right-hand side of the table need to learn how to speak down by cultivating the qualities on the left side.

OBSERVANT	UNAWARE
• <i>Pays close attention</i>	• <i>Isn't aware of their impact on others</i>
• <i>Cognizant</i>	• <i>Doesn't read an audience well</i>
• <i>Plugged-in</i>	• <i>Doesn't notice cues from other people</i>
• <i>Perceptive</i>	• <i>Unobservant</i>

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Strong communicators have exceptional situational awareness. They continuously read the room and accurately perceive how others are feeling. They know exactly how to reach that audience, when to respond to any discomfort that people are experiencing, and when to be quiet. If you tend to dominate the conversation in groups, tune into what is happening around you in a meeting. It's just as important as the things you want to say. By becoming more observant and attuned to others' contributions, you'll become a more effective communicator and strengthen your executive presence.

Not having this awareness directly undermines your executive presence by making you less clear as well as less supportive of those around you. Discouraging others from speaking (intentionally or unintentionally) diminishes your charisma, making you a less likeable and inspiring leader. Great leaders draw others out and make them feel good, not the reverse. And they don't have to share every thought that arises—they carefully choose the most important ones and voice them in a tight, succinct way.

If you're a leader, tapping into your employees' potential means learning how to draw them out. That means being highly attuned to how much airtime you and each member of the team are consuming. Creating space for your quieter employees to share their insights will expand what your team is capable of achieving together.

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Strong communicators have exceptional situational awareness.

They continuously read the room and  
accurately perceive how others are feeling.

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## Action steps for speaking down.

Here are the key steps you can take to dial back your speech while still remaining assertive and bold. You'll also greatly benefit from following the action steps to becoming a clear communicative leader.

1. **Focus on active listening.** Before a meeting, affirm to yourself that it's an opportunity to practice your active listening skills.
  - Set listening goals for yourself. For example, "I want to hear Mary's detailed thoughts about the topic she's presenting on, so we can have an in-depth discussion over lunch," or "I really want to understand all the pros and cons of this idea, from everyone's point of view."
  - Take notes. Having your pen on paper will remind you of your goal to listen much more than you speak.

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2. **Mentally survey the room periodically during meetings to gage how many people are engaged in the conversation.** Who hasn't shared yet? Do your part to give others equal time so a variety of ideas will be heard.
3. **Practice pausing before you speak.** Count to five and collect your thoughts.<sup>cxxviii</sup> This will help you focus your thoughts, making you less prone to rambling.
4. **Speak more slowly.** When you speak slowly, you give more weight to your words. Thus, slowing down your tempo will encourage you to choose them more carefully and to express your message in fewer words.
5. **Prepare your thoughts beforehand.** Choose several key topics for which you have something important to contribute. Ask yourself which topics are most vital for you to speak on, and which information is most critical to share. Jot down notes to help you stay on message. By doing so, you'll make your message more crisp and concise.
6. **Pay attention to how much you're speaking about yourself.** Personal examples can be extremely useful, but if you've fallen into a pattern of continuously talking about yourself, it's time to self-censor.
7. **Pause after stating an important or unexpected idea.** This will make the audience pay even more attention to what you've just said. It will also act as a speed bump to slow yourself down.
8. **Watch your audience's expressions and body language closely.** Even when you're speaking, you should be noticing how they're responding. You may *think* your longwinded explanation is fascinating, but are they truly hanging on your every word?

Again, use the action steps for speaking clearly and concisely as well. They will absolutely help you to establish the kind of presence you want to have in a meeting. By focusing on the most vital information, you'll ensure that people truly hear you. And by keeping it simple, you'll help them retain your important points.

As you become more aware of all the audience members in the room, you'll witness the quality of the discussion increasing. The more actively involved everyone is, the more elevated the learning between participants will become. When more equal participation occurs, the meeting will leverage all the experts in the room and achieve the best outcome possible.

## Alan Learns to Listen More Than He Speaks

### **Problem:**

Alan talked a *lot* at meetings and didn't pay attention to how participants were reacting and feeling toward him. Greg, one of his coworkers, finally approached him. "You made it really hard to join in on the conversation," he said. "Instead of being the most outspoken voice in the room, take a lesson from Yvonne."

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## Action:

Alan closely observed how Yvonne interacted with others. She could tell when her colleagues felt upset, even if they didn't voice it to anyone, as Greg pointed out. When a more timid coworker wanted to join a conversation, she would notice and make space for her. She made sure that no one felt awkward by complimenting their strengths in front of others and giving them a seat at the table. Alan had been so busy talking that he hadn't really noticed Yvonne's perceptiveness, but he began to study how she interacted with others. He spent more time being silent and observing how she conducted herself, and she became his new role model. He asked Greg and Yvonne to both give him regular feedback so he could gage his progress, and they were delighted to do so.

## Results:

Greg soon became much less overbearing and learned to engage in genuine dialogue with everyone in the room. He shared gratitude for his coworkers' continued mentoring and was glad to also have a closer relationship with them both as a result.

Overly expressive people like Alan need to learn how to modulate themselves. They need to work to install an internal dimmer switch that knows how to turn itself down and so it's not always on high. The more they can regulate themselves, the easier it will be to achieve equal participation.

Practice deferring to the others in the room. Let them speak up and state their opinions and ideas. Remind yourself that you don't need to be constantly speaking to be valued and appreciated. Let others ask questions, give input, and provide direction. Let them experience what it feels like to have impact in a meeting.

## How to help your employees learn to speak down.

As you learn to speak down, also work to help your employees develop this competency. Here are some key ways to use strong facilitation to help make all voices heard.

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Practice deferring to the others in the room.  
Let them speak up and state their opinions and ideas.

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- **Ask talkative speakers to wait.** It may feel uncomfortable to silence someone, but that's your role as the facilitator. When a quieter person tries to jump in, ask more vocal speakers to wait for him to speak. Using the talkative person's name can gently get her attention and show you're serious.<sup>cxxix</sup>

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- **Tell the group that all opinions matter.** Assert upfront that you expect to hear everyone's viewpoint in the meeting.
- **Do a round-robin-style check-in, giving each person a minute to share their thoughts.** Go around the room, beginning midway to avoid having the most dominant speaker go first or last, suggests Barbara MacKay of North Star Facilitators.<sup>cxxx</sup>
- **Stop people when they've gone off topic.** Ask ramblers to concisely complete their point or save their thoughts for later if they're not relevant to the topic at hand.
- **Set clear ground rules at the beginning of the meeting.** For instance, state a maximum length of time for comments and note that if people digress from the agenda topic at hand, you'll ask them to hold their thoughts.
- **Utilize a timer to keep comments from becoming too long.** This will help give equal time to participants and prevent long-winded speeches.
- **Ask for input from specific participants.** Rather than singling them out because they've been quiet, ask for their opinions on areas reflecting their strengths and expertise.
- **Speak to dominant personalities outside of the meeting.** Enlist their help in making space for more reserved group members. Give them direct feedback on ways they could improve their performance in groups in a positive, tactful way.
- **Ask questions on areas of knowledge directly relevant to quieter employees'.** Focusing the discussion and selecting the less talkative people, will help create more engagement and variety of ideas.
- **Limit your responses to dominators' comments.** Don't inadvertently encourage them to be more vociferous by replying in depth to all of their comments. You could nod and say something like, "Thanks, Brian. Does anyone else want to share their thoughts on that?"
- **Give people the chance to work together in different sizes of groups.** In a smaller working group of three, a quieter employee might take up more space than in a large group. This builds their confidence for participating in larger groups as well.

Through these steps, you can create a culture that frowns upon letting one or two people dominate a meeting. Instead of normalizing that behavior, you'll be setting the expectation that all voices must be heard and valued. With attentive facilitation, you'll continue reinforcing that standard. As a result, you'll develop a team of individuals who know how to effectively communicate and collaborate, not just sharing their own ideas but also drawing out one another's best insights.

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Setting the expectation  
that all voices must be heard and valued.

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You now possess the building blocks of executive presence.

We've now discussed each of the nine key executive presence competencies that together make up the three domains of executive presence: gravitas, authority, and expression. Let's take a moment to briefly review what you've learned.

First, you know how to develop your gravitas so you can radiate the commanding, self-assured presence of a high-level leader. We've also unpacked what charisma truly is, so you can cultivate and leverage it in all your interactions. Whether you're loud and bubbly or quiet and reflective, you have what it takes to become a charismatic leader who makes others feel valued and important. As you cultivate these three core competencies, you'll carry yourself with gravitas in every situation, whether you're meeting with direct reports or a panel of senior leaders.

Second, you know how to grow your aura of authority by becoming decisive, bold, and influential. You've studied how to step outside of your comfort zone by trusting your instincts, making quicker and bolder decisions, and holding your ground. You know how to assert a compelling point of view that persuades others to adopt your ideas. Your assertiveness and ability to convince others of the merits of your ideas will grow your influence throughout your company.

Finally, you know how to enhance your expression by presenting yourself as vocal, insightful, and clear. You've learned actionable strategies for becoming more visible in meetings and other group settings by speaking up clearly. You know how to develop and share meaningful insights that will help guide group discussion. As you hone your ability to be succinct and polished in your speech, you'll become a more powerful communicator whose ideas are heard and valued.

Mastering these qualities won't happen overnight, but you will see progress more quickly than you probably think. Until now, many of these qualities may have remained a mystery to you, as they do to most people. Being commanding, decisive, or vocal may have seemed out of reach. But now you know how to cultivate these qualities step by step, and you can refer back to the various chapters as your blueprint for success as you move forward on this journey. Through continued practice, you'll gradually expand your comfort zone and capabilities until you are radiating executive presence in every scenario, no matter how high the stakes.

As you work to develop these nine executive presence competencies, you'll see your potential expand in a way you may never have imagined. Your influence will grow in every direction, causing senior leaders, coworkers, and peers in other functions to look to you for ideas and guidance. New doors will open all around you as a result. It will be up to you to decide which ones to walk through. Strive to know yourself fully as you undergo this incredible transformative process, so you can make the decisions that bring you to where you truly want

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to be. But first, to prepare you to embark on this journey, let's take a look at one barrier that can hold back your development of any EP competency, and how to surmount it.

## How Do You Undermine Your Executive Presence?

No one else can limit your executive presence or decide what is possible for you to achieve. You can only undermine it yourself—and when you decide to allow it to flourish, no one else can hold you back.

How are you limiting your executive presence right now, in your daily work? By now, you hopefully have a much better sense of which areas you need to grow in. Perhaps you are realizing that you back down too quickly when someone disagrees with you, which is undermining your influence (and thus, your authority). Perhaps you are realizing that you don't step up to the plate often enough when a situation calls for a strong leader, lessening your ability to be in command (and thus, your gravitas). Or perhaps you are not choosing your words carefully before you begin speaking, preventing you from being a clear communicator and undermining your expression. It's vital to come to all of these realizations, and then to forge a pathway forward. But along the way, you'll find that the greatest obstacles are within. To overcome these challenges, you need to confront the greatest barrier of all: internal limiting beliefs. Let's take a close look at what these beliefs are, and how they undermine your executive presence.

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You'll find that the greatest obstacles are within.

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### The biggest barrier to executive presence is self-doubt.

Internal limiting beliefs are the thoughts and preconceptions you have about yourself, which guide your behavior. Our internal limiting beliefs can be incredibly powerful even when they are based on false premises. Often, though, people aren't even aware of what their limiting beliefs actually are—and they remain oblivious to how these limiting beliefs are hindering their executive presence.

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These beliefs have an especially strong hold on us when we don't consciously recognize them. Many people go through life being controlled by their internal limiting beliefs without becoming aware of them and realizing that they are false, and that the real issue lies in their self-confidence. To flourish as a leader with executive presence, you need to meet these beliefs head-on to challenge, unpack, and overcome them.

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Learning to move beyond self-doubt by focusing on their positive qualities is key to overcoming imposter syndrome and showing up as a leader with executive presence.

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## Tania Taps Into Her Strengths as a Leader

### **Problem:**

Tania had been a graphic designer before becoming creative director of her department, and she'd never gone through formal leadership training of any kind. Unfortunately, her technical prowess didn't translate into managerial success.

She always sounded tentative about speaking up in meetings, and unsure of herself when she did. Even her direct reports characterized her as meek and unassertive. She would overanalyze a decision to no end, requesting input from everyone else but not sharing any of her own. Tania spoke in a quiet voice that lacked conviction, which didn't inspire much confidence in her direct reports. She lacked authority and urgently needed to develop it in order to effectively lead. But deep within, she felt she was naturally not a confident, authoritative leader and could never develop executive presence.

However, Tania had a number of positive qualities as well. She knew how to prepare well for a project and how to keep the workflow organized, since she'd been deeply immersed in the process for years herself. Thus, she knew how to direct her team. She just needed to trust herself to do it, and to learn to give directives rather than soft-spoken suggestions. She also had an inner passion for the work that did reveal itself to those who knew her well.

### **Action:**

Through executive coaching, Tania learned to identify and challenge the false beliefs she held about her own abilities. She agreed to practice putting a stake in the ground for the smaller decisions and to work her way up to the big ones. She also promised to use her impeccable organizational skills to prepare her thoughts on key agenda topics *before*

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meetings. Through coaching on how to effectively make decisions, she learned to stop trying to gain 100% of the information every time she made a choice. She learned to trust her gut and gain input from a few people instead of fifteen. She also practiced using language that conveyed authority, such as saying “I know” rather than “I think” and cutting out filler phrases before getting to her main point.

## **Results:**

Tania’s boss confided that while he’d had some initial concerns about her ability to lead, these improvements had blown him away. Tania’s team became more energized than ever, fueled by her contagious enthusiasm for the work—which she’d now learned to convey to all those around her. She’d overcome her internal limiting beliefs to truly thrive as a leader with a growing executive presence.

You may possess deep-seated feelings of inadequacy that keep you locked into the same unhealthy thinking patterns, which translates into behaviors that undermine your executive presence. Everyone has experienced the limiting power of self-doubt at one time or another in their career. These internal thoughts can have a major impact on your career success, unless you correct them. They can bring your ability to develop executive presence to a halt, preventing you from trying new things and stepping out of your comfort zone.

Remember that one of the core competencies of executive presence is confidence. All of the other eight competencies actually rely on confidence as a foundation. It is very difficult to be commanding, charismatic, bold, decisive, and vocal (to name a few) if you don’t have a strong foundation of confidence.

While it’s important to think critically about the areas you need to develop, you need a strong foundation of confidence to actually be able to take action. And that confidence comes from healthy, balanced self-talk that acknowledges and celebrates your strengths.

“Self-doubt is the mortal enemy of executive presence,” says Chris Westfall in Forbes.<sup>cxxxii</sup> However, you can counteract insecure thinking with another point of view, as he notes. Most of us have multiple perspectives of our own skills and talents. Often we tune into the self-doubting voice rather than the soft, still one that says, “You’ve done incredible things before. You have what it takes.” However, it’s still there, and you can encourage it to speak more loudly by genuinely tuning into what it has to say. Imagine how a trusted friend or colleague who knows your work well would speak to you. What assurances would they give about your performance and potential? Give this reassurance to yourself, and really take it in.

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**Self-doubt is the mortal enemy of executive presence.**

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

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## Jeanette Takes a Seat at the Table

### **Problem:**

Jeanette, an HR director, was at a meeting with all the company VPs and the CEO. The VPs left to discuss something for 10 minutes. Jeanette went over to the CEO to ask him a question about the agenda and sat in the chair next to him. As the VPs began coming back into the room, she started to get up to give her seat back to them. However, the CEO said, "Stay where you are." He saw her and valued her. He didn't feel she needed to leave her seat at the table.

Jeanette didn't yet see herself in the same way the CEO saw her. She began to realize that how she presented herself—what space she felt she could take up, and how—reflected her level of confidence. While a select few people like the CEO might see her actual competencies despite her lack of confidence, most would not. She needed to portray confidence in order to inspire others to feel confidence in her.

### **Action:**

In future meetings, Jeanette began arriving early and taking a seat by a high-level leader. As they chatted before the meeting, she spoke to them like peers rather than superiors. She sounded more relaxed and sparked genuine conversation about their current projects and areas of interest. She casually mentioned important developments in her own work.

### **Results:**

Jeanette had changed her own mindset so that she was no longer viewing these leaders as more important than herself, but as peers. In doing so, she'd claimed a real seat at the table.

Think of the situations that bring up feelings of self-doubt for you. Chances are, you experience self-doubt when in meetings with people who are more influential and powerful than you. This self-doubt destabilizes your executive presence, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

How can you be fully in your power in a room full of strong, confident leaders?

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Be fully in your power  
in a room full of  
strong, confident leaders?

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You probably already have some level of confidence in your skill set and expertise. You might even rate your technical prowess very highly. Now you need to translate that confidence into the ability to command a room and influence senior leaders.

## Gunther Grows His Presentation Skills

### **Problem:**

Gunther had a strong belief in his technical knowledge and abilities. In fact, his peers recently rated him a 9.5 out of 10 in terms of skill level. When he spoke to senior leaders, though, his confidence plummeted.

He felt like he couldn't articulate his ideas, or even formulate them. Later on, he would think of the perfect thing to say—but it was too late. He began clamping up in those interactions. His confidence level and executive presence were about a 3 out of 10.

After one particularly unsuccessful encounter, his boss called him into her office. "I didn't just invite you to that meeting to give you a chance to build a rapport with a senior leader," she said. "I knew you could actually explain the project results better than I could. You know that stuff like the back of your hand. There's no one I'd trust more to relay that info—not even myself."

### **Action:**

Gunther's boss didn't give up on him just yet. A week later, she asked him to pretend she was a senior leader and to prepare to deliver a three-minute overview of project results to her. Gunther spent fifteen minutes outlining his thoughts beforehand, as directed. Then he went to her office and delivered the report. His boss gave him pointers on strengthening his performance, and he tried it again. "That was excellent. You are ready," she told him.

His boss invited him to present the project update at a senior-level meeting later that week. He realized he'd felt a bit silly about the idea of role-playing before, but now he knew it was critical to growing his confidence. He practiced with two of his peers,

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inviting them to ask him tough questions that leaders might pose. He had a solid response to each of them.

## **Results:**

Finally the moment came. Gunther stepped into the conference room and took a seat at the table. He reminded himself that he deserved to be there, as senior leaders needed his knowledge and perspective. It wasn't a personal favor to him. It was for the good of the company. When Gunther's turn to speak came, he eloquently delivered his message. The leaders sounded truly appreciative as they thanked him for sharing his thoughts, and he knew he'd nailed it. He also felt much less nervous about the idea of doing that again! Something had shifted for him. Gunther had begun projecting executive presence, and now that he knew he could carry himself with it, his self-doubt continued to subside.

The success you've experienced thus far in your career may have relied on your expertise and technical knowledge. Your future success, however, will draw much more upon your confidence and ability to lead, influence others, and exude a strong executive presence. Like the clients in these case studies, you need to realize that you deserve a seat at the table. You're there for a reason, not by happenstance. You bring a great deal of value, and you are needed there.

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You deserve a seat at the table.

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The movie *Hoosiers* shares a great lesson about recognizing your own capabilities. A small-town basketball team that has only played for home-town crowds in very small locations holding 30 to 50 people makes it all the way to the state finals. They'll be playing for a crowd of twenty thousand, against bigger, far more accomplished players. They're understandably petrified. Their coach brings them to the gigantic arena where they'll be playing and asks them to stand on a chair and measure the hoop's height. They tell him its ten feet high. Their coach then asks them how tall the hoop in their home gym is. Ten feet, they tell him. There's no difference between playing at home and playing here in front of tens of thousands of people, he's showing them.

Every leader needs to learn the same lesson as these small-town high school basketball players. There's no difference between talking with a peer and talking with a senior leader in the board room, unless you *allow* there to be a difference. The players in *Hoosiers* remembered that they were on that court for a reason, just as you're at the table for a reason. Seize the moment by showing your fellow leaders that you have the confidence to speak to them as equals.

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## Imposter syndrome

Many people experience imposter syndrome as they move up to a new position with increased responsibilities. This especially shows up when leaders advance quickly, taking on new roles

and identities that they don't quite feel confident about filling—even if they were quite confident in their previous position. They feel like they don't quite belong in the new role or trust themselves to carry it out. Feeling like an imposter seriously undermines their ability to exude executive presence. It's hard to radiate gravitas, carry yourself with an aura of authority, or express yourself powerfully when you don't truly believe you deserve to be where you are today.

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Over 70% of the U.S. population has experienced imposter syndrome

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This dilemma is incredibly common: Over 70% of the U.S. population has experienced imposter syndrome (IS), a study in the *Journal of Behavioral Science* says.<sup>cxxxii</sup> Most of us will experience it at one point or another. However, some people work through it as they begin to fully identify with their new role, while for others, it lingers for months or even years.

Psychologists Suzanne Imes and Pauline Rose Clance first described imposter syndrome in the 1970s. It often causes high-level achievers to attribute their success more to luck than to skill, leaving them afraid of being found out a fraud.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> If you have imposter syndrome, you may find yourself suddenly lacking confidence even if you had it in your previous role. Here are some of the symptoms you may experience as a result.

- Feeling incompetent to fulfill your new role
- Experiencing self-doubt
- Lacking conviction
- Feeling insecure
- Believing you don't deserve to be here
- Not speaking up (even if you used to do so)

You may lose trust in yourself, even if you used to trust your intuition and speak your mind. To some people, that experience itself can feel disorienting. A negative feedback loop begins: They feel anxious about the fact that they are experiencing imposter syndrome, believing this signals that something is wrong. This solidifies the idea that they are out of place in the new role, which can cause their imposter syndrome to linger for much longer than necessary. That's a major reason why so many leaders who have risen to higher level positions haven't mastered the competencies of executive presence that will allow them to thrive in the role.

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For women, imposter syndrome can be especially consequential: In an internal study, Hewlett-Packard found that women only apply for a job if they feel they fit 100% of the requirements, whereas men apply if they have 60% of the expected competencies.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> That suggests women are far more likely to feel unprepared for their leadership roles than men, even if in reality they have at least as strong a skill set. Further, in *Cracking the Code*, Sylvia Ann Hewlett found that multicultural leaders are less likely to have support from their superiors in developing their leadership competencies, which places them at a disadvantage.<sup>cxxxv</sup> Intentionally working to cultivate executive presence is therefore of the utmost important for women, people of color, and anyone else who doesn't fit the traditional mold of a leader! As you grow your executive presence, you'll increase your sense of belonging in every context and trust yourself to step into higher-level roles with grace and skill.

## Do you have imposter syndrome?

Dr. Clance came up with a scale called the Imposter Test for assessing whether you have imposter syndrome.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> A positive response to statements like the following would support the presence of IS.

- “When I’ve succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.”
- “I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.”
- “If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I’ve accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I’ve done.”
- “I’m afraid people important to me may find out that I’m not as capable as they think I am.”

Do these statements resonate with you? If so, it’s time to address your imposter syndrome so it doesn’t hold back your executive presence.

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Imposter syndrome can appear  
despite an abundance of evidence of high achievement.

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## Orla Overcomes Imposter Syndrome

### **Problem:**

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Orla had been a powerhouse in her previous role as a manager. Driven and capable, she fired her team up to achieve more than they believed possible. But when she received a promotion to a prestigious position, Orla felt shaken.

Even though she'd proven her strong leadership skills, she began to doubt her ability to handle the new responsibilities. It involved a lot of strategic planning and collaboration with high-level people. Could she really demonstrate the high-level visionary thinking needed for the new role?

As she stepped into the position of director, she felt out of place. The transition had destabilized her nascent executive presence, causing her to show up as self-doubting and indecisive as well as quieter and less bold than normal. She was good at managing her team, but she felt deeply anxious about the idea of having to eloquently present a strategy to the CEO. Maybe they'd jumped the gun in promoting her, she thought. At meetings with other higher-level leaders, she still felt like a subordinate. She second-guessed her thoughts, causing her to rarely speak up.

## **Action:**

One of the other directors invited her to lunch one day. "I know this position is a big leap from your previous role," he said. "It felt pretty daunting for me when I stepped into this role. Just know that we've all been there, and we understand. But you were chosen for a reason. I'm here to support you in learning this new role, and I know you're going to master it sooner than you might think."

Orla realized that she had imposter syndrome—and that it was totally normal. But she didn't have to stay in that mentality. She began to embrace the idea that she would soon feel comfortable in the new role, and until then, she could trust her new mentors to give her advice and guidance. She began to voice her ideas in strategic discussions and to weigh in on others' proposals. After a few weeks, she was excitedly debating ideas and finding it easier to trust her intuition on big decisions. She followed the lead of her fellow leaders, emulating their positive attributes like big-picture thinking and listening to their gut reaction—and it paid off.

## **Results:**

Orla now felt like she belonged in the position of director. She knew others appreciated her presence, and she'd begun exuding executive presence no matter who was at the table. She'd also learned that it was okay to be vulnerable by talking about what she was going through with her peers, because they'd all been there before.

As this story shows, being comfortable in some contexts doesn't translate into being comfortable in higher-level contexts where the stakes are higher. You must work to gradually

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increase your confidence in the new environment—hopefully with support from a colleague or mentor. Remember that imposter syndrome is completely normal, and everyone in your new peer group probably felt that way at one point or another. Imposter syndrome is not logical, either—like yourself, each of those people was promoted for a reason and was probably quite capable of the job. In fact, imposter syndrome can appear despite an abundance of evidence of high achievement. It can appear despite excellent performance reviews, strong credibility and respect, and actual authority. Despite all of this evidence, it keeps you stuck in an *illogical* fixation on your insecurities.

"It's hard to encourage someone's glaring talent, achievement, and creativity when it doesn't jibe with the mentee's self-perceptions of potential and performance," write W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith in *Harvard Business Review*, speaking of how to mentor someone with imposter syndrome.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> This individual's beliefs don't align with the reality. Learning to move beyond self-doubt by focusing on their positive qualities is key to overcoming imposter syndrome and showing up as a leader with executive presence.

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When you doubt your own experience and impact, you sabotage your own executive presence.

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Do you find yourself doubting your own abilities despite abundance evidence of your competence? When you doubt your own experience, impact, or whether you deserve that promotion, you sabotage your own

executive presence. It's hard to even see whether you have executive presence qualities. Through the lens of imposter syndrome, you'll think you don't have them. However, once you lift the veil of imposter syndrome, you'll see that you *do* have many of the qualities of executive presence. Look to your past performance, abilities, talents, and accomplishments. They will speak the truth to you.

You may realize that you display executive presence in certain situations where you feel more comfortable, but not in newer situations that intimidate you. When you find yourself among others with more power, influence, and authority than you, your executive presence may decline. However, you still possess those qualities. So, where does your executive presence go when you're in front of that intimidating group? What veil do you place over it?

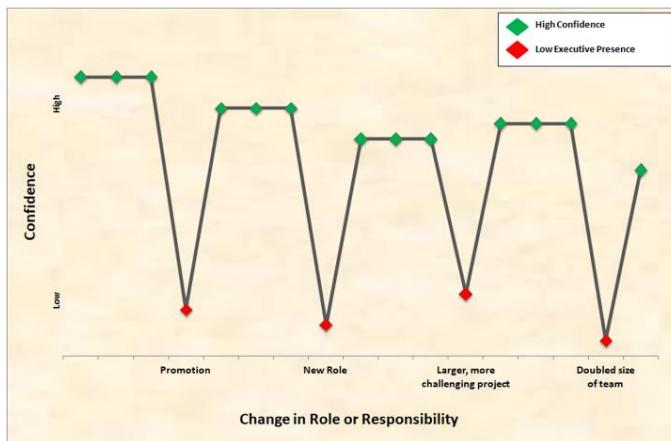
In these moments of self-doubt, you are filtering inward. You are listening to the fearful voice inside and reverting to a childlike mentality that urges you to hide who you are out of self-protection. Over time, imposter syndrome can be a self-fulfilling prophecy that causes you to act as though you're less capable than you truly are, unless you take initiative to work through it.

Conversely, leaders with high self-efficacy inspire others to have confidence in them. That's why overcoming your imposter syndrome is so critical. To truly radiate executive presence, you need to believe you deserve to be where you are today.

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Imposter syndrome can be a self-fulfilling prophecy that causes you to act as though you're less capable than you truly are, unless you take initiative to work through it.

EP Confidence Model



The above graph shows how executive presence can rise and fall in conjunction with career advancement. What's happening here? As soon as you master your current job, where you were feeling quite confident, a new opportunity arises. Imposter syndrome kicks in immediately, creating a tremendous amount of doubt and insecurity. With each change in role or responsibility, you lose confidence, and from that place of doubt, you are less inclined to utilize your executive presence competencies. You aren't as bold, decisive, and confident while working from this place of doubt. The doubt acts as a restraint that prevents you from using your EP qualities. You feel vulnerable and unprepared, so you shrink into a more timid version of yourself.

Here are examples of situations where this could happen:

- You are promoted to a new level and feel intimidated about fully showing up with C-level executives. In turn, they perceive you as lacking EP.
- You accept a new position and then feel unsure of yourself in this bigger and more challenging role. You become unassertive and soft-spoken, and coworkers view you as lacking EP.
- You embark on a bigger, more challenging project and feel unable to carry it out well. You feel you've bitten off more than you can chew, and in turn, you come across as lacking EP.
- You double the size of your team and feel you lack the competence to lead people, so your team sees you as lacking EP.

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In any of these situations, you may feel like you don't deserve to be where you are today. You feel exposed, as if others can see how much you don't know, or you fear that they'll find out. In actuality, you possess all the skills needed to succeed—and the following action steps will help you start believing it.

Some of the world's most talented people have experienced imposter syndrome: Meryl Streep, David Bowie, Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, and tennis star Serena Williams, to name just a few.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Meryl Streep has said that she's thought, "Why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don't know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?"<sup>cxxxix</sup> She's won 3 Academy Awards (nominated 21 times) and 8 Golden Globes (nominated 31 times), but higher-level accomplishments often leave people feeling flummoxed about how they ever made it that far. For many, it's hard to internalize the idea that they made it there with their own hard work and talent—not by luck.

Imposter syndrome often strikes people who don't fit the traditional mold of the corporate leader, such as women and people of color. They often have to work extra hard to overcome fears about how others will perceive them so their executive presence can truly shine. That's partly because they frequently lack mentors and advocates who can give them personalized guidance that helps them to fully cultivate their leadership presence. Women of color are particularly likely to lack sponsors in the workplace.<sup>cxl</sup> Coupled with the fact that they don't fit into the stereotypical mold of a white male leader, they may doubt that others will ever actually perceive them as a high-level leader.

## What to do when imposter syndrome strikes.

Don't let imposter syndrome control you. Start owning your abilities and embracing the chance to let your executive presence shine in a more challenging role. These tips will help you do just that.

- **Remind yourself of the specific skills that got you to where you are today.** Your intelligence, strengths, and probably certain EP competencies brought you to where you are now. Before, while you were in the mastery-of-your-job stage, you didn't feel tentative, and you shouldn't act that way now.
- **Adopt the attitude that *I deserve to be here*.** Let this realization in—there is no difference between who you were before and who you are today. The stakes are higher, the people around you are more powerful, the projects are bigger, but the work is not that different. The same goes for the people you manage—it's not that different than before, just larger and higher-profile.
- **Know that your feelings are normal.** Remind yourself that the most talented people of every rank in the corporate world and elsewhere have experienced imposter syndrome. If

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you are sitting at a meeting with ten people, realize that seven of them are experiencing imposter syndrome.<sup>cxl</sup>

- **Learn to lean on your executive presence.** The further you go in your career, the more opportunities you'll encounter for imposter syndrome to emerge, *and the more you'll need to have executive presence to leverage*. You'll need to lean on a strong EP *especially* when your confidence is waning. Bring the 9 EP competencies into the new situation. Let them give you a foundation of confidence. If you were decisive before, why can't you be decisive now? If you were confident before, why can't you be confident now? Really, what is different? Remember that when you had achieved mastery of your prior role (before promotion), you weren't hesitant or unsure—and you shouldn't be now.
- **Step outside of your comfort zone in smaller and then bigger ways.** Only by testing your own limits can you prove to yourself that you're fully capable of your new role. Ask yourself, "What's one step I can take today to increase my comfort zone?" As you start adopting bolder behaviors in this new context and witnessing your success, your confidence will grow—and soon the imposter syndrome will fade away.
- **Project confidence even when you don't feel it.** The world doesn't need to know you're nervous. Use strategies for appearing confident despite your anxiety, like slowing the cadence of your speech so it doesn't sound hurried.
- **Surround yourself with people who reflect your strengths back to you.** Even if you're not around them all the time, they'll have a positive effect on you. Go to lunch with a supportive mentor or colleague who will affirm your ability to handle your new role.
- **Assemble a "board of directors" for your own career.** These should be experienced people with the wisdom and insights to guide you in the right direction and clue you in about how you need to grow, says Tania Katan, author of *Creative Trespassing*.<sup>cxl</sup>
- **Challenge harmful self-talk with evidence of the truth,** as W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith say in HBR.<sup>cxl</sup> Remind yourself that you at first lacked confidence in prior roles or opportunities, but confidence and competency always followed. Even though you feel as if you don't belong due to this new change in role or responsibility, eventually this will shift and you'll move from self-doubt to self-assurance.

Share the same advice with any direct reports who are struggling with imposter syndrome, and look out for self-despairing statements. "Quite often, mentees struggling with imposter syndrome offer telltale blanket assessments of their capacity or performance," say Johnson and Smith. "Stay attuned to vague self-downing comments such as: 'I am so stupid!' 'I totally botched that presentation!' or 'I have no business being in this job!'" Then counteract them with evidence of your mentee's true capabilities. "In these moments, stick with the data, stay concrete, and work to create dissonance between the evidence and your mentee's self-statements," the authors urge.

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Confident leaders have the conviction to advocate for their ideas even in new situations that might make them uncomfortable.

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even when someone with more authority could push back. Others might disagree with them, but they'll gain their respect. As you overcome the self-doubts that are holding you back, you'll become a candid and persuasive leader even when working with higher-level people. As you internalize your belief in your own executive presence competencies, they will become more fully a part of your identity. It won't matter who else is in the room—you're still *you*, radiating gravitas, authority, and expression. That's the power of executive presence when you've truly mastered it: It's with you always, guiding you to present yourself as a powerful and influential leader.

Now let's examine how behaviors that undermine your executive presence hold you back when executives are discussing the next promotion. We'll take a look at the kind of conversations they have about leaders' self-sabotaging behavior so you can understand how this plays out in these critical moments.

**"I wish I could promote you, BUT you lack executive presence ..."**

Imagine a talent review meeting where leaders are discussing who is most deserving of the next promotion. Your advocate speaks of several positive qualities you possess. Then someone else steps in, noting that while you do have some strong competencies, you lack executive presence.

To change their perception of you, you need to understand the "BUT" behaviors that are undermining your executive presence competencies. These BUT behaviors shape others' perceptions of you as a person without executive presence. They're the behaviors that senior leaders mention at talent review meetings when they say, "I wish I could promote this person, BUT ..."

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BUT behaviors shape others' perceptions of you as a person without executive presence.

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**Here are some extremely common BUT behaviors that I've seen with my clients:**

1. Technically competent, **BUT** doesn't take command of a situation.
2. Excellent with customers and clients, **BUT** doesn't communicate clearly and succinctly with senior leaders.
3. Highly intelligent and smart, **BUT** is rigid, not poised, or hesitant when speaking.

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4. Knows the business inside and out, **BUT** isn't willing to take charge when decisions need to be made.
5. Performs well, **BUT** won't make bold decisions or put a stake in the ground and own a position.

These clients needed to take action to overcome their BUT behaviors so they could move forward in their career.

As you've gone through each of the nine chapters about the key competencies of executive presence, you've learned about many "BUT" behaviors. All of the undesirable behaviors of leaders who lack each of those competencies are "BUT" behaviors that will sabotage career success. You've probably reflected quite a bit on your own as you've read this book.

## **What are your "BUT" behaviors that limit your executive presence?**

Write down the top 6 behaviors that undermine your EP.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

→ Circle the top two that most limit your executive presence.

**Write down an action step to take to improve one of these two behaviors:**

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Consider action steps that can help you shift your self-perception in regard to this behavior. An action step should be achievable in the short-term—something you can do *now*, not something you might build up to doing in three months. Thus, action steps can help you begin challenging the self-doubts that had led to your BUT behavior today. For example, if you have trouble feeling bold (and thus, presenting yourself as bold), vow to voice one bold idea in your next

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low-stakes meeting with your own team. Aim to make a bold statement in each weekly team meeting going forward, even if it's half-baked. Have fun with it! Practice making a declarative statement that voices your complete support for a controversial idea, or pitching an outside-of-the-box suggestion. As you hear yourself making statements like these in a low-pressure setting, you'll realize you have what it takes to be bold—and you'll get practice in delivering your message.

You'll remain undervalued (and overlooked) as long as you keep engaging in your BUT behaviors. Prioritize your action steps for overcoming them in your daily work. There is nothing more important to your career.

Shifting others' perception of you begins within yourself. "Your perception of yourself is critical—not the perception you project to others or the way you are perceived, but how you perceive you," writes Ellevate Network in Forbes. It all begins with conquering your imposter syndrome and insecurities.

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You'll remain undervalued (and overlooked)  
as long as you keep engaging in your BUT behaviors.

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## Laid-Back Lawrence Learns to Grow Charisma

### **Problem:**

Lawrence, who had held a mid-level management position for the past five years, was intelligent and good at problem-solving. He'd quietly averted several crises in the past few months with his quick-thinking and innovativeness. However, his laid-back personality didn't attract a lot of attention.

He rarely seemed very excited about a project. When he stepped into a room, people seldom approached him to ask for his input or discuss an idea, even though his wealth of knowledge and experience could really benefit them. He lacked charisma and a commanding presence that would make people want to hear his thoughts.

In meetings, Lawrence rarely pushed his own agenda or asserted his opinions. He tended to go with the flow, and he didn't recognize his own need to play a role in defining that "flow." Because he didn't appear to have a strong belief in his own ideas or enthusiasm for team projects, he lacked gravitas. In a crisis, his team wouldn't look to him for solutions with trust and confidence. And because he lacked decisiveness, boldness, and influence, he lacked authority.

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## Action:

Lawrence actually did have some great insights, though. He first needed to learn to recognize them and to give himself space to cultivate them. So, he took time for big-picture reflection every Friday afternoon. He then began to feel more confident in his own ideas, which gave him more excitement about his work. As he began to share his ideas more vocally, it triggered a positive feedback loop. People responded positively to his assertions and insights, which made him feel more confident and enthusiastic about sharing. Over the next six months, he worked to strengthen his competencies in each of the three EP domains.

## Results:

His team's energy level and motivation increased substantially. When he took part in a meeting, the atmosphere felt noticeably different, even though he did much more listening than talking. At one time, Lawrence never would have thought he could become a charismatic leader with executive presence, but he'd made great strides toward that goal—and now his boss was finally beginning to talk about advancement.

Like each of these clients in these case studies, consider your own fatal flaws. How are your own internal limiting beliefs undermining your executive presence? These self-sabotaging behaviors can put a halt to your career progression. They can deprive you of the opportunity for job fulfillment, leaving you stuck in a position that doesn't fully leverage your talents and allow you to enjoy your work. It's time to overcome them, and the answer is self-awareness.

## Moving past doubt by deepening self-awareness.

Cultivating a deep level of self-awareness plays a vital role in transcending your internal limiting beliefs. Self-awareness allows you to see yourself as you truly are, rather than in an overly positive or negative light. It lets you know when you have an overly critical thought or fall into an unhealthy thinking pattern that you've been working to step out of. Likewise, it allows you to see where there's work to be done.

There are four key dimensions of deepening your self-awareness. Work to become aware of how you project (or don't project) executive presence in each of these dimensions of your working life.

- The image you present.
- The opinions you share.
- The attitudes you convey.

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- The actions you take.

The impression you make and the reputation you cultivate in each of these ways will show the world that you either possess or lack executive presence.

Spending time reflecting on your BUT behaviors and taking action to correct them will heighten your self awareness over time. But don't only focus on the negative. Every day, give yourself positive reinforcement for the things you do well. Acknowledge them to yourself instead of letting them go by unnoticed. At the end of the day, think to yourself, "What were my three best moments today?" Do the same at the end of the week. Reflect on which moments stand out and why. When did you feel proud of your actions, or most courageous? Voice them to your partner, a close friend, or a family member. By recognizing these moments instead of letting them slip away, you'll affirm the idea that you can carry that courage with you from this point forward. As you recognize your small, everyday wins, you'll internalize a stronger sense of pride and accomplishment, and in turn, you'll project that in the image you present to the world, the words you share, the attitudes you convey, and the actions you take.

We've thoroughly examined what executive presence is, why it's so important, and what you do to undermine it in specific ways. We've looked closely at each of the nine competencies that make up the 3x3 Executive Presence Model, and you've reflected on your strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas. Hopefully you now have a strong idea of how you undermine your executive presence. Now it's time to assess whether others in your company, especially leaders, actually perceive you as someone who has an executive presence. Their impressions of you override your actual performance, so no matter how much you accomplish in your daily work, you need to shape the perceptions of all those around you by projecting a strong executive presence. We'll take a look at how to guide the perceptions of even the most influential people by reflecting on how they view you, asking for feedback, and acting upon it to radiate executive presence wherever you go.

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No matter how much you accomplish in your daily work, you need  
to shape the perceptions of all those around you  
by projecting a strong executive presence

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## Are You Perceived as Someone Who Has an Executive Presence?

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To be anointed as a leader with executive presence, you first have to be perceived as one.

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How do others in your company perceive you?

Do they see you as having a low or high degree of executive presence?

To be anointed as a leader with executive presence, you first have to be perceived as one. Executive presence is not a title that you give yourself; it is an honorary title bestowed upon you by colleagues, peers, and senior leaders because you have gained professional credibility and earned their respect. Let's take a deep dive now into the power of perception, which will help you evaluate whether other people in your company—especially influential leaders—perceive you as having executive presence.

Take a moment to consider how the specific leaders who make decisions about your career perceive YOU.

**How do others in your company perceive you? Are you seen as someone with executive presence?**

**Write down the names of eight people who will be sitting around the executive table discussing you at the next talent review meeting.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ 7. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. \_\_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_\_

Imagine that YOU are being discussed for ten minutes by these influential leaders and executives. They review the nine executive presence competencies and identify which ones you do well and which ones you most need to improve.

**Write down the three qualities that these influential leaders sitting around the table would choose as the ones that you need to improve.**

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**Write down the one competency they would choose that most needs improvement.**

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**How does having a low degree of this competency limit your success at work?**

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**Write down one commitment you'll make to improve this quality and infuse more of it into your work.**

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**Impressions override performance.**

For most of your career, you've been rewarded for good performance. How you perform has determined the level of success you experience in your company. You've been evaluated through the lens of your performance—the results, skills, abilities, and knowledge you bring. From day

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one of your career, you've embraced the mindset that says, "Let my work speak for itself. I'll just keep working hard and rely on my strong performance, and success will come." Up to a certain point in your career, this is 100% true. However, over time, a critical shift occurs: **Impressions override performance.**

The impressions you make become *more important than your actual performance*. The success you achieve becomes directly tied to the impressions you make on others, which is really about how others are perceiving you. The most successful leaders recognize that since they've already mastered performance, they now need to concentrate their efforts on making sure others perceive them as having a strong executive presence.

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The impressions you make become more important than your actual performance.

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**High Performance + Impression of Executive Presence = Most Successful Leaders**

Why is perception important? Everything you do is being observed and documented inside the brains of others. People are constantly judging, evaluating, and observing you. What they see, notice, and observe matters. Your peers, bosses, subordinates, customers, clients, and vendors are all consciously and unconsciously forming opinions of you. Maybe you never thought of how you are perceived by all of these groups—or maybe you try to avoid thinking about it as much as possible.

The spotlight is on you, whether or not you desire it. You may not want the spotlight to be on you, and you may pretend that it's not. Many leaders don't appreciate the fact that they are always on camera and the higher their level, the more people are watching their every move. But if you don't embrace this reality, it will come at the cost of your career success.

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Perceptions of competence  
are just as important for success  
as actual competence

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"Perceptions of competence are just as important for success as actual competence," asserts Jack Nasher in HBR.<sup>cxliv</sup> Perception matters because it's at the heart of many decisions that will be made about you. As you shape your executive presence, you are shaping

the perceptions others have of you. As you display the nine EP competencies, you instill the perception that you have a strong executive presence. People will begin to perceive you as embodying these behaviors.

Making these competencies outwardly visible is key to allowing your executive presence to shine. Here are a few examples of how invisible competencies can be made more visible.

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## COMPETENCIES VS. PERCEPTION

LACKING EP	DISPLAYING EP
You're decisive in making choices within your personal projects. You take smart risks that usually pay off. However, in meetings you go with the flow too much and often sound hesitant, so people don't perceive you as decisive.	You learn to be decisive in the points you make and ideas you advocate for during meetings. You don't give in so easily anymore; instead, you defend your position for as long as you can show evidence to back it up. Thus, others begin to actually see you as decisive.
You are eloquent and polished in all your written communications. Whether sending an email to your team or a report to senior leaders, you are clear and articulate, getting right to the point. When communicating face-to-face, however, you get nervous and ramble. You don't punctuate your important points to emphasize them, so they get lost in the muddle. People view you as inarticulate and unclear.	You learn to speak the same way you write: clearly and succinctly. Writing your ideas down first helps you voice them in a more compelling way. You realize that you had convinced yourself you could never be an eloquent speaker, and you push past that belief. You organize your thoughts for a meeting the same way you organize an email—and others begin to view you as clear and insightful as a result.
In your new leadership position, you motivate and inspire your direct reports. They see you as charming and funny; you're good at radiating optimism within your team. Among your coworkers and superiors, you feel more intimidated because they all seem so poised and accomplished. As a result, they don't see those positive qualities in you. In fact, you seem closed-off and unapproachable.	You spend time getting to know your colleagues and superiors one-on-one over coffee or lunch, so you can be yourself around them. You come to see them as people who struggle with many of the same challenges that you do. Thus, you loosen up in group settings and unleash more of your natural enthusiasm, charm, and ability to make people laugh. They come to perceive you as witty and charismatic—which you are!

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Others' *perceptions* of your competencies can differ greatly from your *actual* competencies. Making your competencies visible will help debunk and eradicate any false beliefs about your abilities that present you in a negative light. When you're not striving to make your competencies visible, others are consciously or unconsciously filling in the blank—and what they think may not be favorable.

## What perception do the most powerful and impactful people have of you?

Let's consider for a moment how the senior leaders in your organization view your executive presence, and why this is so critical.

Imagine your boss, boss's boss, and other key executives in company sitting around table, behind closed doors. They are all discussing YOU. They are evaluating you. Talking about you. Judging you.

What are they saying about you? Is it positive? Is it negative?

Are you seen as confident, charismatic, and commanding? Do these important people find you decisive, articulate, and insightful? Or do you fly under the radar, remaining invisible to them?

Some might have a blank page inside their mind when they think of you because they don't know you. If they don't know you, that's because you haven't been speaking up in ways that they can hear. When you don't speak up, these really important people don't know you. They don't understand what value you bring. They don't know your impact on the company—and they certainly don't view you as someone with executive presence. Instead, you are just a blank page.

As a blank page, you become just another "hidden leader" who is overlooked for opportunities, advancement, and recognition. Upping your executive presence makes you more known and valued, rather than hidden. It highlights your ability to command a room and motivate people to action. These leaders will see you as someone they can depend on to take the reins and drive your team to success, rather than someone who will hang back and see if someone else will step up to the plate.

Before we go into what they are saying about you at this meeting, do realize that each of these people often *prepare* for these meetings by asking others (both their peers and lower-level employees) for their opinion of you. This aggregated data often shows up at the talent review meetings. Thus, other people's opinions clearly matter a great deal to your career success.

These behind-closed-door meetings are important because it's where their perceptions of you are shared and debated. "The biggest decisions about your career are often made when you're

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not in the room,” says Davia Temin in Forbes.<sup>cxlv</sup> “Your professional fate is often determined in closed rooms where people are talking about—and evaluating—you, without the benefit of your input.”

This is also where bias occurs. It’s where senior leaders have a license to show favoritism. This is where the discussion about your peers can occur that results in their receiving the promotion you felt you deserved. These top execs are evaluating your capabilities and potential—often without having any concrete understanding of what you actually do and what you’ve achieved. You might imagine they carefully weigh the actual contributions of each person, but that’s rarely the case. They come in with their own preconceptions, and if you’re lucky, you have someone in your corner with whom you have a rapport. They’ll quickly dismiss anyone who doesn’t immediately catch their eye, relying heavily on “gut feel,” as Temin says.

In these conversations, they’re evaluating whether you’re a leader with executive presence. This can be a turning point in your career, determining whether you’ll step up to the next level or begin to falter. Seventy-eight percent of business leaders believe a lack of executive presence will hold a leader back from advancement, according to a survey by communications experts Sally Williamson & Associates.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

Set a conscious intent to make your EP competencies visible. You probably already embody some of them in at least certain contexts. You might move from good in one context to average or poor in another for any particular competency, however. In some contexts, you’re in your power, while in others, you give your power away. It’s time to make your EP competencies outwardly visible in every situation, not just a select few where you feel most comfortable.

In 360 reviews that I have conducted for a leader, one of their peers will often say, “I don’t believe this, but people *think* this.” The peers who know the leader best often see their best qualities—which others are missing. They understand the difference between truth and perception. However, the leader needs to make these positive qualities visible to *everyone*, not just their closest colleagues.

Most people aren’t going to study you closely in order to find out who the real *you* is. They take what they see at face value—and often, they don’t see a lot of who you are. When you have a chance to interact with leaders, make the most of it. Your touchpoints with senior leaders are limited, so you have to make a great impression each time you interact with them. Each interaction gives you a chance to shape their perception of you, so use it wisely.

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Research shows that people  
form impressions about a leader's competence  
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People form their impressions about a leader's competence quite quickly. "Research shows that people form impressions about a leader's competence in as little as half a minute," says Carmine Gallo in HBR. "This means, within seconds, listeners will decide whether you are trustworthy, and they will do it based on your body language and vocal attributes. What you say *and* how you say it are equally important."

As you build a reputation as a leader with executive presence, this is how influential people will see you:

- **Credible:** You are consistently competent, effective, and accurate.
- **Trustworthy:** Your words, deeds, and character are honest and authentic.
- **Respected:** You are highly regarded; people admire and look up to you.
- **Reliable:** You show people that they can depend on you to get the job done right and on time.

Others will know that when you're at the helm of a project or initiative, it's in capable hands. When you're leading the response to a crisis, they'll know you will steer the organization safely through stormy waters. Once you cultivate a strong executive presence, you'll establish yourself as one of the most dependable and competent people around.

## Ask for feedback to learn how you are perceived.

You may not yet recognize the ways in which you are undermining your own EP, which is why gaining feedback from people at different levels is so crucial. Ask your direct reports, boss, coworkers, clients, and peers from other departments how they would characterize your strengths and weaknesses in regard to each of the executive presence competencies. Their insights will help you to truly understand where you need to improve.

You may have received feedback in various forms already—but does it expressly pertain to EP? Having recently gone through a 360 review process or performance review doesn't necessarily deliver insights on executive presence. Instead, you need to ask specific questions about the nine executive presence competencies.

Asking for feedback can feel challenging. It requires you to make yourself vulnerable, as the truth can be hard to hear. However, it becomes a positive and enriching experience when you reframe how you view feedback. The act of asking for feedback about your executive presence makes you appear stronger than if you were to shrink from it. And taking initiative to solicit feedback on your own feels much more empowering than having someone confront you about an issue. Most leaders find that when they ask for feedback, people are appreciative of the

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chance to voice their opinions. They also appreciate the concern those leaders are showing for their emotions and experiences. Relationships and trust grow stronger as a result.

People who feel a false sense of security and don't see the benefit of feedback will feel and act more defensive, resistant, and closed-off. They will grow more slowly, put limitations on their career success, and restrict the quality of the contributions they make to their organizations.

In contrast, leaders who are committed to self-development and self-awareness understand the importance of seeking out feedback about their executive presence competencies, and they appreciate receiving it. They are proactive about seeking out feedback, rather than simply waiting for it. As leaders, they make others around them feel comfortable sharing feedback that is direct and candid. As a result, they gain an accurate assessment of their strengths and areas for improvement. As you welcome feedback, you'll learn exactly how you need to continue fine-tuning your performance to establish yourself as a leader with executive presence. This is why self-aware individuals are a powerful asset to the organization: They encourage feedback because they want to grow. They look for opportunities to expand their abilities and provide support to those around them.

Everyone benefits when providing feedback becomes part of the company culture. A work environment that strongly supports and endorses a high degree of feedback will directly improve each person's effectiveness. Thus, all employees should seek open and honest conversations regarding their performance and ability to manage—especially leaders.

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It would be easier to fly under the radar, but by asking for feedback and acting on it, you choose the bold course of moving past your comfort zone and tackling new challenges.

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experienced in offering and getting feedback. Experience does, however, give us the advantage of knowing that we can survive the exposure and uncertainty, and that it's worth the risk." Because it takes courage to ask for others' honest opinions, requesting feedback shows courage as well. It would be easier to fly under the radar, but by asking for feedback and acting on it, you choose the bold course of moving past your comfort zone and tackling new challenges.

Self-developed and self-aware leaders have enough self-esteem and confidence not to be intimidated or fearful about what the feedback might reveal. They don't allow their egos to get in the way of feedback. As your EP grows, you'll feel less and less afraid of hearing feedback.

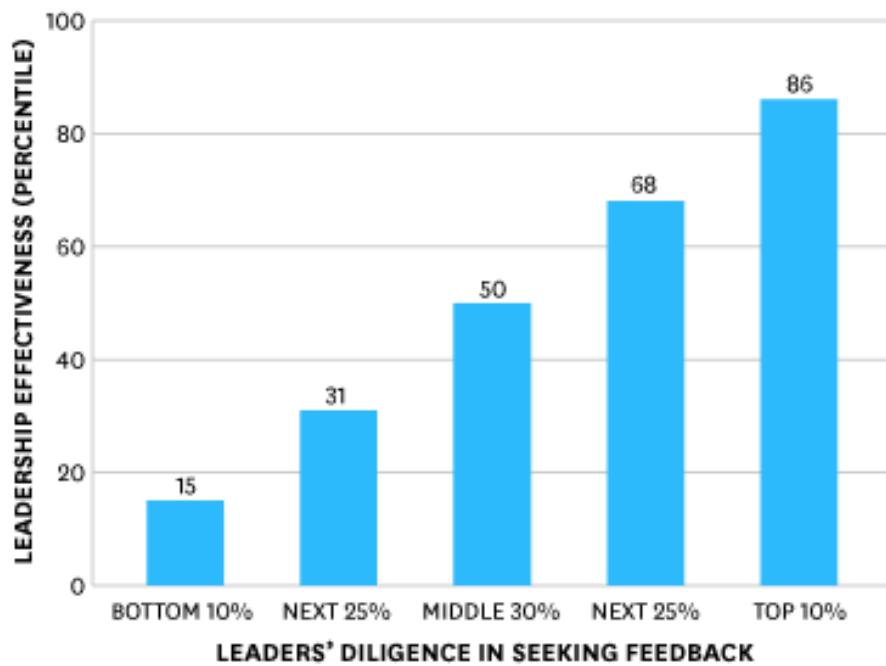
The higher you advance in an organization, the more people you'll have working for you. Your subordinates will work best and want to give you the most when they feel they can trust you and are able to share their honest feelings with you. As a leader, you'll receive powerful

Asking for feedback takes courage. "Vulnerability is at the heart of the feedback process," says Brené Brown.<sup>cxlvii</sup> "This is true whether we give, receive, or solicit feedback. And the vulnerability doesn't go away even if we're trained and

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feedback from them that directly informs how to best guide your employees to reach their full potential.

## BETTER LEADERS ASK FOR MORE FEEDBACK



SOURCE ZENGER/FOLKMAN

HBR.ORG

In a study of nearly 52,000 executives, Zenger Folkman found that leaders who routinely ask for feedback achieve a far better performance than those who don't.<sup>cxlviii</sup> The top 10% that most effectively asks for feedback ranked in the 86th percentile in terms of their leadership ability, the study found.

Moreover, the feedback you ask for is more effective than the feedback you don't ask for, Gallup has found. Asking, "Can you give me some feedback?" inspires feelings of good will, which allows for a more productive conversation, Gallup explains.<sup>cxlix</sup> "Those words can immediately create a trusting atmosphere in which feedback is exchanged and processed effectively." Only 26% of employees say they get useful feedback from coworkers, the organization has found—and that's partly because they're not asking for it.

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## Brandy Re-Brands Herself as a Leader

### **Problem:**

Brandy had the sneaking suspicion that others didn't think as highly of her leadership skills as she had once believed. She knew she projected confidence in meetings and maintained strong communication with her team, so she felt at a loss about what the problem might be. So, we conducted a 360-degree feedback review that solicited input from direct reports, colleagues, and superiors.

Brandy acted completely oblivious to others' reactions in meetings, respondents said. Rather than glancing around the room to note people's body language, she droned on and on about her opinions. She talked over people and interrupted incessantly. Sometimes she would think aloud without having a real point to make. These behaviors undermined others' perception of her, making her seem less insightful than she actually was and minimizing the impact of her words.

Further, Brandy often lacked follow-through with projects. She fell short on taking full accountability and often dropped the ball, undermining her gravitas. Because she didn't follow through, she didn't project the persona of a confident and commanding leader.

### **Action:**

Alongside those negative qualities, I pinpointed some positive ones as well. Brandy had a fairly high comfort level in terms of speaking up in meetings. She was a highly verbal, communicative person who did in fact check in on her direct reports every day, giving them clear (albeit overly verbose) feedback. She tended to make a much better impression in one-on-ones than in meetings; coworkers felt more comfortable interrupting her in a discussion over coffee than at a meeting.

Brandy felt very discouraged at first when hearing 360 feedback about her performance in meetings, but I assured her that she possessed some strong positive qualities as well. We determined that she fell short on accountability because she became frequently overwhelmed with the number of meetings and mundane tasks on her schedule. We restructured her workload with priority on high-importance projects. When checking in with her direct reports, she focused on more succinctly reminding them of project workflow requirements. She learned to listen as much as she talked, too, which meant she could clarify areas of confusion to ensure tasks got done on time. She also began learning to speak down in meetings, which allowed her to speak with more clarity and precision.

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## **Results:**

These changes greatly enhanced Brandy's gravitas and expression. Her coworkers, direct reports, and boss all noticed improvements within weeks. Her peers and subordinates found her far more approachable and much more effective as a leader, and she proved herself to be someone whom seniors leaders could count on to get the job done.

## **How to get feedback on your executive presence**

To get beneficial feedback on your EP, you need to ask specific questions. Don't just ask whether you do well in meetings—ask *what* you do well and what you need to improve. Don't settle for general answers, either. Instead, ask follow-up questions that provide clarification.

Begin by writing down the names of five people you will contact to get their perspectives in a feedback conversation—your boss, a senior leader, your boss's boss, a peer. Email them right now to set up a meeting for this week or next.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Then, consider how to approach the conversation for best results. Prepare thoughtful questions on the following topics so you'll get the information you're seeking.

## **Questions on your overall level of EP**

The following questions will help you gage your overall level of executive presence and where you most need to focus your efforts to change. You may need to share the 9 competencies outlined in the 3x3 Executive Presence Model so that you clearly define what executive presence is before asking the questions. This will ensure you'll be working with a shared understanding of what it means.

- “Am I perceived as having an executive presence?”
- “In what ways do I show that I have an executive presence?”
- “What do I do to undermine my executive presence?”
- “How can I improve my executive presence?”
- “What would you be willing to do to help me improve my executive presence?”

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You may want to ask more specific questions as well, like those that follow.

## ***Questions on the nine competencies***

Also ask for feedback on your specific executive presence competencies. After all, not everyone understands what executive presence is, but they can still give you invaluable feedback on your EP attributes. Ask questions like the following:

- “How confident do I sound in meetings? What could I do to improve in this way?”
- “How clear am I when I’m giving instructions? In what ways could I improve?”
- “How could I come across as more decisive? Are there specific times when I really need to sound more decisive?”
- “When I’m presenting, what are my greatest strengths and my greatest weaknesses?”
- “How could I participate more effectively in meetings? What do I do well?”

You’ll notice that some of these questions ask for a general assessment of strengths and weaknesses in a specific context, to gage your overall performance. Others delve into specific EP competencies. By giving the other person a specific quality to focus on, you can sometimes gain more detailed and relevant input. If you’ve been working to hone in on particular areas, check in on your progress with various people. Use the above questions as a template for any of the nine EP competencies you wish to gain feedback on.

## ***How to approach the conversation***

It’s important to set the right tone when asking for feedback, so you’ll get a candid and constructive response. Follow these pointers to get high-quality feedback whenever you ask for it.

- **Avoid “yes or no” questions, or questions that beg the listener to give a positive reply.** Phrasing a question as, “Do you think I’m good at delivering presentations?” almost requires the listener to respond positively. Instead, say, “I’d like your honest feedback on my delivery in my presentations. Please clue me in to any areas that I could strengthen for next time.” Use open-ended questions that don’t guide the reader toward a particularly positive response, which is many people’s default reaction.
- **Relax your body language and expression.** If you appear tense, the listener may feel compelled to assuage your uneasiness rather than being as candid as possible.
- **Ask for *feedforward*.** This frames the feedback discussion around what you could do better in the future rather than what you’ve done poorly in the past. It may seem like a subtle distinction, but it can frame the conversation in a more positive and motivational light. Moreover, it results in actionable suggestions about specific behaviors you could

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adopt in the future. You can guide the conversation in this direction with questions like, “How could I show more confidence in the next meeting?” or “How could I be a better project manager for our next initiative?”

- **Ask follow-up questions when people don't fully illustrate their points.** Detailed, nuanced feedback wins out over vague statements every time.

Let's delve into the concept of *feedforward* a bit more, because I've seen it result in powerful insights for countless clients. Acclaimed executive coach Marshall Goldsmith offers up this process for asking for feedforward:<sup>cl</sup>

1. Choose a behavior you wish to change.
2. Describe the behavior to others whom you wish to ask for input.
3. Ask for feedforward, requesting two suggests you can use in the future to model the desired behavior.
4. Listen closely and take notes on their responses. Don't comment on their responses, even in a positive way!
5. Thank them for their input.
6. Repeat the process with someone else.

These feedforward conversations will play a vital role in your development, and they'll show influential people that you're serious about self-improvement. Have these conversations with a broad range of people, which will give you a more well-rounded perspective of your executive presence attributes. Although it may feel daunting to ask at first, having a couple of good conversations about your performance will make you fear it less in the future. Remember, they already think and believe the feedback. It's their opinion that is locked inside their minds. You are asking questions to unlock the feedback and know the truth. As I often say to my coaching clients, “They already think it, you might as well know it.”

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They already think it,  
you might as well know it.

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As you gain this valuable feedback, you'll be able to detect themes within the data. These patterns will tell you where you need to focus your energy to improve your executive presence.

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## Scott Gets Strategic about Seeking Feedback

### **Problem:**

Scott decided to strategically ask 10 influential leaders in his company about how they perceived him. He wanted to make a plan for how to improve his executive presence, and this was step #1. So, he carefully crafted a list of questions such as those shared in this section. He emailed those 10 leaders and set up a series of phone and in-person meetings with them. He brought the 3X3 Executive Presence Model with him to the meetings so he could ask them which of the nine competencies he most needed to improve in. The leaders were impressed with how he cut right to the chase and asked the tough questions that would bring real insights. Scott realized this also provided an excellent chance to build a rapport with these leaders.

They had great conversations that enlightened him about how others viewed him. He took careful notes, collecting their suggestions on key areas for improvement.

Scott learned that he needed to speak up more in meetings and be more forthright in his speech. He also needed to expand his network of influence and inform them of the impactful work his team is accomplishing. Multiple leaders told him that it was only recently that they learned of the importance and impact of the team to the company's success. Too often he flew under the radar and important decisions were made without his team's input. He needed to build his rapport with many more influential leaders throughout the company.

### **Action:**

Scott entered all of these suggestions into a spreadsheet under the appropriate leader's name, so he could keep track of his progress in follow-ups with them. He took clear notes that he could easily refer back to over time.

### **Results:**

Through their advice, Scott learned how to have more confidence and presence at work, especially when interacting with senior leadership. He took action to present himself as more confident and grow his influence. After a couple months had gone by, two of the leaders reached out to him to let him know they admired his progress.

The #1 way to increase your own self-awareness is to ask others for feedback. They are the eyes you do not see with, seeing things that you cannot. Have others rate you on your executive presence. How are your actions and behaviors being experienced by others? When you gather

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this feedback, you'll learn much more about the gaps between others' perceptions and your actual intention. You may want to ask someone who is frequently in the same meetings as you to observe your behavior and share feedback on your EP later.

Create a spreadsheet to keep the information you receive organized and to track your progress over time. You can easily refer to it to remember who said what, and which qualities they focused on, so you can follow-up with them to find out how you're progressing. Here's an example of what this might look like:

**Feedback-Tracking Spreadsheet**

	Sarah	Travis	Mateo	Lois
<b>Meeting #1</b>	COMMANDING: Need to take charge more readily. In tough situations, your team needs to depend on you for leadership. Show them you're able to steer the ship through choppy waters.	COMMANDING: Focus on handling stress more effectively. You seem too easily rattled.  DECISIVE: You also waver too much in meetings. Show that you trust your gut and follow your instincts.	DECISIVE: You seem to trust everyone's judgment but your own. Learn to listen to yourself first, and don't try to get consensus. You often take too long to make a time-sensitive choice.	COMMANDING: I want to see you taking command of the room more. Show conviction when sharing your opinions.  DECISIVE: Don't try to get 100% of the information before making a decision. Show you believe in your ideas.
<b>Meeting #2</b>	COMMANDING: I saw a positive shift as we went through a recent change. You had a stronger leadership presence as you navigated the transition. You've started taking more	COMMANDING: You've definitely begun to handle stress better, but keep working at this. You have some room to grow.  DECISIVE: In meetings, you are taking a more	DECISIVE: You recently had to make a tough decision, and I believe you trusted your gut more than you had in the past. I was glad to see that you asked a few people for their input but	COMMANDING: You are starting to build a stronger presence. This is a longer-term process, so stick with it. I still want to see you showing a lot more conviction in your ideas.

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	initiative to provide guidance and reassurance.	decisive stance, but your confidence still seems shaky.	not everyone. That is progress!	
<b>Meeting #3</b>	COMMANDING: I'm impressed at how far you've come so quickly. Your team is naturally looking to you as a capable leader in every situation, including the tough ones.	COMMANDING: You voice your ideas with more confidence. I can hear your conviction, so I'm more inclined to trust you myself.  DECISIVE: I've seen you boldly make several decisions now. Keep practicing this and it will feel more natural.	DECISIVE: I get the sense that making a decision doesn't feel so hard for you anymore. You've clearly been practicing trusting your gut while getting input from a well-chosen circle of people.	COMMANDING: I witnessed you in a meeting with other leaders last week, and the difference was astounding. You really rallied support for an idea you believed in, and the influence you had on others was clear.

This is a simplified example; you can and should include much more detail in your own. You can certainly track your progress over more than three meetings, too.

By asking these leaders for feedback, you'll also be prompting them to watch you more closely. These influential players will place extra focus on you as a result. They'll notice the changes you're making and the effort you're putting in. You're bringing attention to yourself by asking them to observe you. They'll witness your executive presence flourishing, as well as your dedication to self-improvement. They'll see you as a proactive leader in your own right because you're following through on your commitments and achieving your goals so quickly.

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You're bringing attention to yourself  
by asking them to observe you.

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## Carlos Become More Commanding

While I was conducting a 360 review on a client named Carlos, three senior leaders and two peers all said, "He lacks executive presence." "What do you mean by that?" I asked. This is how they replied.

- "He needs to be more assertive," one leader said. "He comes across as being too laid-back. I wonder if he has enough strength to stand up for what he believes in."
- "I would like him to portray a sense of command in difficult situations," said another. "He needs to have the strength to stand up to authority and hold a line in the sand when dealing with peers or subordinates."
- "He needs to hold people accountable when they aren't doing their job," said a peer. "When people aren't delivering, he needs to not be afraid to have those tough conversations, or to get rid of people who aren't working out."

Carlos had no idea they all perceived him in this way. He began working to strengthen these qualities, and after two weeks, he began approaching people for feedback. "Where could I be more assertive?" he asked his colleague Marie. "And have you noticed any changes in my level of assertiveness?" Marie affirmed that she had been surprised to hear him making bolder, more decisive statements in recent meetings. She gave him a few suggestions on where he could still bring in more assertiveness as well. Carlos left their discussion with a smile on his face, feeling uplifted. Whereas feedback had once felt intimidating, he now felt empowered to continue taking action to strengthen his EP.

Now you have an excellent understanding of how to enhance your executive presence by shaping others' perceptions of you. Remember that **you have the power to shift the perceptions of colleagues, leaders, clients, and everyone else around you**. Changing their perceptions begins with making your executive presence qualities visible by using them in contexts where all of those people can see them. As you practice using your growing executive presence competencies in all of those circumstances, you'll see their perception of you transforming. Any limitations will be removed, and in their place, they'll see your full potential to blossom into a high-level leader who radiates executive presence in every situation.

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**You have the power to shift the perceptions  
of colleagues, leaders, clients, and everyone else around you**

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## Conclusion

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Now and for the duration of your career, executive presence will be the key ingredient to your success.

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Earlier in your career, you learned the value of executing tasks with precision and skill. You learned to excel in your projects and meet deadlines promptly. You learned to be reliable. But as you now know, being a dependable employee will not take you to the levels where you aspire to go. You can't rely on what worked in the past to bring about your future success. Instead, you need to find a new way of operating.

The 3x3 Executive Presence Model is the way forward. Now and for the duration of your career, executive presence will be the key ingredient to your success. Begin to master it through the 3x3 model, and it will serve you for the rest of your life.

Stepping into the shoes of a leader with executive presence takes courage. You're expanding your identity, which inherently means taking risks. Have the courage to envision yourself succeeding in each step you take, which will propel you forward. Nelson Mandela wisely said, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

Having courage will drive you to take chances that guide you to become an inspiring leader who exudes confidence in every situation. Allow your courage to shine in all of these ways:

- The courage to fully SHOW UP with EP.
- The courage to COMMAND the room or command a situation when the opportunity presents.
- The courage to be CONFIDENT in the face of fear.
- The courage to be BOLD and assertive when you have doubt.
- The courage to be DECISIVE when you aren't sure.
- The courage to be SUCCINCT and know your words are enough.
- The courage to PUT A STAKE IN THE GROUND and own your position
- The courage to radiate GRAVITAS, act with AUTHORITY, and EXPRESS yourself fully.

## **EXECUTIVE PRESENCE**

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You may have been undervalued and overlooked as a leader when you began reading this book, but you are now a leader who knows how to exude a world-class executive presence. Your executive presence is a powerful tool. Use it. It gives you the power to be your actual size, not a lesser or watered-down version of yourself. Don't diminish yourself in any way. You now have the ability to fully express yourself and radiate all of your essence so that others grasp your full value and impact. Allow your executive presence to shine, and your success truly will have no limits.

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<sup>i</sup> Sally Williamson & Associates. (2021). *Executive presence is a top priority for leadership.* <https://sallywilliamson.com/executive-presence-top-priority-leadership/>

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# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

When 400 CEOs were asked how they chose their next-level leaders, 89% of them said they looked for one critical trait—executive presence. This quality clearly is crucial for professional success.

Do your leaders have executive presence? If they don't, how can they get it? This book shows employees how to convey confidence, command respect, and exude a professional magnetism that influences others. They will move from passivity and self-doubt to self-assurance, decisiveness, and bold decision making.

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- 1. RADIATE GRAVITAS:** Be confident, commanding, and charismatic.
- 2. ACT WITH AUTHORITY:** Be decisive, bold, and influential.
- 3. FULLY EXPRESS YOURSELF:** Speak (up), be insightful, and clear.

As they master the lessons in this book, you'll have a core group of capable leaders who know how to influence others and drive results.



**JOEL GARFINKLE** is recognized as one of the top 50 executive coaches in America. Global Gurus named Joel #14 on its list of the top 30 global coaching experts. He is also a Master Certified Coach (MCC) — the highest level of achievement in coaching — and author of 11 books and over 300 articles on leadership. His client list for coaching and corporate training includes Google, Amazon, Starbucks, Bank of America, Microsoft, Oracle, Deloitte, Ritz-Carlton, Genentech, NBC, the NBA, and many other prestigious companies.