

Leadership Presence

HBR Series

Executive presence is one of the make or break factors on the way to a C suite role.

Executive presence is highly intuitive and difficult to pin down, it ultimately boils down to your ability to project mature self confidence, a sense that you can take control of difficult, unpredictable situations, make tough decisions in a timely way and hold your own with talented members and strong willed members of an executive team.

How does one start?

Start by addressing the basics

Find a couple of trusted people who will give you unvarnished feedback about your dress and grooming, and the level of confidence you project.

Look for opportunities to hone your presentation skills.

Find your voice as an executive.

One of the big transitions in a career is when you move from being an individual contributor to a team leader. Here, your leadership presence will have a direct bearing on people you lead.

Leadership presence is about being authentic, genuine, having a guiding compass on values, being agile, ability to connect with different types of people.

An important aspect of having an executive voice relates to being a strategic leader. You must always understand the context and cultivate strategic relationships. Executive voice is about bringing solutions, not stating problems.

Insights from the field of psychology tell us that 'warmth' and 'strength' in a person or the way we see it accounts for 90 % of the variance – positive or negative towards that person.

Leaders who project strength before warmth run the risk of eliciting fear and along with it a host of dysfunctional behaviors.

A growing body of knowledge says that leaders should start with warmth, warmth is the conduit of influence, it facilitates trust and absorption of ideas.

Putting competence first undermines leadership. Without a foundation of trust, people will comply but not in a lasting way.

In management settings, trust increases information sharing, openness, fluidity and cooperation.

Most people hate uncertainty, they tolerate it much better when they can look to a leader who has their back and is calm, clearheaded and courageous.

Communication isn't as simple as saying what you mean. How you say what you mean is crucial, and differs from one person to the next because using language is a learned behavior.

How we talk and listen are deeply influenced by cultural experience.

Everything that is said must be said in a certain way – in a certain tone of voice, at a certain rate of speed, and with a certain degree of loudness.

We always think about what to say, we never think about how to say it.

Studies show that women are more likely to downplay their certainty while are likely to minimize their doubts.

Americans ask 'how are you' but are not interested in the answer, it's a routine question for them.

In the Philippines everyone asks 'where are you going', which is intrusive to Americans.

Exchanging compliments is a common ritual amongst women.

Having too much charisma hinders a leader's ability to be effective.

We conducted a study of 800 leaders and 7500 of their superiors, peers and subordinates.

We found something interesting.

Charisma increased till about the 60 th percentile and was seen as effective, after the 60 th percentile, it was seen as less effective.