

How to Improve Your Executive Presence

Business and HR leaders are expected to not only excel in their work but also enthuse and inspire others. This is not easy because people are quick to judge- the way one looks, sounds and acts play a key role in leaving the right or wrong impression. That is why executive presence matters a lot. Executive presence stems from imbibing the right qualities- confidence, competence, poise, great communication, the ability to remain calm under pressure, etc.

Fortunately, much of this can be developed, provided you get the right inputs and guidance from the right sources.

What is Executive Presence?

While it is difficult to articulate the exact quantitative or qualitative definition, developing an executive presence is broadly referred to as 'charisma' that one can think of it in the following terms:

1. How you act: Becoming someone important often entails acting like one even before you are that person. Naturally, to become an influential leader, you must start behaving like one early-on. Some key qualities of a great leader are authenticity, competence, confidence, trustworthiness, poise and an ability to remain calm amid high-pressure situations. To treat people with respect and integrity, you must first develop self-awareness.



2. How you communicate: The importance of communication in today's collaborative world cannot be stressed enough. Leaders must be able to put their point across clearly, concisely and convincingly, both through verbal and non-verbal means. An invaluable and often overlooked skill is the ability to listen to others and to receive feedback the right way- it can provide wonderful insights into self-management. And people management.

3. How you look: It is common human nature to make snap judgments about a person based on his or her appearance. The bottom-line is that appearances matter, hence it is crucial always to be well-groomed and presented. As described by Harvard psychologist Amy Cuddy and author of the bestseller "Presence", people make an initial impression within seconds of a meeting. Wearing appropriate attire as per the event and exuding confidence through good body posture are ways to leave a lasting impression.

How to Improve Your Executive Presence?

You should take concrete and continuous steps to work towards building a favorable executive presence. Here's how:

1. Self-awareness: This is the first step to becoming a compelling leader. Develop awareness about how your body language is, what your gestures convey, and how you engage with people. Knowing oneself is the means to understanding strengths and improvement areas and thereby filling in the gaps with the right personal attention. Developing executive presence is intricately linked to your style- and hence start with embracing your uniqueness.

2. Communicate clearly and concisely: In a bid to appear fast, many leaders tend to utter statements, which may not reflect in good light and later on create reputation-blunders. It is always a good idea to think twice before you sleep, as a leader or professional you may never know what impact your words may have on others. Speaking concisely and clearly are much-needed qualities. To make this happen, use the "power of pause" technique, which is extremely important in interactions such as conflict management and negotiation.



3. Engage empathetically: Empathy is crucial to leadership trait. You should make an effort to relate to people who you interact with genuinely. Some of the ways to do this effectively are to seek feedback, ask the right questions, and respond thoughtfully. Engage with people on a deeper, personal level, and they will respond with enthusiasm and trust. Developing and conveying a sense of empathy helps build trust with people- an invaluable organizational asset.

4. Be decisive: Leaders are expected to lead from the front through highly ambiguous situations. It requires believing in oneself and taking some hard decisions. Let go of any people-pleasing attitudes and learn to take decisions in tough times, and more importantly, stick to those decisions. Identify the right forums and participate in them to share your views emphatically. Do not shy away from proposing or facing change.

5. Use humor and wit: Humour and wit can be great tools to build a connect and foster a fruitful relationship. However, be careful to know the thin line between employing wit at the right time, and not being taken seriously at all.

6. Dress appropriately: Dressing sense is not just about wearing expensive apparel. Your attire should be such that it espouses the organizational culture. The adage, 'Dress to the position you aspire to' holds very much true. A good way to go about is to observe the styles of influential leaders and learn from their dressing style.

7. Strong work ethic: Having a strong and commendable work ethic elicits trust and respect. People tend to depend on you more and more and can quickly become your loyalists if they see that you strive to do the right thing. It means aligning your personal and organizational values and upholding them even through tough times.



There is no 'finish line' that you must reach in this endeavor. Developing executive presence is an ongoing journey, and should be an ongoing commitment. Moreover, much of it happens beyond the surface; it happens in the mind. Constantly cultivate a strong belief in yourself.

As Harvard business school professor Amy Cuddy whose TED talk on presence went viral says, it's about "believing in and revealing the abilities you truly have . . . and shedding whatever is blocking you from expressing who you are."

Executive presence is thus about understanding and enhancing the real you, and not putting on a façade of a false another.

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