

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

STEP INTO YOUR **POWER**, CONVEY CONFIDENCE  
& LEAD WITH **CONVICTION**



JOEL A. GARFINKLE

"*Executive Presence* takes one of the most elusive qualities of leadership and makes it concrete and practical. The nine components of executive presence will give leaders at every level the guidance and confidence to up their game."

Daniel H. Pink, #1 New York Times bestselling author of  
*The Power Of Regret, To Sell is Human, and Drive*

"If you've ever wanted to have a more powerful presence in all interactions, *Executive Presence* is the book for you. With a focus on specific behaviors, Joel explains how the most powerful leaders project that presence in every situation. You'll learn to command the room using the tools and strategies he shares throughout the book."

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith is the *Thinkers50* #1 Executive Coach and New York Times bestselling author of *Triggers, Mojo, and What Got You Here Won't Get You There*.

"Few people understand what executive presence is and how to demonstrate it as well as Joel Garfinkle. In *Executive Presence*, Joel draws on his deep executive coaching experience to provide self-assessments, case studies and specific action steps for any leader who wants to show up with more gravitas, authority and full expression."

Scott Eblin, best-selling author of  
*The Next Level; What Insiders Know About Executive Success*.

"This book takes the mystery out of executive presence and offers a practical path to learning to enhance your influence."

David Burkus, author of *Leading From Anywhere*

"You don't often find a book that empowers you to immediately improve others' perception of you. But Joel Garfinkle's new book *Executive Presence* clearly explains how to radiate power and charisma, even if you weren't born with these qualities. This book is an indispensable guide for up-and-coming leaders, providing the tools to emanate an executive presence in every interaction. Whether you're an extrovert or introvert, and whether you work in a very social setting or remotely, this book provides incredibly useful ideas on how to present yourself as a commanding leader to those who matter most in your work. This book is a great find for any professional. I highly recommend it!"

Maya Hu-Chan, author of *Saving Face: How to Preserve Dignity and Build Trust*

"Ready to accomplish more in your current role or rise higher through the ranks? *Executive Presence* will guide you to adopt specific practices of successful leaders who consistently deliver results. Joel Garfinkle's new book is the guide you need reach greater heights of influence, service, and success."

Ron Kaufman  
New York Times bestselling author of *Uplifting Service*

"Much has been written about the presence executives must display as they lead. In his newest book, *Executive Presence*, Joel Garfinkle provides insights into what this *presence* truly is. An experienced executive coach, he articulates its three core domains—gravitas, authority, and expression—by building upon his research conducted with thousands of clients and workshop participants. *Executive Presence* is a book that will open the eyes of those looking to advance their careers the right way with dignity, respect, and confidence."

John Baldoni, author of many books on leadership, including  
"Grace Notes: Leading in an Upside-Down World."

"Whether driving a team or directing an enterprise, everybody wants to know your purpose, applaud your presence, and value your narrative. Drawing on years of executive coaching, Joel Garfinkle sets forward a compelling formula for doing so. His *Executive Presence* offers the roadmap for upping your confidence, decisiveness, and forcefulness."

Michael Useem, Faculty Director of the McNulty Leadership Program,  
Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania,  
and author of *The Edge: How 10 CEOs Learned to Lead*

"As a long time thought leader in the world of career development, I say with conviction that everyone needs presence to get ahead. Joel Garfinkle outlines, with wonderful credible examples, a model for how to think about your own presence and how to take the next step in improving it. Bravo."

Dr. Beverly Kaye, Author, Consultant, Thought Leader  
Recipient of ATD Lifetime Contribution Award

"In *Executive Presence*, Joel Garfinkle explains how to demonstrate the traits of leaders who people want to follow. His well-researched advice and practical action steps show how to lead by inspiring others through gravitas, authority, and expression. This book is a must-read for any leader—or anyone who wants their employees to achieve their full potential."

Mike Figliuolo, Managing Director, *thoughtLEADERS*, LLC and author of  
*One Piece of Paper*, *Lead Inside the Box*, and *The Elegant Pitch*

“With inspiring stories, self-assessments, and clear strategies, *Executive Presence* explains how to step into your full power as a leader—even when navigating crisis. You’ll learn to inspire your team to embrace positive change by cultivating a bold, commanding, and charismatic presence.”

Mike Robbins, author of *Bring Your Whole Self to Work*

“Executive Presence is the go-to playbook for developing or enhancing your executive presence to maximize your leadership success. He provides a road map, step by step, on what you need to do to improve your executive presence. Joel’s model is understandable, clear and what I find most helpful is that he provides insights on how to practice, develop and sharpen your executive presence. Practicing new tactics and skills is a must to improve and Executive Presence is *the* authoritative guide.”

Nancy Parsons

CEO of CDR Companies, LLC, and author of

*Women Are Creating the Glass Ceiling and Have the Power to End It*

“In *Executive Presence*, Joel shows you how to cultivate the power and presence of top leaders. As you read this book, you’ll identify which qualities you’re lacking and how to immediately begin adopting specific new behaviors that radiate executive presence. This book will show you how to have the executive presence qualities that all next level leaders utilize for impact and success.”

Eileen He, Vice President, Software Development and Operations  
Oracle

“Joel’s approach presented in *Executive Presence* is a robust roadmap for navigating a career into the next level. One thing I love about this book is that it approaches supporting people with compassion and empowerment. This is not a book modeled on the “winner take all” philosophy, but rather in enabling everything to present their best self, to help themselves and their organization excel.”

Noah Goldstein, Senior Sustainability Program Manager  
Google

“Executive presence is a critical attribute of successful leaders. You can see it not only in how they exude confidence, but in how they show up in a way that builds, inspires, and challenges people to be their best. Applicable to those leading teams and individual contributors alike, Joel’s insight on executive presence captures what we can and should learn for it to become a core strength to more effectively influence others. Highly recommended.”

Kevin Morrison, Managing Director, Chief Information Security Officer  
Alaska Airlines

"If you want to become a more inspiring and impressive leader who catalyzes change and influences at scale, *Executive Presence* will guide you in doing just that in your professional and personal life. Using stories from his hundreds of coaching engagements, Joel Garfinkle shows the reader that any leader with a passion for their work can develop executive presence. I highly recommend this book to any individual who aspires to become an influential and effective leader!"

Kevin Nembhard, Senior Manager, Corporate Accounting  
Walmart

"This is an excellent book from Joel Garfinkle who is one of the nation's top executive coaches and a world recognized expert on Executive Presence (EP). The book clearly explains main EP concepts via an innovative model, provides a series of tests and questions for measurement of your own current EP level, and gives you valuable suggestions on how to create and expand your EP based on your individual personality and working style. I am glad to see that now Joel's powerful work is available to influence thousands executive leaders in many organizations across the entire world"

Igor Kozlov, Global Head, Reagent Research and Design  
Roche

"This thoroughly researched book provides a clear blueprint to developing executive presence. He debunks myths about this elusive quality and illustrates how three key domains—gravitas, authority, and expression—merge together to imbue a leader with executive presence. If you have ever felt confused about what executive presence truly is, you will be grateful for this book."

Omkar Pendse, Senior Director of Engineering  
PayPal

"I can't recommend Executive Presence highly enough. Joel helps you gauge your level of executive presence—and then improve it—like no other resource I've found. His self-assessment exercises for each of the 9 executive presence qualities help you see exactly where you stand, so you can focus on the most critical areas for improvement. From Joel's clarity of writing and to his ability to distill down an opaque area into actionable steps, this book leaves the reader feeling emboldened to develop the powerful presence of a great leader."

Former VP, Policy Development and Research  
Lyft

"Joel Garfinkle and his methodology have helped me tremendously during my career. He's been an excellent resource on my journey toward becoming an effective leader. I recommend Joel and his 3x3 Executive Presence Model to anyone looking to accelerate their career and leadership skills."

Rani Urbas, Global Head of Enterprise Trust  
Google Cloud

"In Executive Presence, Joel guides readers to take tangible action steps and behavior modifications to radiate executive presence and 'command the room'. This book is a must-read for leaders and executives looking to increase their influence in the current role, and more importantly, for those looking to take their executive career to the next level."

Mario Pacheco, CEO  
West Pak Avocado

"This book shows every current and aspiring leader how to overcome self-doubt and show up as a leader at work and in life. Joel makes executive presence easy to understand and provides a direct, straightforward plan for cultivating it. Those who have faced societal barriers to success, or who think they don't have the personality type of a leader, will especially benefit from this book."

Robert Martin, CISO  
Alberta Health Services

"This book provides practical and applicable guidance for developing executive presence and influence, crucial concepts that are often discussed but rarely defined. By articulating how the reader can cultivate leadership presence in a way that is authentic and real for them, *Executive Presence* helps leaders and organizations support advancing employees of all levels, functions, perspectives and backgrounds."

Vicki Webster, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Director  
GEHA

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**JOEL A. GARFINKLE**

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# **Part 1**

## The Importance of Executive Presence



# Introduction

## **Executive Presence Is a Prerequisite to Leadership Success**

*“The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born—that there is a genetic factor to leadership. That’s nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.”*

– Warren Bennis

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, 98% of senior leaders say they didn’t innately possess executive presence<sup>i</sup>. Instead, they had to cultivate it. This book will show you how to do this, through clear and actionable steps focusing on building specific competencies.

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>ii</sup>

This book gives you the tools to develop and hone your own executive presence and become an elite performer who influences outcomes and drives change. You'll learn how to convey confidence, command respect, and exude a professional magnetism that influences others at every level. You'll learn new strategies for projecting conviction, asserting your opinions, and leading with gravitas, trading in 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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Fortunately, you don't need to wait for anyone's permission to begin developing executive presence. Rather, you can start right here and now. In fact, the onus is on *you* to develop it within yourself. Don't wait for a superior to point you toward a workshop or an executive presence coach.

In Part 1 of this book, we'll first take a deeper look at what executive presence is and how growing it will benefit you as a leader. You'll learn how executive presence enhances leadership, and how to avoid undermining it within yourself. You'll also take a quiz to assess your current level of executive presence, and you'll learn how to gauge whether others perceive you as having it. Most importantly, you'll begin to learn my 3x3 Executive Presence Model, which will serve as your guide in developing these indispensable qualities. In Part 2, we'll then examine each of the nine key components of executive presence and how to develop them one by one.

If you're a leader working to help your employees develop executive presence, this book will assist you in teaching them to leverage it more effectively, propelling them forward in their careers. By embodying the qualities of executive presence and applying them wisely, your people will achieve and sustain a high level of success and impact.

When you or your employees begin exuding the confidence that executive presence entails, top leadership will more easily envision 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. 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% said it plays a key role in getting ahead.<sup>iii</sup> Leaders are paying attention to who has enhanced executive presence. Those who do are the ones who get promoted. This quality clearly plays a central role in a leader's career progression and promotional opportunities. 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:

**Radiate Gravitas:** Be confident, commanding, and charismatic.

**Act with Authority:** Be decisive, bold, and influential.

**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. And as you teach them to your employees, you'll develop a core group of capable leaders who know how to influence others and drive results.

## Creating your executive presence brand.

If you don't establish your own brand, someone else will do it for you. As a rising leader, executive presence must 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 particular 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 intentionally and systematically establishing your own executive presence brand.

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 they didn't know what he *did*. They didn't know his value to the company at all."

The advice shared in this book helped this leader to come up with an executive presence brand that got 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?

This book will help you to not only cultivate your own executive presence (EP); 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 you haven't fully developed your executive presence or are underutilizing it, you'll have less credibility and garner less respect. Senior executives spend the majority of their time in meetings where they constantly need to speak up to 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 leaders lack executive presence, they immediately lose credibility and persuasiveness.

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

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**Future company leaders.** Maybe you're one of the fast-rising, high-potential employees who are the up-and-coming stars of the organization. As an aspiring or emerging leader, you 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 advanced up the company ladder. 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 the confidence, authority, and presence that you notice in great leaders.

To ensure the company's continued success, you have the responsibility to master the qualities of executive presence. It's also the only way to continue your personal trajectory toward heightened success.

**Managers who want to help employees grow into leaders.** As a leader, you need your employees to develop executive presence to 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. Apply what you are learning in this book to help them improve their EP, and consider giving them a copy to read.

**Employees with a solid performance who are ready for the next level.** As a solid performer, you receive good performance reviews, have a strong skillset, and execute your responsibilities well. With this strong foundation of performance and results, you are ready to begin developing your 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 executive presence.

**Marginalized employees, including women.** If you're a budding leader of a marginalized racial group, ethnicity, gender, or ability, you will benefit from cultivating executive presence. Women, people of color, and other employees from marginalized groups are too often 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 diversity of 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 sustained success. Women, people of color, and other marginalized employees 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 the ability to command a team—as men should do, too.

In short, don’t dial back your confidence because of how you fear others may perceive you. Own your power and strength, while also working to convey empathy and compassion. You can’t necessarily change people’s biases, but you *can* control how you show up. Again, this advice applies equally to men, who also benefit greatly from consciously working to show more empathy and emotional intelligence in their daily work.

## 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 read 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.

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 EP. They fail to recognize its vital importance—so it’s 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 will it take for you to commit to making executive presence a vital part 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, former executive vice president and chief strategy officer at Omaha-based TD Ameritrade, emphasizes the need to take a proactive approach to advancement. “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. ‘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 to recognize and promote your own value, and you’ll develop a meaningful and effective career plan. And you’ll enjoy more fulfillment on a daily basis as you see yourself progress.

## 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 sometimes 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."

Ben Lyttleton

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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>xi</sup> I see this point confirmed in my executive coaching work time and 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>xii</sup>

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

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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 EP. However, they can learn to speak with conviction, be decisive, put a stake in the ground and own their position, and assume 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 definitely do *not* 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 role you have or what level you've reached, you can constantly be working toward radiating more gravitas, acting with more authority, and expressing yourself more fully. If you do this early in your career, all the better!

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 being commanding stray into becoming too pushy?

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 your 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?

Executive presence matters just as much, if not more, on teams working virtually. 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 interact 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 employed 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. Plus, you need to bear in mind how your superiors will view you. 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?

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 (although you can consider changing your approach when interacting with people outside of your own culture). 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 with.

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 their best qualities. Thus, it will enable 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.



## 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 between being too nice and too aggressive, and it comes from achieving that ideal balance.

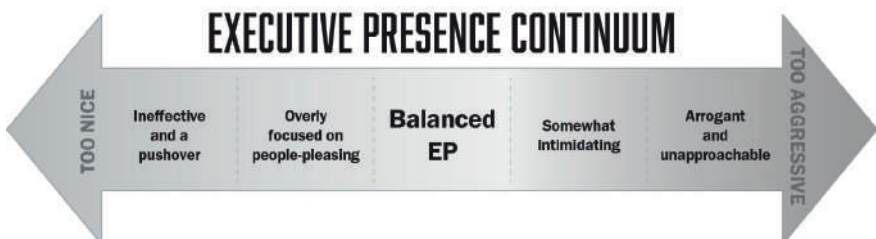
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Great leaders are committed to nurturing others, leveraging all of their executive presence qualities for the good of the team rather than just personal gain.

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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 executive presence qualities for the good of the team rather than just personal gain.

Take a look at this scale, which shows the two extremes some people may find themselves at. Where do you fall on the continuum?



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 of your presentations, discussions, and interactions.

# DO YOU HAVE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE?

## ASSESS YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF EP.

Place a checkmark next to each statement that describes you. If it somewhat describes you, put a checkmark. When you're finished, tally up your total number of checkmarks.

1. When I speak, I am long-winded and tend to share my unedited train of thought.
2. When I have new, creative, and unbaked ideas, I rarely share them at meetings.
3. I don't present ideas persuasively to senior leaders.
4. I avoid confronting challenges head-on and without delay.
5. I have trouble making decisions and feeling conviction in my choices.
6. I don't naturally draw people to me and build excitement for my ideas.
7. I often overanalyze what I'm going to say, and then I don't speak up.
8. I am laidback and casual, going with the flow and lacking conviction.
9. I'm too nice and accommodating, making decisions based on appeasing people.
10. I don't feel or act equal to people at higher levels than me.
11. I get consumed by day-to-day responsibilities and don't spend much time setting the strategic direction.
12. I don't share my full breadth of experience and expertise.
13. I don't boldly speak the truth when I know it will feel uncomfortable for others.
14. In situations that lack leadership, I don't take control of the situation and lead.
15. I struggle to make my presence felt, in each space I step into, by voicing my opinions.

16. I don't persuasively advocate for an idea even when I believe in its merit.
17. I refrain from taking risks, afraid of making mistakes.
18. When others push back or disagree, I tend to back down.
19. My words lack energy when I want to move people toward action.
20. I don't influence groups or people across the organization.
21. I don't take action in the face of uncertainty, pushing boundaries beyond what feels safe.
22. I rarely raise concerns that could lead to improvement of a plan.
23. I often show up unprepared to meetings.
24. I don't ignite interactive discussions that draw out others' ideas by asking great questions.
25. I often focus on data, facts, process, and background details instead of getting to the point.

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:

- 1–6:** *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 likely sees you as someone who knows how to take charge, rally others behind an idea, and drive change.*
- 7–16:** *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.*
- 17–25:** *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 expression are holding you back in your career, and it's time to correct course so you can achieve the career you deserve.*

# Chapter 1

## How Executive Presence Enhances Leadership

*“We convince by our presence.”*

– Walt Whitman

If you're an aspiring leader wondering whether 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 recognize 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 become a stronger, more influential and convincing leader who guides others to reach their full potential.

If you're already a high-level leader, you must focus on helping your employees develop executive presence. As a senior leader striving to win the talent war, it's not about finding the right employees: You already have the best talent. Now it is 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.

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What will move your hidden talent up to  
superstar status?

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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 examine now 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.
- Gain the most from your hidden leaders.
- Dramatically boost retention and engagement.
- Know the value each leader is contributing.
- Benefit from a diverse pool of talent.

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

Executive presence is essential to preparing employees for higher levels of leadership. As companies come to this realization, they're focusing more heavily on EP. They are requiring their people to have a strong foundation of executive presence as they move into middle management and beyond. Stepping up to the next levels of leadership 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>ii</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>iii</sup> Robert Half found that 52% of CFOs don't have a successor lined up for their position.<sup>iv</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, your company 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 gain the most from your hidden leaders.

Every company has hidden leaders. These low-profile leaders remain unrecognized and unappreciated, leading them to feel invisible. During talent reviews, executives will say, “I have no idea who that person is” or “I've been in meetings with them, but I never hear from them.” When these leaders remain hidden, the company loses out on all that unused talent. They may even promote people with far *less* talent just because they're more visible. Gallup has found that companies miss the mark in their promotional and hiring decisions for leadership positions 82% *of the time*. Allowing talent to remain invisible has serious repercussions for productivity and engagement as well.<sup>v</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 inspire those around them and drive change.

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Enable ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

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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*.
- Those who *took part in a project that failed*, which damaged their reputation.
- Those *assigned to an unsupportive manager* who doesn't know how to encourage them to grow.
- Those with *unconventional backgrounds*.
- Those who *stepped off the upward mobility track for personal reasons*, transferring onto the children track, the back-to-school track, or the spouse relocation track.

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

Dramatically boost retention and engagement.

How do you make sure your employees feel like an integral part of your company? Cultivate executive presence and provide the visibility they desire and deserve. Gartner has found that high-potential employees are 15%

more likely than other employees to seek out new job opportunities if they don't believe you're grooming them for succession.<sup>vi</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 will save you time and money by reducing recruitment costs and increasing employee retention rates.

Elevating your leaders' executive presence will also greatly improve engagement. When people feel valued, they'll 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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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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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>vii</sup> Within two years, engagement improved by 16%, reports the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). 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 its employee retention and engagement.

Know the value each leader is contributing.

Oftentimes, the hidden leaders are the worker bees who put their heads 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.

Organizations cannot engage in effective decision-making when 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 each leader develops executive presence, others will know who they are and will appreciate the value they bring to the table.

### Benefit from a diverse pool of talent.

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 from which to draw. You'll avoid the groupthink that can result from operating in a silo, while helping your company to create an inclusive leadership pipeline. 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>viii</sup> and 37% are persons of color,<sup>ix</sup> it's time to stop overlooking these underrepresented groups. Providing executive presence training will allow these individuals 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*?
- ✦ Would you like to be *recognized as being highly capable and credible by upper management*?

For myriad reasons, people of marginalized groups may not put themselves forward or draw attention to themselves—and when they do, they may be overlooked. 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. 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, organizations must embrace six signature qualities of inclusive leadership, Deloitte explains.<sup>x</sup> These six qualities will help you mentor your diverse leaders as they rise to 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 in collaborating within diverse groups, you can nurture the development of all your rising stars.

This commitment to an inclusive leadership pipeline will benefit everyone within your organization. In a Deloitte study, 75% of respondents said they thrive in a diverse and inclusive environment. Many said such a workplace culture 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.

## **Executive presence is critical to leadership success.**

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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 you 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.

Let's consider how EP will benefit you in each of these ways.

### **Position you as a next-level leader.**

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 state that a low level of executive presence paralyzes career advancement.<sup>xi</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 clear a path for yourself that ultimately leads to the upper echelons of leadership, if that's where you want to go. 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.

### Transform self-doubt into confidence.

With executive presence, 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 your confidence to become a powerful leader you may not even recognize right now!

### Love your work more.

As your executive presence grows, you'll gain more satisfaction from your daily work. You'll be more deeply engaged and excited about what you are doing.

As your executive presence starts to shine, you'll notice yourself doing these four things:

- Building meaningful relationships with peers and superiors across the organization, making your work more enjoyable.
- Lending your perspective and insight to others who seek it out, helping shape the success of company initiatives.
- Taking ownership of more complex and challenging projects, making your work more interesting.
- Becoming more fully seen for your contributions, making your work more satisfying.

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

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. The people you lead will benefit from the enhanced motivation they receive from you, and your whole team will flourish. You'll help people create a roadmap to their goals and stay 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 rely on you more fully 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.

### ***Action:***

Together, we determined ways that Eloise 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 benefited others, she built her influence among her coworkers and across functions. She also gained more attention for the results of her projects as she shared them directly with leaders. Her boss took note. Eloise was finally ready to move on to the next level, because she'd begun displaying the key ingredient for leadership success: executive presence.

Let's now dive deeper into what executive presence actually is, so you can learn to recognize it in yourself and others.