

SUCCESS®



Good News! You're an
Executive.

Bad News! You Don't Have
Executive Presence.

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The number one reason I am asked to work with individual executives is to help them make the transition from transactional relationships to the human connection—to develop Executive Presence.

Most of these people have followed a similar track. They were identified as “high potentials” for their analytical talent, operations efficiency and financial prowess. Once they stepped into a leadership role, someone noticed they didn't know how to connect with people.

In essence, when an individual gets to be an executive, they don't have the Executive Presence they need to move forward.

Sure, we all have presence, since it comes from the impressions we make on others. But what kind of presence?

Typically, I ask my clients, "What is it like to be with you?" and "What is the feedback you receive from friends, family and teammates about how they experience your presence?" Most of them have only partial answers, but instruments like a 360 survey can help us locate blind spots.

Blind spots include presence-killer behaviors such as being distracted—which others interpret as being self-important and impersonal; fidgeting, which is interpreted as a lack of confidence; and making calculated comments which is often experienced by listeners as insincere and inauthentic.

Once we identify these blind spots, we talk about the kind of image and presence the executive wants to convey and what they need to do to close the gap.

At Interact Studio we coach from our Four Parts of Executive Presence™ model. The four areas overlap but help define the behavior and energy behind Executive Presence.

1. Authentic Presence: Authenticity is about "Walking the Talk." People attach the following characteristics to Authentic Presence: genuine, optimistic, natural, fair, open and trustworthy. Do not think for a minute that this is a technique. You must recognize the authentic aspects of yourself to connect with others. You must understand what your life has taught you while being open to the insights of others.

2. Personal Presence: Communication style, people-awareness and emotional intelligence are part of your Personal Presence. When you lead with warmth, you can connect with the people around you. When people feel heard and understood, they will trust you. Practicing presence in everyday interactions can help close the gaps in communication within the organization.

3. Physical Presence: Physical confidence and command allows you to move with purpose, take hold of a room and extend yourself to others instead of staying separate. Even a few nonverbal signals can show people that you're pleased to be in their company. Stand tall, look us in the eye, smile, face us and extend a friendly greeting. Nothing over the top, mind you. It has to be natural. It also matters that you are attentive to appearance. We've relaxed the old "Dress for Success" guidelines, but we still like leaders to dress appropriately for their role and the occasion; and we want them to be crisp even when casual and well-groomed.

4. Professional Presence: Experience, knowledge, status and reputation for results are all important—but not the most important parts of Executive Presence. These things actually come more into play after someone experiences your presence and deems you to be trustworthy. Most executives don't realize that prioritizing warmth will open people to this all-important layer of credibility—not vice versa.

Executive Presence (like leadership) is never perfected, only practiced. So where do you practice? Not just the annual meeting and board meetings. You practice in the elevator, one-on-one meetings, conference calls, videoconferences, the parking lot, the cafeteria, traveling with teammates and walking through cube-land. You practice everywhere.

Coaching and development cannot fortify just anyone with the kind of presence we long for in our leaders. They have to drop personal preoccupations, show up with earnest and pay attention. They have to do the work of pulling from the authentic aspects of themselves and seeing the same in others. However, coaching can help lift the well-intentioned leader into the on-going pursuit of self-awareness, which is the pre-requisite of greatness.

The American painter Robert Henri said, “It's a wrong idea that a master is a *finished person*.” I would add that people who see themselves as finished lack Executive Presence.



Lou Solomon is an author, TEDx speaker and founder of **Interact**, a communications company that helps Fortune 500 CEOs, business leaders, managers, entrepreneurs and their teams to make connections, earn trust and build influence.