

*“Character - a reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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### The Power of ‘Presence’

Often referred to as “bearing,” presence incorporates a range of verbal and nonverbal patterns (one’s appearance, posture, vocal quality, subtle movements)—a whole collection of signals that others process into an evaluative impression of a person.

#### So what? What’s ‘Presence’ got to do with anything?

Let’s imagine for a moment that someone in your company was recently promoted to a leadership position. This person successfully competed against other qualified candidates, some of whom were probably just as experienced and smart.

So why was this person ‘tapped’ and the others were not? The decision most likely came down to – or was strongly influenced by - degrees of “executive presence.”

An Internet search on *executive presence* reveals definitions and advice on everything from dressing for success and patterns of speech to more fundamental issues of charisma and emotional and social intelligence.

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*“Charisma is the transference of enthusiasm.”*

Ralph Archbold

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But executive presence comes in all shapes and sizes. Who would have thought, 30 years ago, that Mark Zuckerberg, the 26-year-old founder of Facebook, would have been one of the youngest men ever to be named *Time Magazine’s* Person of the Year? He certainly has presence - his own authentic version of it.

#### So what really IS presence? Are some born with it and others not so much?

Most people aren’t born with executive presence. They develop the requisite skills with experience, maturity and a great deal of effort.

**Eleven** qualities contribute to executive presence:

1. **Transparency:** *Genuine, open, straightforward, comfortable in one’s skin. Aims for truth and clarity.*
2. **Passion:** *Loves the profession, job, industry and life in general. Believes in optimism.*
3. **Clarity:** *Communicates thoughts, feelings and insights with clarity and simplicity. Master of metaphors and stories that make an impact.*
4. **Intelligence:** *The ability to process, retain and apply information, whether it’s academic or street-worthy.*
5. **Pattern Recognition:** *The ability to boil down complex factors and mounds of data to rare conclusions. Offers insights others may not see.*
6. **Results-Oriented:** *Driven to succeed. Flexible and willing to adjust goals. Decisive under pressure. A bias toward action. An attitude of giving, rather than getting. Works in the service of common goals.*
7. **Confidence:** *Not overconfident; has enough self-doubt to be objective. Asks questions and listens.*
8. **Humility:** *Willing to admit mistakes, misjudgments, fears and uncertainties in ways that are endearing. Seeks answers and advice; listens to others.*
9. **Courage:** *Willing to take risks and positions against considerable odds. May be seen as a maverick. Able to perceive possibilities and innovations.*
10. **Humor:** *Not over-the-top, but in the right measure to disarm others’ defenses.*
11. **Social:** *Genuinely cares about others; sees both strengths and weaknesses in people. Allows people to learn from mistakes. Promotes healthy self-esteem and respects others.*

Keep in mind that no single leader possesses all of these qualities in abundance. Here are some tips from *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Success* (Pfeiffer, 2009), Karl Albrecht - for building more of your own genuine and authentic executive presence:

- Don't mimic a CEO you've read about, admired or conceptualized in your mind. **Personal authenticity** is critical, so find your most natural way of walking, talking, dressing and interacting with others. Think about how you want to be perceived, and aim for these qualities.
- **Identify your core strengths and values.** Write a brief description of yourself from the perspective of someone who has just met you. Start working on specific aspects of this description to ensure they're real.

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*“Authenticity is the alignment of head, mouth, heart, and feet - thinking, saying, feeling, and doing the same thing - consistently. This builds trust, and followers love leaders they can trust.”*

Lance Secretan

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- Leave a long message on your voice-mail, and play it back in a few days to get an idea of **how you sound to a stranger**. Note any aspects of your speech that you would like to change.
  - Record a conversation with a friend on audio or video. Make sure it's long enough so that you and your pal will forget you're being recorded. Study yourself and your friend's reactions and jot down any habits or behaviors that contribute to or inhibit **empathy, clarity and/or authenticity**.
  - Ask one or more close friends to share their **impressions** about meeting you for the first time. Remind them to be brutally honest, and encourage them to offer insights into other aspects of your interactions.

- Review your discoveries with a coach or mentor. **Practice.** Change will take time, as personal habits in interacting with others are ingrained. After a while, however, you and your inner circle should begin to notice improvements.

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*“Sometimes one creates a dynamic impression by saying something, and sometimes one creates as significant impression by remaining silent.”*

Dalai Lama