

# EXECUTIVE PRESENCE (EP)

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## 1. WHAT IS EXECUTIVE PRESENCE?

Executive presence and no man or woman attains a top job, lands an extraordinary deal, or develops a significant following without this heady combination of confidence, poise, and authenticity that convinces the rest of us we're in the presence of someone who's the real deal.

### CRACKING THE EP CODE

CEO. "I can't describe it, but I sure know it when I see it". EP rests on three pillars:

- How you **act** (gravitas)
- How you **look** (appearance)
- How you **speak** (communication)

## 2. GRAVITAS

### ACCORDING TO SENIOR LEADERS

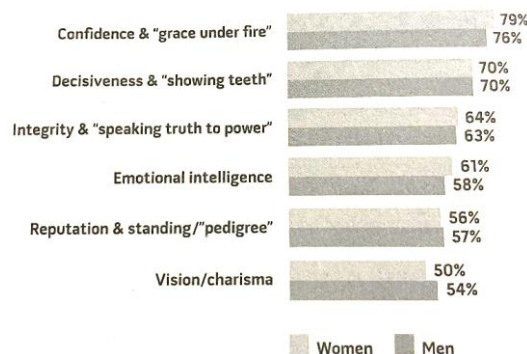


Figure 2. **Top Aspects of gravitas**

### DEMONSTRATING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

"Not showing that you have an understanding for people's feelings is absolutely a no – no".

### HOW TO DEEPEN YOUR "GRAVITAS"

Gravitas is that je ne sais quoi quality that some people have that makes other people judge them born leaders.

- Surround yourself with people who are better than you
- Be generous with credit
- Stick to what you know
- Show humility
- Smile more
- Empower others' presence to build your own
- Snatch victory from the jaws of defeat
- Drive change rather than be changed

## 3. COMMUNICATION

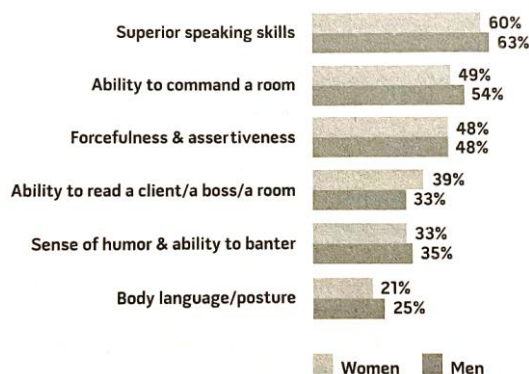


Figure 4. **Top Communication Traits**

## SUPERIOR SPEAKING SKILLS

**ACCENT.** “You have to fundamentally change how you speak” “You have to flatten your accent. You have to change, or you cannot survive in this state.”

**GRAMMAR.** Sounding uneducated likewise undermines your gravitas and marks you as an outsider to the inner circle.

**TIMBRE AND PITCH.** Not only does the sound of your voice matter twice as much as what you’re talking about, but a voice in the lower – frequency range will encourage others to see you as successful, sociable, and smart.

Human beings are apparently wired to tune into lower frequencies; and of course, we tend to pay attention longer to voices we don’t find irritating.

## COMMAND A ROOM

**ESTABLISH CONNECTION.** It’s all about making yourself human: not oversharing, not indulging in self – revelation, but unveiling just enough of your inner core that your listeners feel connected to you and start pulling for you. Getting an audience to like you, to root for you, while at the same time giving the impression that you don’t need to be liked – this is the wire you want to walk.

### DELIVER YOUR WORDS AS A MUSICIAN DELIVERS NOTES

Phrasing, inflection, and pace are what distinguish you as a person worth listening to. As in music, it’s important to deliver your words conscious of your narrative arc, lifting and dropping your cadence to emphasize key passages or points, paying particular attention to how you end a phrase, so that your listener senses closure and consequently hangs on to the last word and retains it before making room for the next.

**USE NARRATIVE.** Stories, not bullet points, are what grab and hold an audience.

**DON’T SNOW PEOPLE WITH DATA.** “people just want your conclusion with data, the bottom line.”

**GET RID OF PROPS.** “It’s about her ability to impress as well as perform”

If you cannot command your subject, you certainly won’t be able to command the room. Know your material cold so that you needn’t rely on notes, and needn’t rely on your glasses to read notes. This will free you up to establish eye contact with the audience. And nothing is more important than eye contact.

“There are such multiple tugs on people’s attention that distraction is the norm”. “In an important meeting, nothing boosts your leadership presence more than signaling that you’re totally present”

**BE SUCCINCT.** “Executive presence is not necessarily about being formal or abundant in your communication, but rather straightforward and brief.”. “The more you keep speaking, or explaining yourself, the more you cloud or dilute your core message.”. Get to the point, and then people will give you their attention.

## ASSERTIVENESS

Being forceful and assertive is a core executive trait, for both men and women. But for women, it’s a decidedly more difficult trait to embody, as assertiveness in a woman often makes her unlikable (the B – word is rolled out and she’s seen as overly aggressive).

Come from a position that’s not about you, but about what’s best for the company. Don’t yell, and be careful about your tone.

## ABILITY TO READ A ROOM

To command a room, you’ve first got to read it. Sensing the mood, absorbing the cultural cues, and adjusting your language, content, and presentation style accordingly are vital to your success as a communicator, and succeeding as a communicator is vital to your executive presence. Deploying your emotional intelligence and then acting on what it tells you absolutely boosts your EP – especially if you’re a woman.

“Reading your audience is all about winning their confidence so that when you speak, they really hear what you have to say”

## HUMOR AND BANTER

“Women spend so much more time on personal grooming than guys do.”

Not everyone can pull off a funny story at the lectern, but everyone can learn to banter at the water cooler.

## BODY LANGUAGE AND POSTURE

“You should be sitting up straight, pulled up to the table, making eye contact, and taking notes. You should be paying attention!”. Never underestimate the communicative power of body language.

While standing at attention bolsters your own self – confidence, it absolutely signals to others that you are paying attention – which is perhaps the keystone of all effective communication. To radiate presence, you have to radiate that you are present.

## HOW TO POLISH YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| – Ditch the verbal crutches | – Invoke your vertical                                       |
| – Broaden your small talk   | – Lose the props   |
| – Get control of your voice | – Do not allow challenges to your authority to go unanswered |
| – Overprepare               |  |
| – Less can be more          |  |

## 4. APPEARANCE

“I’m not ready to throw in the towel. I don’t want to retire.”

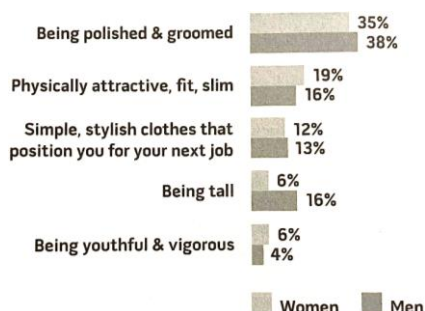


Figure 6. Top aspects of appearance

### First Impressions

Golden rule: *Minimize distractions from your skill sets and performance.*

Minimizing sexual distraction is especially important if you’re female.

“It’s not that I want my protégées to look less feminine, just less provocative.” “It’s as though at a deep level, some women believe that the power they ultimately wield is their sexuality. But overt sexuality has no place in the executive suite.”

**SIMPLE, STYLISH CLOTHES THAT POSITION YOU FOR YOUR NEXT JOB.** The journey begins by dressing for the job you want, not the job you have.

Complement a sophisticated look with a signature style piece or accent. For men this might be a pair of colorful socks, a playful tie, vintage cuff links, distinctive shoes, or a bold watch. Women have arguably more options.

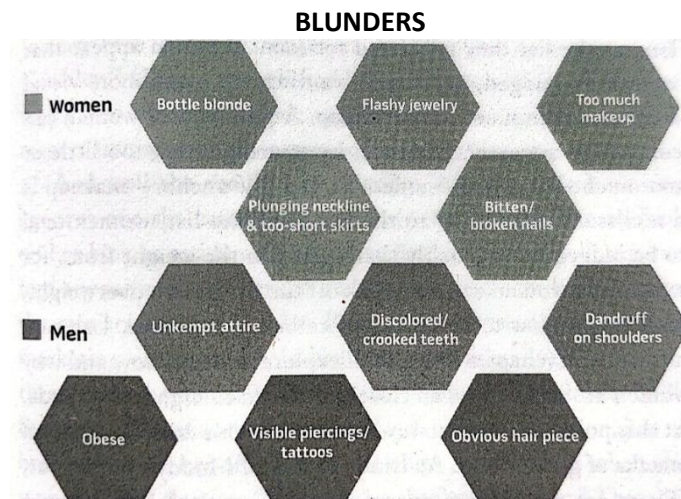
The more rigorous the dress code, the more it behooves you to personalize it in some standout way. In very real ways, CEOs are the public face of their companies, and they are well – advised to align their brands with that of the business they represent.

**BEING TALL.** If **women's** leadership potential is unreasonably correlated to **weight**, **men's** is unfairly correlated to **height**.

**BEING YOUTHFUL AND VIGOROUS.** Looking youthful, boosts the EP of both men and women because, like slimness and fitness, it implies you've got the **vitality** to lead the charge and not succumb to setback.

I can affirm that nothing signals vitality in a middle-aged woman more than **toned arms with a discreet ripple of muscle**.

Wear flats and shift attention to your perfectly cut skirt or dress. **Appearance is the medium for your message** and, as such, it should neither distract nor detract from what you stand for and what you want to say.



*Figura 8. Appearance blunders*

## TACTICS

**There is no one "right" look.**

**SHOWCASE YOUR STRENGTHS**

**SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP**

**IT'S NOT HOW GOOD YOU LOOK, IT'S HOW APPROPRIATE YOU LOOK FOR YOUR AUDIENCE**

**IF IT DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT, IT PROBABLY ISN'T**

**BEWARE OF CASUAL/COOL CULTURES**

**STAY IN COSTUME TO STAY IN CHARACTER**

**DON'T LET YOUR BANGLES AND BLING STEAL YOUR THUNDER**

Clanging, **banging jewelry is not the best if you're giving a presentation. "Anything that calls attention to itself rather than the message you're giving is not the best."**

**WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAN ON YOUR SPONSOR**

**ASK FOR SPECIFIC FEEDBACK – AND SIGNAL THAT YOU'RE OKAY WITH UNVARNISHED CRITICISM.** Ask for your superiors for feedback on your **attire, hairstyle, and grooming**. You will receive their observations and suggestions not as fault – finding but as constructive guidance.

**BUY YOURSELF GREATER LATITUDE.** **Executive presence is all about inspiring trust and confidence in others.** Win everyone's faith and confidence.

## 5. FEEDBACK FAILURES

When's the last time someone at work gave you honest, critical feedback on some aspect of your **Executive Presence (EP)**?

### DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS-BUT EXTRAORDINARILY IMPORTANT

It must be said that some kinds of feedback are intrinsically difficult to give no matter who is on the receiving end. Criticizing someone's appearance, for example, turns out to be emotionally fraught, even **woman-to-woman**.

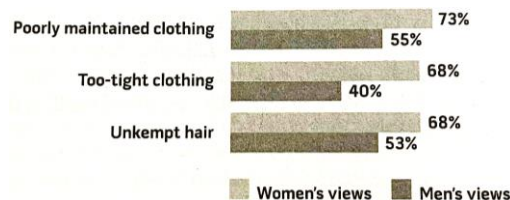


Figure 9. Female appearance blunders

### WHAT **GREAT FEEDBACK** SOUNDS LIKE

Leader who delivers such feedback:

- You'll be clear on what the problem is.
- You'll understand why it must be addressed.
- You'll know precisely what you need to do to course-correct.

### TACTICS: HOW TO GET THE **EP FEEDBACK YOU NEED**

**RECOGNIZE YOU NEED IT**

**DEVELOP A THICKER SKIN**

**ROUTINELY ASK FOR SPECIFIC, TIMELY, PRESCRIPTIVE **FEEDBACK****

**IF YOU CAN'T GET ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK FROM YOUR SUPERIORS, ASK FOR A COACH-OR PAY OUT-OF-POCKET YOURSELF**

**CREATE A CIRCLE OF PEERS WITH WHOM YOU CAN SHARE FEEDBACK**

**CULTIVATE A SPONSOR**

**LISTEN FOR THE "**RING OF TRUTH**".** Not all feedback is accurate or well-intentioned. But don't dismiss it out of hand.

**DEMONSTRATE YOU WILL ACT ON THE FEEDBACK YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN**

**WHEN YOU'RE GIVEN VAGUE CRITICISM, GET CLARITY BY ASKING HOW YOUR BEHAVIOR IS NEGATIVELY IMPACTING OUTCOMES**

**DON'T BURST INTO TEARS**

Of course, criticism hurts. But put on your best face with your critics, and save your tears for later, because nothing cuts off the spigot of vital feedback more effectively than a loss of emotional control. "You have a responsibility to listen, and react appropriately, just as your manager has a responsibility to deliver his or her insight. If you sit there and get angry or emotional, then it will be so much tougher for the two of you to have subsequent conversations. Your manager may feel it's a waste of time, or conclude you're incapable of growing. And then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: If you don't get feedback, you cannot grow."

**NEVER BURN A BRIDGE**

## TACTICS: HOW TO GIVE EP FEEDBACK LIKE A TRUE LEADER

*GIVE FREQUENT, DISCRETE POINTERS RATHER THAN SEMI-ANNUAL DOWNLOADS*

*PUT THE GOOD THINGS OUT THERE FIRST*

*EMBED CORRECTIVES IN YOUR CRITICISM*

*CATCH PEOPLE WHEN THEY'RE GETTING IT RIGHT*

*PREFACE FEEDBACK WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT YOU HAVE THAT PERSON'S BEST INTERESTS AT HEART AND WISH TO ENSURE THEIR SUCCESS*

**DISCUSS APPEARANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF PERSONAL BRANDING**

*ENLIST A THIRD PARTY*

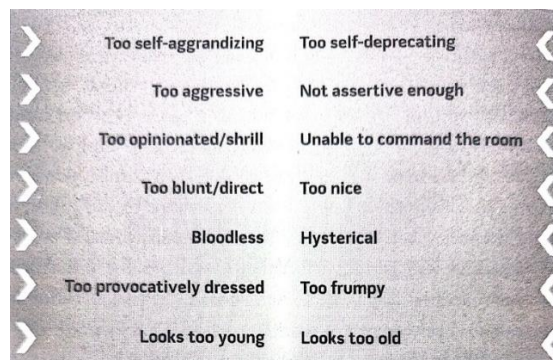
Good feedback on executive presence is hard to come by it's difficult to give, difficult to elicit, and difficult to receive. The issue is even more sensitive for women, people of color, and LGBT employees.

### 6. WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

Sheryl Sandberg Facebook's number two, 2013, Lean In. "It is also a the very core of why women are held back."

#### NO BANDWIDTH

Has nothing changed? Are women indeed "damned if they do, doomed if they don't"?



*Figure 10. The fine line of executive presence*

#### APPEARANCE

Either they're too feminine (and therefore incompetent) or not feminine enough (and therefore mannish and inauthentic). **The too feminine/not feminine enough double bind**. Even when women succeed at telegraphing professionalism, they can still be penalized for being female.

#### COMMUNICATION

Women seeking to demonstrate leadership by commanding a room run up against an extremely narrow band of acceptability.

#### GRAVITAS

**A woman who shows teeth, risks being perceive as a bitch, or noncooperative ("not a team player").**

Behaviors that confer gravitas on a man by demonstrating he can "show teeth" come off as aggression in a woman. Speaking truth to power and showing teeth aren't the only gravitas – building behaviors that women can't get right. **Reputation**, too, **turns out to be a double – edged sword for women**.

### HOW TO WIN GREATER LATITUDE: INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES

*WHEN YOU SHOW TEETH, SHOW THAT YOU HAVE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE TEAM AT HEART*



Assert your difference of opinion, but take the “I” out of your argument. Be deliberate with your language. Be careful about your tone and your body language. Consider the perspective of the majority.

***WHEN SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER, WIDEN YOUR BRAND OF RECEPTIVITY WITH A JUDICIOUS USE OF HUMOR***

“I just want to make sure you had the whole picture.”

***HIT THE MARK BY TAKING MORE CAREFUL AIM***

Women take a broad – spectrum approach to communication that leaves open to crossfire.

***BUILD A PERSONAL BRAND THAT GRANTS YOU LOTS OF LATITUDE TO BE YOU – AND BE RELENTLESS IN PROJECTING IT***

***BUY MORE EP LATITUDE BY WIELDING YOUR CREDENTIALS MORE CONSCIOUSLY.***

## **7. AUTHENTICITY VS. CONFORMITY**

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### **RESOLVING THE TENSION**

If you’re different from most people at work, do you suppress that difference or embrace it in order to be perceived as leadership material?

Small businesses ask that their employees mold themselves to fit the path carved by the owner.

### **TACTICS**

***KNOW YOUR “NON – NEGOTIABLES” AND WALK AWAY***

Some cultures simply don’t deserve your compliance. The stress of working for a leader whom she couldn’t respect and who couldn’t perceive her value was taking a toll on her health. “I had to remove myself”. “It was making me physically sick, going into that situation every day, knowing that people did not see me the way I knew I deserved to be seen. Nothing is worth that.”

***NEVER TRY TO BE SOMEONE YOU’RE NOT***

“Who do you think you are, talking to me like that”

***PLAY THE LONG GAME***

“It’s your responsibility to figure out how to align your talents and gifts to the culture so that, long – term, you achieve your goals.

***PERCEIVE SLIGHTS AS OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS IGNORANCE***

“If he’s not going to get to know me, then I am going to some other company.”

***SEEK AIR COVER BEFORE YOU STEP OUT TO ASSERT YOUR AUTHENTICITY***

***LEVERAGE YOUR BACKGROUND***

In research, nothing is more important than getting candid answers.

***DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF BY WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT***

“Women are more likely to be screened out and not heard than men”

### **CONCLUSION**

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Ordinary mortals can crack the EP code. These skills are eminently learnable. You don’t have to be some kind of genius and ace all top picks across the three categories of gravitas, communication, and appearance.

Figure out what is negotiable – and what is not.

Commit to the work involved and embraced your EP journey.