

Executive Presence Checklist

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If there is one people trait that is most counterintuitive, it has to be that people don't know themselves very well. You would think we know ourselves very well, especially given that we live with ourselves every day. Yet neuroscience finds that most people have very limited self-awareness.

Unless we've completed and debriefed numerous assessments, worked in a feedback-rich culture for many years, and received sound feedback throughout our lives, our self-awareness is limited. We live with subconscious habits, biases, and intentions which confuse our reality and prevent us from having a deep and accurate self-awareness.

Our lack of self-awareness is applicable to both our personal and professional lives. Whether leading, parenting, socializing, or playing, we talk and behave in ways we don't realize. We impact people in ways we don't intend. We create perceptions about us that are unknown to us. We don't objectively understand many aspects of our appearance, attitude, communication, and behaviors. Nor do we fully understand the impact these have on others.

Of course, some people don't care much about how they are perceived or their impact on others. They don't give much attention to their self-image. As a result, they generally have very little influence. They aren't taken very seriously nor highly respected.

How important are perceptions about you and your impact on others? If you are in a position of influence or aspire to be influential, how important are others' perceptions to your success? For example, in the workplace, do managers benefit from having a distinguished persona? Like it or not, how people are perceived, especially managers and executives in the workplace, has a significant impact on their leadership effectiveness. Perceptions also impact their compensation as well as their career advancement. Whether a person's image is a facade or genuine, it doesn't matter when it comes to perceptions. How a person is perceived is others' reality.

It is well known that first impressions are hard to change. So are first impressions hard to get right. For those who aspire to be respected as a senior manager or executive, so too is executive presence. As a recovering engineer, I know. I went from a stereotypical engineer to sales person to manager to executive. Every transition was difficult, especially as I strived to find the right balance of maturity, humility, gravitas, and authenticity. I failed miserably many times and still do.

Projecting a genuine, polished, and confident self-image comes from within, but what people observe on the outside often determines how you are perceived. This is not to say you should merely focus on your external image, but neither should you just focus on your internal self-confidence. If you only concern yourself with how you think within, your external image may

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hinder you from getting past first impressions to reveal your true self. Likewise, if you only concern yourself with your external image, you might make a great first impression, but if people get to know a different you, they will lose respect for you.

There is a third option. You can do both. You can project a distinguished persona while also possessing honorable character and a likable authentic personality. You can be internally genuine as well as externally polished.

Everything you think, say, or do impacts how you are perceived. Yet there are a finite set of attributes typically associated with executive presence. If this is an area important to you, or others whom you influence, use the list below as a checklist. Use the list as a reference in asking others who you trust how well you manifest executive presence. Receiving feedback and assessing yourself will increase your self-awareness and help target areas in becoming your best self.

- Clean refined physical appearance
- Competent, knowledgeable, and experienced
- Confident, self-assured, belief in self, lack of dependence on others' validation
- Interest in others, asks thought-provoking questions
- Constructively assertive and candid
- Personable, authentic
- Articulate, understandable, connects topics to the big picture
- Stays at the appropriate level of detail
- Substantial vocabulary
- Calm demeanor, slow talking cadence
- Balance of energy, not too much but not too little
- Self-assured body language, sits up straight, uses meaningful hand gestures
- Physically fit
- Mentally fit
- Honorable core values, beliefs
- Optimistic, can-do attitude
- Prepared
- Influential over important resources and impactful circumstances

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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