

The 15 Most Important Characteristics of Executive Presence

I am often asked, "What is the most popular topic clients request when it comes to leadership development?"

My answer? "Presence" -- specifically Executive Presence. I have found that Executive Presence is that "special sauce" which separates *good* leaders who "do well" from *outstanding* leaders who catapult to the top of their organizations.

Let's face it - most leaders have good enough technical skills, business acumen, and all-around smarts to achieve a certain level of success in an organization. But, a powerful sense of "Presence" - that *je ne sais quoi* - is often what's missing, and that is what can hold back many leaders from advancing in their careers.

What is Executive Presence? And, more importantly, how do you get it? The way I like to define Executive Presence is *a certain set of attitudes, behaviors, and skills which - when combined - send the right signals, influence others, and ultimately drive results*. When you develop powerful Executive Presence, you automatically strengthen your Leadership Personal Brand, i.e., the way others perceive, think, and feel about YOU™, which is a critically important foundation of success.

"That sounds appealing," many clients have told me, "but can Executive Presence really be *developed*?" Absolutely. Let's face it: No one is born with Executive Presence - it is a *learned behavior* with multiple facets, which is strengthened through intention and practice.

What is the essential first step in developing your own Presence? It's getting clear on how well you currently fare with the various characteristics that make up Executive Presence.

With that in mind, I'm sharing with you below a self-assessment that highlights what I have seen in my coaching practice to be the 15 most fundamental aspects of Executive Presence. This will help you review the state of your own Presence, both in your personal and professional life.

Assess the State of Your Own Executive Presence

Take this quiz, and see how well you are doing on these key facets of Executive Presence, which can in turn impact your Leadership Personal Brand.

On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the lowest score and 6 the highest score, rate yourself in the following areas. (Be honest!)

<i>How would you self-assess your Executive Presence attitudes, behaviors, and skills?</i>	<i>Self-assessment from 1 (low) to 6 (high)</i>
1. I have strong, positive influence on my team, coworkers, colleagues, and superiors.	
2. I manage my emotional reactions well in the workplace, and I stay calm under pressure.	
3. When I need to let someone know I'm unhappy with a situation, I speak to them calmly and assertively. I don't express my feelings in a passive-aggressive way.	
4. I am resilient when pressure builds on the job.	
5. I speak up comfortably in very important meetings and when in the presence of more senior leaders.	
6. When I'm attending a gathering or a meeting, I am able to focus 100% on the topic at hand, without distracting thoughts or checking my phone for messages.	
7. Based on the way others relate to me, I believe I exhibit charisma on the job.	
8. I have inner self-confidence, and I believe in myself.	
9. When team members and others push back on my decisions, I manage the situation in a professional, balanced way so that the best choice is made without harming workplace relationships.	
10. I'm capable of thinking on my feet when under pressure.	
11. When I'm called upon to make a presentation, I do so powerfully, engaging my audience from beginning to end.	

12. When conflict arises, I manage it quickly and competently, without damaging professional relationships.	
13. I know how to maneuver office politics, as necessary.	
14. I'm aware of and effectively manage my Executive Leadership Brand, not just within my organization, but also within my industry.	
15. I use storytelling as a means of engaging others when I communicate.	

Obviously, if you rated yourself a "5" or a "6" on all 15 of these Executive Presence attitudes, behaviors, and skills, good for you - well done! Based on my experience though, that would be rare. It's not unusual to have room for improvement on a fair number of these attributes.

So, take a moment to review your self-scores, and write down two or three aspects of Executive Presence that are the most important for you and which you would like to improve.

Action Steps

Sit back, and assess your scores. Where did you do well? In which areas did you score lower?

On the statements where you scored well, ask yourself what allows you to do that. What makes you think those are areas where you exhibit strengths?

Now, look at the questions where you ranked lower and choose a specific aspect of Executive Presence that you would like to strengthen the most.

1. Find a role model (boss, peer, colleague) whom you think embodies that particular aspect, and seek their advice on how they have managed to succeed in that area. You might even ask them if you can observe them in action and take note of what they do to really excel at that particular Executive Presence characteristic.

2. Check out the articles I've written on various executive and leadership topics. These articles can be found at www.BrendaBence.com/media-room/articles.php.

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3. Lastly, consider enlisting an "accountability buddy," someone to help support you in developing your Executive Presence, and share your plan with them. Ask if that person would be open to following up with you on your plan as well as giving you honest feedback as you progress.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including *Master the Brand Called YOU™* and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.



In one of her recently released books, *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™? How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in Fortune 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, personal and corporate brand and leadership development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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