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How to Take Command of Your Executive Presence in 2017

You can shape your executive presence to project an image consistent with who you want to be and the opportunities you want to have.



By [Joelle K. Jay@JoelleKJay](mailto:JoelleKJay)

A graphic consisting of a blue rectangular header at the top and a white rectangular body below it. The text 'HELLO my name is' is written in white, sans-serif font on the blue background. The 'HELLO' part is in all caps and larger font size, while 'my name is' is in lowercase and smaller font size.

HELLO
my name is

CREDIT: Getty Images

Executive presence is a vital sign of your readiness to take on bigger leadership roles. Yet, many leaders don't know what executive presence actually is, much less if they have it. That would be

worrisome, except for the fact that you can change it. You can shape your presence to project an image consistent with who you want to be and the opportunities you want to have. Executive presence is the degree to which others perceive you to be a leader.

The trap many leaders fall into is being underestimated by others because of the way they present themselves. They may be perfectly capable, but if their presence doesn't project the expected image of a leader, they may be seen as less powerful than they are. Women can easily become victim to this problem, being undervalued because of their perception from others. To eliminate this problem, they need to think deeply about acquiring executive presence, which can be complicated for women.

With historically few women holding high-level leadership positions, the image of what executive presence should be is often based on a man and, to further complicate things, "women are unfairly deemed to have the wrong leadership style needed to be successful." Business women are trapped in a double bind of combining being an ideal manager, which means being masculine, with being an ideal woman, which means being feminine. To combat this contradiction, women must present themselves as leaders while maintaining their natural strength and style.

The second hurdle women face when tackling executive presence is the sensitivity of the topic. Women, in particular, have trouble getting feedback on their presence- especially when it comes to appearance. While appearance is only one small element of presence, it is an important one. Specific details of appearance, like unkempt attire and provocative clothing, can undercut presence up to 75 percent. Not to mention it is difficult to address.

Resolving this dilemma is more than a matter of managing perception and communicating to others that, "I have what it takes, and I'm ready to fill the role of a leader." It is also about being confident in yourself. The more you can learn about the impressions you make on others, the more you can shape your image to fit their expectations, while also working on strengthen your own self-image.

Executive presence manifests in the silent judgements people make about you, rightly or wrongly. The more specifics you can get about how you are being measured, the better you can assess yourself. These attributes play important roles in determining executive presence: status and reputation, physical characteristics, demeanor, communication skills, interpersonal skills, interpersonal behavior patterns, values-in-action, intellect and expertise, work outcomes and power use. By understanding these different elements in yourself, you can shape your presence intentionally, to make a positive impact.

When you find your unique way of expressing executive presence, you will naturally develop a stronger sense of yourself as a leader, termed as "A Sense of Self" (another vitally important factor of

executive presence). Understanding yourself as a leader will not only allow you to shape your executive presence, it will also make you feel powerful, and it will show.

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Dr. Joelle Jay is a principal with the Leadership Research Institute, as well as an executive coach, keynote speaker, and the author of *The Inner Edge: The Ten Practices of Personal Leadership*. Joelle specializes in the advancement of executive women, and she is proud to have supported the development of top talent into positions of leadership for many successful companies, including MetLife, Adobe, and Microsoft.