

The 'It' Factor: How To Have Executive Presence In A Meeting

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The Muse, Contributor

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Think back to a recent meeting, when someone there just seemed to attract and engage everyone around the table. Someone like [Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg](#) or Virgin's Richard Branson—someone who has the ability to walk into a boardroom, command attention, and leave everyone wanting more. Someone who has that “it” factor.

In business, this is called executive presence. While it may seem like some people “just get it,” executive presence is actually something that they’ve probably worked very hard to achieve. In fact, as [a public relations professional](#), part of my job is preparing company spokespeople for important interviews or speaking engagements, and I’ve worked with many leaders and executives on developing their “it” factor.



You can achieve it, too—and in fact, it’s an important skill to work on whether you’re currently in the C-suite or not. So, before you head to that next big meeting, take note of a few things I’ve found to be helpful in developing your own executive presence.



[The Worst CEO Screw-Ups Of 2013](#)

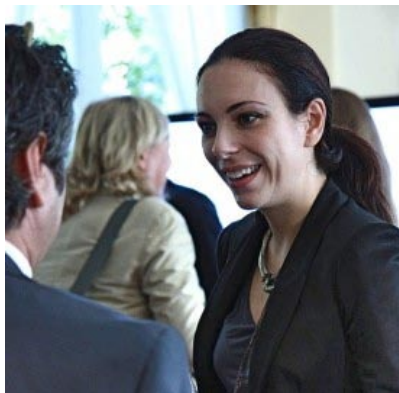


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Be Polished, Poised, and Prepared

A person with good executive presence never lets people see her sweat. She’s not harried running from meeting to meeting, she’s not flustered when she speaks, and she’s seems like the person who, even in the wake of a crisis in the middle of the night, could still show up looking put together.

How do you achieve this type of poise (even if you are running from meeting to meeting)? First, before



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entering a room, always take a quick second to compose yourself—take a deep breath, smooth your hair, and slow down.

But more importantly, [spend extra time beforehand to prepare yourself for anything](#). Think about the questions that your boss or client might have, and prepare a well thought-out response, which will prevent you from having to scramble through your notes or blurt out, “I don’t know.” Be calm, collected, and the person with all the answers, and you’ll be seen as a leader.

Mind Your Body Language

In your next meeting, look around and note how everyone is sitting. Typically, shy or unconfident people will close off and make themselves small by crossing their legs and arms. Imagine [a hunched over Steve Jobs](#), avoiding looking at you. Seem impressive? Not so much.

People with executive presence demand more control over the room. (Ever heard of the power stance? Check out [Marissa Mayer's Fortune cover](#).) Stand (or sit) tall, look engaged by leaning slightly forward, and take up space by putting your arms on the table, not huddling them to your body.

Also, make sure to maintain solid eye contact with everyone in the room, which is not only personable, it portrays confidence. (Though, don’t overdo it—you do still need to blink!)

Speak Up

You’ve heard it before—to be taken seriously in a meeting, speak clearly, firmly, and loudly enough so that people can hear you. And avoid trailing off at the end of a sentence or using fluffy language like “I hope to have this done” or “I think it will get results.”

Also, don’t be afraid of silence. So many people will ramble just to fill silence, which can lead to less-than-intelligent-sounding statements. You want to [leave others hanging onto your every word](#), not trying to stay awake while they glance at the clock and wonder when you’ll finish.

Make Others Feel Special

As Maya Angelou said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Overall, one of the best ways

to achieve executive presence is to make everyone around you feel like he or she is the only person in the room.

It may seem counterintuitive, but often the best way to do this is by [really listening to others](#). Don't hog the conversation, and don't speak over others or interrupt. When someone is talking, maintain eye contact, lean toward her, and nod at what she's saying. Then, thoughtfully respond to what you heard, asking good questions to show that you were paying attention. The more you listen to other people, the more they will want to listen to you.

When it comes to executive presence, remember that actions speak louder than words. So, take the time to think through everything you do and how those around you may perceive it. Through practice, you'll master the above skills until one day, you'll be the person everyone wants to talk and listen to. Pretty soon, people will be saying, "She just gets it."

This article was originally published on [The Daily Muse](#). For more on great leadership communication, check out:

- [Disaster Recovery: Crisis Communication 101](#)
- [Your Smart Guide to Body Language in the Conference Room](#)
- [Panel Prowess: How to be the Best Speaker in the Bunch](#)

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Photo of [executive courtesy of Shutterstock](#).