Executive Presence: The Ability to Connect, Motivate, Collaborate, and Inspire

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Faculty Lunch at the Ropp
December 2013
ADVANCEing Faculty Program
What is Presence?

Presence is

1) the ability to authentically connect, captivate, motivate, collaborate, and inspire others through flexible, value-centered communications and leadership.

2) the ability to project genuine confidence that inspires the trust and appreciation of others.

Presence is more than having charisma, good presentation skills or dressing well!
Executive Presence vs. Presence

- Presence is the ability to comfortably draw and hold attention while delivering a message.

- Executive presence is the ability to comfortably draw and hold attention while delivering a “business”-savvy message.

- “Business”-savvy Message:
  - Clear
  - Concise
  - Connected
Why is Executive Presence Important?

- Research suggests that being perceived as leadership material is essential to being promoted into leadership positions.

- Senior executives say that executive presence counts for 26% of what it takes to get promoted.
Why do women struggle with Executive Presence?

- Executive presence involves a number of traditionally male attributes.
- Women are often held to a stricter code of behavior than men and punished more severely for deviations from that code.
- Feedback women receive on executive presence is often contradictory and confusing (i.e., the range of “okay” behavior for men is wider than it is for women).
- So...Women are unclear on how to act.
Keys to *Executive Presence*:

- The ability to project:
  - Confidence
  - Poise under pressure
  - Decisiveness
  - Assertiveness
- Strong speaking skills
- Ability to read an audience or situation
- Appearance
Projecting Confidence

• Know your “business”
  ◦ Intelligence (knowledge), Insight (wisdom)

• Know Yourself
  ◦ Know who you are, reflect your values in decisions, know how and when to adapt

• Identify your objectives
  ◦ Convey? Convince? Coach?

• Be clear in your message
  ◦ What do you want, need, or expect?
Poise under Pressure

- Manage distractions
- Put fear aside
- Adapt to what circumstances prescribe
- Focus on others there, not yourself
- Be prepared, know your content
- Take a deep breath
Decisiveness and Assertiveness:

- Need a baseline of self-confidence
- Willing to deal with unpredictable situations
- Honed presentation skills
- Be firm but polite
- Find your “executive voice” (your communication assets: listening, thinking and speaking on your feet, maintaining your composure) and leverage it
Strong Speaking Skills:

• Speak up
• Use strong, clear language – be succinct
• Avoid qualifiers
• Communicate with passion and energy
• Display positive body language
  ◦ Stand tall
  ◦ Make eye contact
  ◦ Offer a firm handshake
  ◦ Use an authoritative tone of voice
• Use a steady voice
Strong Speaking Skills, part 2:

- Express feelings and emotions to capture interest
- Use your voice and body congruently
- Tell stories to make your point real (plan them ahead of time!)
- Show excitement, interest about what you are doing
- Use eyes (connect), body (leaning) as a tool to help convey your message
Ability to Read An Audience or Situation:

- Goal: Connect, build trust, establish relationships
- Be authentic
- Truly listen
- Make eye contact
- Share of yourself
- Engage the audience
Appearance:

- Take the time and effort to exhibit a physical presence that reflects the image you want to portray:
  - Casual vs. formal
  - Appropriate to audience expectations vs. only your own individual expression
  - Your unique style vs. a copy of someone else

- Appearance is a small part of the equation
- BUT…Major mistakes in appearance are detrimental:
  - unkempt attire
  - too tight, too baggy clothing
  - provocative clothing
Executive Presence Quiz:

Rate yourself (1 – 7; 1 = low, 7 = high) on each of the following attributes:

- Genuine: do you walk-the-talk? avoid pretending or cover-ups?
- Clear communicator: simple, understandable, no jargon, code or spin?
- Present: inquire, listen, process, use body language, facial expressions, tone-of-voice to demonstrate complete attention?
- Display confidence and courage: take innovative risks that others are excited to join?
- Display optimism and passion: deeply committed?
- Like colleagues: see people in a positive light and treat everyone with respect?
- Laugh at own mistakes and willing to be vulnerable: no blame or shame?
Putting it All Together

• Build on your own natural strengths
• Integrate the elements into who you are and how you come across
• Project confidence in who you are and what you have to offer
References

- Toth, Michele, “Executive Presence,” SWE WE12, Houston, TX, November 2013.
- Their, Maria, “Executive Presence and Listening Skills,”