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## DO YOU HAVE THE 'IT' FACTOR? – Best Strategies to Activate Your Executive Presence



***“We have to move away from the belief that people are born with “IT”, and recognize that we all possess unique abilities and gifts to create our own brand of executive presence.”***

Are you receiving feedback that you need executive presence? Are you being told what “IT” is, and how “IT” should look?

If you are like most, it is unlikely that you are getting specific direction as to the changes you need to make. Or you may believe executive presence is unattainable as you are not an executive.

In a world that is constantly trying to conform you to somebody else’s ideal image, often times it is far too easy to fall into the trap of being dissatisfied with who you are and your own unique and inherent abilities.

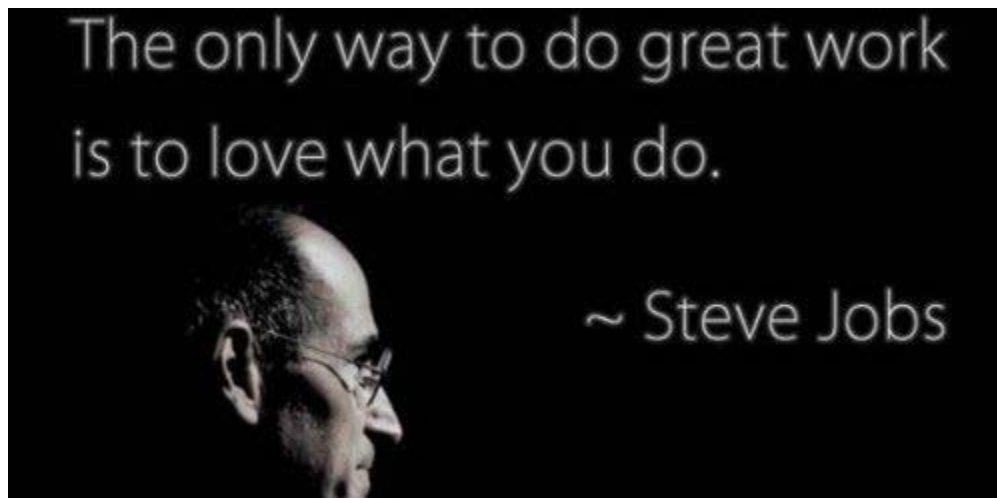
This is why, as an executive coach, I have focused my energy on making “IT” or Executive Presence, accessible to everyone, without their having to become someone they are not. In other words, I have successfully worked with people to empower them to find their executive presence within the framework of their authentic self.

With this month’s eNewsletter, I will help you to lay the foundation for building your executive presence, so that you will shine in your own right.

## **In Your Own Right . . . The Right Way**

***“If your brand truly reflects your personal values and aligns with your goals (not someone else’s vision of who and what you should be), you will have created a magical harmony from within and will present a unified and sustaining image that will neither disappoint nor surprise but instead endure.”***

The above is an excerpt from my book [\*\*The Future Of You: Creating Your Enduring Brand.\*\*](#)



At its core, executive presence is the ability to know yourself. It is the ability to understand what drives you and the things for which you are willing to work. This is not about smoke and mirrors but honing in on the ability to be your own best PR manager.

## Action Item 1: Recognize What Executive Presence Actually Is

*“Executive presence is a special quality that captivates others to follow you and inspires allegiance and devotion. It paves the way to personal leadership and is earned rather than appointed.”*

Some have suggested that the definition of executive presence is mysterious and subject to personal interpretation. After all, what is this “special quality” that some seem to have, while others don’t? It is as if it is left to chance, as opposed to being the result of a tangible effort.



However, the fact is that you don’t start off with executive presence, you earn it.

In other words, executive presence is not something you are born with; it is the result of making a conscious decision to invest in the management of your reputation and having the courage to step-up and stand out.

Like the person who regularly works out at the gym and is in great physical shape, creating your own executive presence requires your time, energy and full commitment. There are no shortcuts, but the returns or rewards are significant IF you are willing to put in the required effort.

Ready to make the commitment? Here are a few things you must do to get the ball rolling:

- Identify your passion. Be brutally honest with yourself. Do you believe in what you are doing and do you have a passion for being the best at it? You need to follow your heart and invest time in doing what you love.
- Set yourself apart. Determine what it is that makes you unique and different from someone else. This could relate to your style of clothing, your emotional intelligence, your expertise, your interpersonal skills or your readiness to initiate change.
- Build greater self-awareness of how others perceive your executive presence. Conduct market research and seek feedback from trusted advisors/confidantes/sponsors who will tell you the truth.
- Choose those behaviors that support your “best” self and identify success pillars along the way.

## **Action Item 2: Look The Part**

In today’s fast paced business world, we are being forced to form quick first impressions. Whether fair or not, we tend to stereotype people. You need to ensure that you are not giving off mixed messages.



I know that the term dress for success has been used to the point of becoming almost superfluous, even irrelevant. But do not underestimate its importance.

I absolutely believe that executive presence begins with the cover – as in the cover of a book. It is an outside-in proposition, in which the way you present yourself in both your dress and body language is critical.

If the book cover is shabby, bland, generic, it will present an ineffectual image that will, regardless of the power of the message within its pages, make it invisible and dispensable.

However, if the cover is compelling, attractive, unique and current, then people will be moved to pick it up and to open it. This means that you have to manage perceptions. Above all, do not allow titles or positions to intimidate or distract you. Regardless of whether someone is a CEO or VP, you deserve to be seen and heard.

The following tips will enable you to not only gauge how people see you, but also what you need to do to put the right face to your executive presence.

## **Body Language**

- Be aware of the subliminal messages your body language is sending. Are you open and inviting, or withdrawn and closed? When you fold your arms in front of your body, you form a barrier between you and the other person. This can be perceived as defensive or scared. In contrast, leaving your arms unfolded and maintaining steady eye contact will make others feel welcome.
- When entering a room, walk with purpose and smile, raising your chin slightly to project confidence and approachability.
- Strike a pose. Stand tall with your feet slightly apart when you are engaging others or presenting at a meeting. This pose makes you look bigger and stops you from looking timid. Even if you don't feel confident, you will feel and look more powerful.
- Don't wait for someone to come up to you before introducing yourself. Instead, be the first one to reach your hand out to meet someone new. Always shake hands for the length of time it takes to know the color of the person's eyes and repeat their name.

## **Dress:**

Dress for the job you want. If you don't look the part of a leader, you're not likely to be given the role.

While you do not have to wear the latest fashions from Paris, or look like you just stepped out from the cover of GQ, your professional dress should reflect a crisp and clean look and feel.

Your style should be both current and aligned with your environment. Do not make a statement by dressing or looking radically different from everyone else. The boardroom is no place for purple hair or unconventional clothing.

Grooming counts as much as clothing. Invest in a good stylist who understands how you want to be perceived. Beards should be trimmed appropriately.

## **Action Item 3: GET VISIBILITY**

*“Decide what you want. Believe that you'll get it. Live as if you already have it*

Like the muscles in your body that may be hidden, only to emerge after you begin to really exercise, you already have within you executive presence.



It may be hidden beneath years of uncertainty and career compromises, but it is there within you as it is within a Richard Branson, or a Michelle Obama. In short, rebrand yourself by creating your own publicity campaign, without needing to stand on a soapbox or copy these examples.

This is not to suggest that you need to be aggressively self-promoting, but you do have to be noticed. You may not crave recognition, however, working hard outside of the spotlight often results in being taken for granted or not being given credit for your ideas. If you're not in people's thoughts, then you'll be passed up for new projects, additional responsibilities or promotions.

Let's look at some strategies that you can use to get noticed in the workplace.

- Move from being a generalist to a strategist. Think strategically about what types of skills your organization needs. Expand these skills, as the more knowledgeable and skillful you become in a particular area, the more likely you are to be appreciated for your work.
- Speak up in the first ten minutes at a meeting. If you are not a subject matter expert, come prepared with a thought provoking question to show that you are present.
- Create a networking navigation plan that will give you the visibility to decision makers and influencers.
- Build a network of "allies" who can help you get assigned to interesting, significant, or eye-catching projects.
- Ask your boss to assign you to a project where you can "rock" and bring in the results that will set you up for success and recognition from leadership.
- Get involved in your company's charities where you can expand your relationships to include the senior leaders with whom you may not normally have access.

## **Many Paths To The Same Destination**

While the action items listed above are by no means the complete list of steps for creating your own unique brand of executive presence, it is a good place to start.



That said, there is one final point that I would like to make . . . there is no “one way” to achieve presence unless you have a game plan.

However, a solid game plan must recognize the fact that everyone is at a different place or stage, and therefore will need to focus on the development of different traits. Or to put it another way, one size does not fit all.



In the end, there are many varied and diverse paths to achieving executive presence. It is reflected in how you navigate your career to make a difference, your willingness to challenge the status quo, as well as your ability to inspire others to follow you.

As such, and in the words of Greg Anderson who wrote the book 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness “Focus on the journey, not the destination. Joy is found not in finishing an activity but in doing it.”

*Wishing you success at projecting your “IT”,*

*Roz*