

INTRODUCTION:

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE PRESENCE?

It's a story common to companies large and small, private and public: the firm employs two individuals who are equally talented. However, over time, one person prospers while the other stagnates. The former becomes integral to the organization's future, while the latter never becomes a company leader.

Why does this happen? Because the successful employee is not only talented – he or she is also highly skilled at creating impact, exercising influence and consistently providing value. All organizations draw their future executives from these kind of individuals.

How does an employee become part of this desirable talent pool? By identifying and increasing their executive presence to ensure advancement and ultimate success.

What is Executive Presence?

Executive presence is the ability to win the confidence of those around you. It means you possess a professional magnetism that influences others; you're admired for exemplary leadership and respected as an authority. When you have executive presence your colleagues, subordinates and superiors rely on your strength and clarity. In the article "She's Gotta Have 'It'", Michelle Conlin says, "When leaders with executive presence speak, people listen--because the talk is filled with conviction instead of equivocation. They inspire that I'll-follow-you-anywhere loyalty, conveying an aura of warmth and authenticity to everybody from the receptionist to the CEO." (*BusinessWeek* July 2002)

When you have executive presence you think in new ways that help you reframe your relationship to work. You redefine your goals for yourself and your place in your company. You alter your perspective so that a different, more productive and positive attitude and belief system can be created.

With executive presence, you transform self-doubt and uncertainty about how to further your career into self-assurance, energy and the ability to successfully navigate the corporate landscape and advance up the corporate ladder.

Having executive presence infuses you with confidence about yourself and what you are able to accomplish. It helps you evaluate and ultimately eliminate the roadblocks that have kept you from rising to the top of an organization and contributing to its success.

Executive presence is about creating a consistent view of yourself as a compelling force inside an organization. You are known as someone who doesn't just rely on your authority or title, but your influence to shape and positively affect the outcome of situations. In the book, *The Leader of the Future*, Charles Handy says, "A career is now not so much a ladder of roles, but a growing reputation for making things happen. Influence, not authority, is what drives the political organization today in all organizations" (Jossey-Bass, 1996)

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

Executive presence is imperative for professional success. No matter what your position, the more of this valuable asset you have, the more others will seek your support and leadership. The higher you are in an organization, the higher your executive presence must be. Without executive presence, you'll find yourself hitting an impenetrable ceiling. You'll become frustrated and fail to achieve your full potential.

People who have responsibility, work on high-profile projects, impact the bottom line and are trusted with confidential and important information have significant executive presence. It is often the key consideration in determining promotions and responsibility.

A survey commissioned by Robert Half International Inc. asked top-level executives what is most likely to cause valuable employees to quit their jobs. The primary reason cited was lack of advancement opportunities.

When you focus exclusively on merit and hard work as foundations to advancement, you'll be disappointed. The hard truth is that advances are made by the perception you create, not just skill and merit. Working on executive presence creates the right perception so valuable employees stay in their jobs and continue to receive the promotions they deserve.

Having an executive presence helps you create a successful career, move upward and reach your full leadership potential. You won't become sidetracked by these common distractions:

- fear of the possibility of a merger or downsizing
- limited advancement opportunities
- company's prospects look bleak
- company's culture isn't inspiring and brings you down
- industry's prospects aren't positive
- boss is not supportive

CHAPTER 1.

POSITION YOURSELF FOR GREATER VISIBILITY

Developing greater visibility is important to creating a strong executive presence. You must actively plan steps that enhance your career and position yourself in ways that showcase your contributions. Often, implementing your plan requires directness: you must be straightforward about what you want and hope to achieve. However, everyone has a different style. With that in mind, this chapter will discuss both direct and subtle approaches so you can create a self-promotion strategy that matches your personality, style and work environment.

The subtle methods of achieving visibility do, however, require a constant awareness of opportunities to promote your accomplishments and demonstrate your talents. Be prepared to take advantage of whatever opening presents itself – even if you have just a moment’s notice.

In this chapter, you will learn how to always be on the lookout for opportunities to create impact and influence. You will prove you are excelling at your job, position yourself for political advantage and become associated with executives in positions of power.

In addition, you will discover ways to create your own brand and take advantage of opportunities to promote yourself. In doing so, you will gain political leverage, have the confidence to act as if you’ve already arrived and educate top executives about your value to the company. You’ll also learn ways to avoid becoming too self-serving and strategies for overcoming internal and external resistance.

■ BRAND YOURSELF

Branding is simply the process of setting yourself apart from the competition and making it clear that you’re the best. No matter what position you hold in your company, you can brand “you” and market your brand for advancement or put yourself on the fast track for assignments that will make an even stronger contribution to your organization.

You can create your own brand by focusing on the characteristics that make you unique. Become an expert on something that will help you stand out and prove your worth to the organization.

Peter Montoya and Tim Vandehey in their book, *“The Brand Called You”*, define a brand as, “a personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for, personally and professionally.”

Your primary goal in building your visibility is to persuade those who can influence your career that you’re the right person for the job you want most. Since there are probably others with the same idea, you have to find ways to prove that you are absolutely the best person for the assignment. If it’s not a particular job or promotion you’re after – perhaps you want to someone in senior management to know

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your name or you want your boss's boss to have a clearer picture of the contributions you make – you can still apply these strategies to increase your profile in your company.

How do big corporations demonstrate to their customers they are the best? They establish an appealing brand that provokes interest, excitement and loyalty. While those huge companies typically hire expensive ad agencies to create and promote their brands, you can accomplish the same thing -- on a smaller scale -- at no cost at all.

Management guru Tom Peters suggests you, “start by identifying the qualities or characteristics that make you distinctive from your competitors – or your colleagues.” “What,” he asks, “have you done lately – this week – to make yourself stand out? What would your colleagues or your customers say is your greatest and clearest strength? Your most noteworthy personal trait?”

Here's another question to ask yourself: “If you were a car, what kind would it be?” According to CIO Magazine, “Last December, Michael Iacona decided he was ready to raise his visibility within his industry. But first the CIO of TMP Worldwide Advertising and Communications thought about what he wanted his name to connote. To focus his thinking, he went through an exercise to identify his personal brand. Iacona sent a survey to his peers, colleagues and even people he had just met to determine the impression he makes. A sample question: If he were a car, what kind would he be?” Iacona explains, “This is not about creating an image of who you want to be, but identifying the unique value that you bring.” (Martha Heller, “*Cue the Spotlight*,” CIO Magazine, December 1, 2006)

Here are some examples of famous companies' brand statements:

- Disney – To make people happy.
- Boeing – To push the leading edge of aviation, taking huge challenges doing what others cannot do.
- 3M – To solve unsolved problems innovatively.
- Microsoft – To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential.
- Wal-Mart – To offer all of the fine customers in our territories their entire household needs in a manner in which they continue to think of us fondly.
- Apple Computer – To bring the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals and consumers around the world through its innovative hardware, software and Internet offerings.
- Levi-Strauss – We will market the most appealing and widely worn casual clothing in the world. We will clothe the world.

Think in terms of your top talents and the value these can provide to the company. Does your attention to detail ensure nothing falls through the cracks? Do you have a knack for solving complex problems, a skill that has saved time and money? Are you so good at defusing conflict? Those might be your branding points.

Play around with your brandtraits, experimenting with different ways of expressing them. Imagine you're creating an ad or business card. How can you express your value in a single, brief statement?

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Come up with something that is easy to remember, short and to the point. Your statement should inspire you toward greatness, be a vision of who you most want to become – and be practical.

Branding is key to establishing executive presence because executive presence is all about perceptions. So consider traits that not only help you stand apart, but above, the crowd.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Nothing falls through the cracks – ever.
- If I can't find the perfect solution, I'll create one from scratch.
- From conflict to cooperation in just one meeting.
- Strategies that will save you time, money...and sanity!
- Strong communication skills, even stronger results.
- Innovation, not exasperation.

Here's a couple of examples of personal brands adopted by successful businesspersons:

Sallie Krawcheck, the CFO and head of strategy for Citigroup, has enhanced her career by building on a clear brand. A *Knowledge@Wharton* article observed, "Krawcheck's insistence on corporate ethics, honest numbers and solid, research-based reporting has earned her a reputation as Wall Street's "Mrs. Clean." (*Knowledge@Wharton*, November 1, 2006). She even landed on the Fortune cover with the headline, "The Last Honest Analyst." She has branded her reputation as being someone who focuses on ethics, honesty and being frank. Thus, the "Mrs. Clean" reputation is the brand she has built and is known for.

In the January 2005 edition of *Knowledge@Wharton*, the Progressive Corp.'s Northeast Agency general manager Meryl Golden said her personal brand is best described as "work hard, play hard." She added, "I'm a direct communicator and my 'work hard, play hard' attitude keeps my job in perspective. It also means I nurture other people who work hard, and I sell them within the company to help them find opportunities - which makes them more loyal to me."

Once you create your brand statement, you can use it as a focal point when you communicate your worth to others. Find opportunities to demonstrate your style through the type of projects you undertake and the accomplishments you promote. If it's your top-notch attention to detail you want others to notice, showcase the complicated, multi-step project you coordinated that went off without a hitch. To demonstrate your talent for solving problems, focus attention on the issue you brilliantly resolved after everyone else had given up. Or promote your ability to circumvent conflict by describing the collaboration between opposing factions you brokered in a single meeting.

If you can offer sound ideas or advice that reinforce your personal brand, all the better. As David F. D'Alessandro, chairman and CEO of John Hancock Financial Services and author of *Career Warfare: 10 Rules for Building a Successful Personal Brand and Fighting to Keep It*, says, "Make yourself valuable to a boss by offering good advice. Timing is important," he says. You have to figure out when it's appropriate to speak and when something is probably too far gone to be challenged." But if your advice is good – and if you sometimes show yourself willing to stand out in stark contrast to the crowd – you polish your brand." (*Knowledge@Wharton*, January, 2004)

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Branding promotes you as a valuable commodity within the organization. You are perceived as needed and in demand. For example, one of my clients was a technical engineer with a unique talent for technical sales and presentations. He realized this skill was the element that set him apart from his fellow engineers, the majority of whom didn't have an aptitude for sales or public speaking. So he began to brand himself by generating more awareness about this unique talent and became more visible because of his unusual combination of skills. This skill set afforded him greater visibility and garnered him more opportunities, which in turn boosted his value to the company. His masterful approach to creating and promoting his brand was vital to improving and personalizing his executive presence.

Take Action Now!

Just like the engineer with the knack for sales and presentations, you have a combination of skills that makes you uniquely valuable to your company. These skills can be technical in nature or can be people-related.

Make a list of five to ten skills or traits you possess that are directly related to your job, such as project management skills, a talent for design, an outstanding vocabulary or high-level technical expertise:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now think of five to ten skills or attributes that are drawn from what you've learned in your career, other interests or hobbies or perhaps dominant personality traits, such as stamina, determination, a positive attitude or organizational skills:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

What interesting, unusual and powerful combinations can you create by drawing from your two lists? For example, you may excel at time management and have four website launches under your belt. So you have scheduling savvy and an excellent understanding of user experience -- plus technical skills and the stamina required to see a complex project through from start to finish.

Now, take the combination you've created and use it as a basis for your own brand statement. Refer to the examples listed above for inspiration and list your brand statement(s) here:

Commit that brand statement to memory and talk it up – use it to boost your visibility!

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Note: If you feel your brand statement still needs a little work, there's no rush. Take the time to review this section and come up with your own steps toward developing a brand that represents you. You may ask a trusted colleague for input, too – if you're feeling a bit stuck, asking someone else for advice might spark some fresh ideas. Also review your last few performance appraisals. Your supervisor may have identified strengths you have overlooked. In fact, if you look closely enough, he or she may have written your brand statement for you!

■ MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY

Opportunities for visibility occur every day. Your challenge is to become aware of those opportunities, be open to them and be prepared to take full advantage of them. Focus on situations in which you can:

- create impact,
- exercise influence, or
- be recognized for your accomplishments.

Volunteer for Projects

Rather than waiting for opportunities to come to you, actively seek out projects that will showcase your talents. Take the lead in a project, if possible. If you hear about a new idea management is considering that might require your special skills, volunteer your help. Or come up with a project on your own that could solve a problem in your department.

For example, if you're in a meeting and the senior executives are providing information about long-term plans for your department or company, pay close attention. They may mention a project for which you are well-suited. Even though assignments will be made weeks or months later, you can certainly say, "I think my skills and interests would make me an asset to that team. I hope you'll keep me in mind when you're making the assignments."

Speaking up will show you are a forward-thinking, enthusiastic team player. Follow up with management, perhaps by inquiring about the status of the project or emailing leaders a newspaper or magazine article that is relevant to the endeavor. This will keep you on the radar screen and reinforce your willingness to volunteer.

Participate in Meetings

There's an old saying, "If your company is run by committee, get on the committee." Get involved in meetings that can showcase your expertise, particularly with people in higher-level positions. Meetings provide excellent opportunities for visibility and they can also result in new contacts with influential people. If you don't already know the individuals in the company who have great influence, you're likely to meet them during such meetings. Be sure to write down the names and positions of everyone at the table and take note of any clues as to their interests, pet projects and so forth.

After the meeting, think of reasons to contact these people. What information could you send to them? What do you know that might be helpful to them? Perhaps something is discussed during the meeting that you can follow up on.

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Within 24 hours of the meeting, send these individuals an email sharing information. They will probably reply, which will open the door to a dialogue. You could soon be on your way to creating a relationship with someone you hadn't met before the meeting. Eventually, you may set up an informational interview with some of these individuals. Ask them about the best way to advance in the company or solicit their advice about increasing your visibility or impact in the company. Once you've established a relationship through your email exchanges, arranging an in-person meeting will be much easier.

Offer Suggestions

When appropriate, offer suggestions to management that might help the organization improve product quality, financial stability and customer service or employee morale. Thoroughly prepare before sharing your ideas so what you say will be heard, understood and respected. Gain in-depth knowledge of the situation and understand the pros and cons of your proposal. And be as articulate as possible.

Offering innovative, workable ideas can earn you a reputation as someone who makes a difference. But be ready to take ownership and responsibility for your suggestions. You don't want to be viewed as an idea person who fails when it comes to follow-through.

Involve Your Boss's Boss

One of the most effective ways to increase visibility is to have your boss inform his or her boss about the important things you are working on, your successes, and the impact you're having in the department. If your boss isn't willing to do this, take it upon yourself to copy your boss's boss on some of your projects and accomplishments. Your boss's boss needs to know you and the work you are doing. You can find subtle ways to promote yourself inside the department by sharing the successes that directly impact him or her. But make sure the accomplishments are expressed in measurable, results-oriented language illustrating the financial benefit and impact on your organization's bottom line.

When your boss shares with his or her boss how well you are doing, it creates a positive perception of you. Others will take notice and realize what an important commodity you are in the organization. It's surprising how many supervisors aren't even aware they could be sharing the wins of their employees. This sharing has even more influence because so few do it.

