

Executive Presence – Part V

By Richard Stanger

Background

The March 2011 issue of this newsletter began a discussion of Executive Presence which has continued over several issues. This issue concludes the discussion with a definition of Executive Presence and a roadmap for achieving it.

The components of Executive Presence encompass those of Executive Power plus skills to Engage and Influence Others, Conflict Resolution skills and Passion. All eight of these components are critical to create a sustainable Executive Presence. These attributes, discussed in detail in the April – June issues of this newsletter are summarized below along with effective approaches for realizing them.

Components of Executive Presence

1. **Knowing self and using self-knowledge** – This encompasses the ability of an executive to understand his or her authentic self and to be able to use that self-knowledge in interpersonal settings. This includes knowing your values and behaving according to them.

Inside the July 2011 Issue

Executive Presence – Part V	1
Background	1
Components of Executive Presence	1
In Future Issues	4

In most cases, this attribute is best attained by an investment in 360 degree feedback, psychometric assessments and a qualified executive coach. The important thing is to begin early enough in the executive's career so that the executive is not derailed by behaviors demonstrating that this attribute is lacking. This presents a real opportunity that many companies miss. The long term impact on results can be dramatic for leadership astute enough to recognize it.

2. **Emotional Intelligence** – This term has been defined in a myriad of ways. The best definition is the ability of an individual to recognize and manage his or her emotions and those of others.

The first step in raising Emotional Intelligence is to use an assessment to get a good baseline of the Executive's existing abilities in this area. As with Self-Knowledge, it can

make a big difference to begin this process early in the Executive's career. The best practice after the assessment is to train the executive in areas of demonstrated weakness followed by limited coaching support over six months to reinforce the training in practice. An effective related intervention is to use 360 degree feedback along with the assessment. The assessment – and the 360 degree feedback, if given – should be repeated at the end of the six-month period.

3. **Identifying strengths and areas for development** – An individual who knows his or her strengths and areas for development will be perceived as adding to his or her Executive Presence. This trait contributes both to establishing Executive Presence and to sustaining it.

The best practice for achieving this attribute is to embed it in the Performance Management Process. The Executive should have an area on the Goal Setting and Evaluation form to list strengths and areas for development as part of the Goal Setting process. Alongside each area for development, the executive should list the actions he will take during the evaluation period to develop better abilities in the area.

These actions could be training, getting mentored, projects or some

“An individual who his or her strengths and areas for development will be perceived as adding to his or her Executive Presence.”

combination of these. As part of the Evaluation Process, the Executive should self-assess his progress. The senior executive to whom he reports should then deliver an assessment of progress. The best practice is to include this assessment score as part of the quantitative performance score for the period. If this is not done, the score should still be visibly tracked as a meaningful development metric.

4. **Self-Confidence** – This means real self-confidence, in contrast to bluster covering up insecurities below the surface. It needs to be founded on true self-esteem.

This is a critical but tricky area. Executives are unlikely to admit to lacking Self-Confidence – even on an assessment. In addition, the 360 degree feedback process and even Emotional Intelligence assessments can do a poor job of getting to the truth. The best approach is to start with a confidential interview by a trained professional, often associated

with an executive coaching firm. Where weakness is shown, the best practice is to have the executive work

“The ability to contribute to these discussions and to have a point of view that is recognized as meaningful and well considered is a critical element of Executive Presence.”

with an executive coach on this area. If this is not successful within six months, or if the issues presented appear to have deep psychological underpinnings, the executive should seriously consider seeing a therapist to address them.

5. **Vision** – For an individual to be perceived as powerful, he or she must have a vision of the future. At the executive level, important conversations take place, in both structured and informal settings, regarding future direction. The ability to contribute to these discussions and to have a point of view that is recognized as meaningful and well considered is a critical element of Executive Presence.

Though somewhat counterintuitive, Vision can often be taught. The best – and perhaps only way – to do this successfully is to assign the executive

a mentor with strong skills in this area. If their relationship is close, the executive will quickly understand how to use his innate visionary skills and to express his vision effectively to others in a business setting. A great way to measure Vision is with 360 degree feedback. Doing this before a mentor is assigned and repeating it a year later for comparison will show whether the executive has progressed in this area.

6. **Engaging and influencing others** – This component has several aspects: persuasion, negotiation and collaboration. For an executive to be effective, he or she must be able to persuade others to accept a point of view. The inability to do this, where appropriate, will seriously undermine the executive’s effectiveness – perhaps irretrievably. Closely related is the ability to negotiate and collaborate with colleagues as well as those outside the organization. If this can’t happen, action will stall, and the executive will appear weak.

This area is best addressed by training. The key is to tailor the training to the executive’s role and the company’s culture. This type of customization is a vital best practice. Using off-the-shelf modules just will

not cut it! Unless the training is closely related to real work examples and case studies, its effectiveness will be very limited.

7. **Conflict Resolution** – Executives are brought issues to resolve constantly, and many of them are unanticipated. Often, executives feel that these issues are disconnected from the main agenda with which the executive is engaged. One thing is certain, however: if the executive cannot address issues quickly and effectively, the result will be real frustration and risk of paralysis.

The first step in addressing this area is for the executive to understand that a problem exists. The best approach to make this diagnosis is 360 degree feedback. Once the problem is perceived, it is best addressed by a combination of Goal Setting as part of the Performance Management process and use of an executive coach. Expect to see measurable progress within a year. If this does not happen, the executive is unlikely to improve in this area.

8. **Passion** – Executive Presence requires Passion which must be understood a little differently from its common meaning. Passion does not always mean a visible display of enthusiasm or sheer extroverted energy. It means deep dedication to the job, to results and to people.

A 360 degree feedback process will tell the story. If Passion is lacking, the best practice to address the issue is a candid conversation with the executive and strong reinforcement through the Performance Management process. This is an area where only self-motivation can make the difference. Many executives respond this way when challenged. Others do not. In these cases, the company is probably best served by replacing the executive with one who demonstrates true Passion.

In Future Issues

- Rapid leadership development.
- What are the best labels for rating levels?
- Effective use of 360 degree feedback.
- The right approach to competency development.
- How do personality preferences affect performance?
- Intuition and coaching.
- Why coaching should be assessment based.
- Emotional Intelligence and coaching.

475 Park Avenue South, 21st Floor
 New York, NY 10016
 (212) 354-8850
 Fax (212) 354-8879
www.crenshawassociates.com
