

## Executive presence

Harvard's Amy Cuddy has written a [book](#) on presence showing how to *bring your boldest self to your biggest challenges*. It is full of wisdom and ideas relevant to executives, so I have written this post to share some of these with you.

### The nature of executive presence

Your knowledge and command of your content are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for having executive presence. Too few understand executive presence is much more than this. It is a multi-faceted, mental and physical state in which you are attuned to your true thoughts and feelings *and* able to spontaneously express them comfortably and convincingly. Other words for executive presence include poise, a word derived from the early French meaning composure and elegant bearing, gravitas, and charisma in a professional business sense.

You have executive presence when your assuredness is projected in your voice and through your body's posture and movement. It's about feeling in charge of yourself *and* the situation – whether it's being interviewed for a position you really want, or convincing a sceptical customer, or making a crucial presentation to the board.

It is when you are supremely confident in your own position and ability. You have a deep-seated conviction '*I know what I know*', but without coming across as arrogant and over-confident.

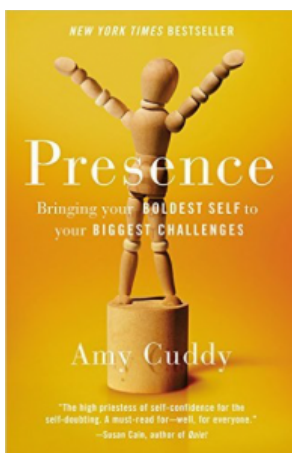
### Benefits of executive presence

Having executive presence helps you sell yourself, convince others of the merit of your ideas, and influence decisions.

Whether it's why some people do well in interviews for promotion or why venture capitalists prefer one pitch over another for investment, the evidence is clear. The candidates who convincingly project passion and self-belief are viewed as more authentic and more plausible, all other considerations being equal.

There's a good reason for this. The more you are able to be your real self and are at ease in your own skin (*'I accept I am who I am'*), the more your executive presence emanates. And the more you will be convincing to your audience who feel your persuasive presence – and you do too.

### Developing executive presence



The manikin on the cover of Amy Cuddy's book (left) is a clever metaphor for the subtle power of posture.

It's one of those wooden toys where the figure stands confidently upright, legs slightly apart, with arms stretched upwards and eyes gazing straight ahead: '*Look at me; I am here to tell you what I believe in and why...*'.

If the pressure is reduced on the elastic in the figure's body by pressing on the base – even by as little as a millimetre – the posture slumps ever so slightly, the head bows forward, the arms droop, and the knees buckle: '*I am not so sure...*' is signalled.

If executive presence means passionately believing in something and being confident and relaxed in speaking about it, how do you learn it?

There are three inter-dependent facets in learning to improve your executive presence: Using your body in unison with your mind, believing your story, and avoiding self-doubt.

## Using your body

*'Our bodies change our minds...and our minds change our behaviour...and our behaviour changes our outcomes'*. The way you carry yourself is a source of personal power, a key to unlocking your presence.

The body shapes the mind, which means the way you sit and stand, and the way you hold your head and use your hands influences how you feel about your own self – and how you are perceived by others. Small adjustments to your posture improve your mental image of yourself and the perception of others.

By consciously tweaking your body language you learn to feel more open, strong, grounded, confident, and comfortable. You develop a unison between your body, your thoughts and your emotions. Of course, these ideas are not new. The origin of the power of posture and poses is found in the ancient art of yoga.

## Believing your own story

Believing your own story is the second element of developing executive presence. This is learned by self-talk and affirming your self-worth, your values and your beliefs about what's right, all of which must be aligned for you to convey a coherent message.

Believing your own story makes you come across as authentic and real. When your words and your body language are in synchrony with your thoughts and feelings, you comfortably project your conviction. You don't have to force or contrive your position and passion; they flow naturally. One of those quoted by Cuddy puts it this way: *"Presence is the inner self showing up"*.

You can craft your own story by spending time reflecting on who you think you really are. What do you stand for? Not who you'd like to be or what you'd like others to believe you are. Genuine presence is based on the reality of what you stand for, your deepest beliefs, your real strengths and what comes effortlessly to you. You don't have to try too hard.

This is what it means to believe in your own story.

## Abolishing self-doubt

And thirdly, don't allow self-doubt in the form of fear of making mistakes or of being judged to creep in. While your presentation may be first class, based on sound analysis and well packaged, if something in your posture or the way you speak is hesitant members of the audience will pick this up subliminally, and you will be less persuasive. If you appear nervous, shuffle your papers, look down or lose eye contact with the audience, these are clues to your self-doubt.

If you are not externally (body language) and internally (thoughts and feelings) congruent, you are pretending – to yourself and therefore to your audience. Cuddy describes this falling victim to the 'impostor syndrome'. You don't honestly believe your own story – you lack total conviction at the vital moment it is needed to sell your message.

## Be inspired

Think of Steve Jobs on stage in a black turtle neck at an Apple new product launch, Angela Merkel standing up to a crowd of anti-refugee protestors, and Roger Federer conducting himself with dignity after losing his #1 standing.

These are beautiful examples of presence to which every executive can aspire.

## Learn more about executive presence

- + Amy Cuddy's book Presence on [Amazon](#)
- + Amy Cuddy's [TED Talk](#)
- + My post [You are who you think you are](#)