

VIRTUAL SPEECH COACH

Elevating Experts' Presentation Skills



Executive Presence Isn't Mysterious—It's Observable

Executive presence is often treated as something intangible. You either have it or you don't.

But in real leadership environments—meetings, presentations, client conversations—executive presence is anything but mysterious. It's **observable**.

Before you finish your first sentence, people are already deciding:

- Do I trust this person?
- Do they feel confident?
- Do they seem credible?
- Do I want to follow their lead?

Those judgments happen quickly, often subconsciously. And they aren't based on charisma, personality, or how smart you sound.

They're based on **signals**.

Why Capable Leaders Sometimes Undercut Their Own Presence

In my work with executives and subject-matter experts, I often see highly capable people unintentionally diluting their impact.

Not because their ideas aren't strong.

Not because they lack experience.

But because under pressure, their *signals* don't always match their intent.

They rush to fill the silence.

They over-explain to be helpful.

They speak faster when the stakes rise.

They move, gesture, or react in ways that unintentionally communicate uncertainty.

None of this means they lack executive presence.

It means their presence hasn't been made **intentional** yet.

Executive Presence Is a System, Not a Trait

This is where I introduce a concept I call **Executive Presence Optics**.

Executive Presence Optics are the external cues others use to interpret your confidence, authority, and credibility, often before you realize it's happening.

These cues include:

- How you occupy space
- How comfortable you are with silence
- How your voice sounds when you're challenged
- How your body, face, and eyes behave when attention is on you

Executive presence isn't something you put on.

It's something that's already being interpreted.

The opportunity is learning how to **align those signals** with the leader you already are.

The Three Dimensions of Executive Presence Optics

In the sections that follow, I'll break down executive presence into three practical, coachable dimensions.

1. Stillness & Command of Space

How restraint, grounded posture, and silence often communicate more authority than movement or energy. Many leaders increase presence not by doing more, but by doing less—on purpose.

2. Voice & Gravitas

How pace, pauses, and vocal control influence how confident and trustworthy you sound, especially in high-stakes moments. Gravitas isn't about sounding impressive; it's about sounding deliberate.

3. Visual & Behavioral Signals

The subtle physical cues—eye contact, gestures, posture, and framing—that shape how others interpret your credibility before you even speak.

Each dimension is practical. None requires acting, performing, or becoming someone you're not.

A Quick Self-Check

As you think about your own presence, consider:

- When the stakes rise, do you speed up or slow down?
- Do you allow silence to work for you, or rush to fill it?
- Does your body reinforce your message, or distract from it?
- If someone watched you without sound, what would they infer?

Executive presence starts with **awareness**, not confidence.

Where This Work Leads

This framework also reflects the kind of work I do with leaders who want their communication and presence to align more consistently, especially in high-stakes situations.

Awareness is the first step.

But presence changes through practice, feedback, and application in real leadership moments.

Dimension 1: Stillness Is a Leadership Signal



On a recent cruise to Antarctica, I stood quietly on deck watching an iceberg drift past.

It wasn't loud.
It wasn't rushing.
It wasn't trying to impress.

And yet, no one could ignore it.

Stillness sends a signal.

In leadership settings, that signal often communicates more authority than energy ever could.

When leaders want to improve their executive presence, they often ask:

“How can I come across as more confident?”

What they usually mean is:

How can I bring more energy?

Move more?

Say more?

But the fastest way to increase executive presence is often the opposite.

Not more energy.

More stillness.

Why Stillness Signals Confidence

In professional settings, people are constantly scanning for cues:

Who seems in control?

Who looks like they belong here?

Stillness answers those questions immediately.

Leaders who rush, fidget, over-explain, or fill every silence often believe they’re being engaged or thorough. What they don’t realize is that these behaviors can unintentionally signal anxiety or uncertainty.

Stillness, by contrast, communicates:

- Emotional control
- Comfort with authority
- Trust in one’s message
- Confidence without force

When someone is still, we lean in.

We assume they have something worth hearing.

Command of Space Isn’t About Dominance

“Commanding the room” doesn’t mean overpowering it.

It doesn't mean talking the most.
It doesn't mean taking up more physical territory.
It doesn't mean interrupting or dominating airtime.

Command of space means being intentional with the space you already occupy.

It looks like:

- Standing or sitting with grounded posture (feet planted, spine tall, shoulders relaxed)
- Letting your body be quiet while your message does the work
- Being comfortable when attention turns toward you
- Not shrinking, but not overcompensating

Authority rarely rushes to prove itself.

The Power of the Pause

One of the simplest ways to practice stillness is through pausing.

Pauses:

- Give your words weight
- Signal thoughtfulness
- Reduce filler words naturally
- Allow others to absorb what you've said

If you've ever been told you speak too fast, don't try to "slow down."

Add pauses.

Try this in your next meeting:

After making a key point, stop.

Don't explain it again.

Don't soften it.

Let it land.

Confident leaders pause because they expect to be listened to.

Common Stillness Leaks (and How to Correct Them)

Most leaders don't lack presence. They leak it.

Here are some common stillness leaks and practical fixes.

1. Filling Every Silence

Silence is not a mistake. It's a tool.

Before your first sentence, pause. Make eye connection with a few individuals. Then begin.

Before and after important ideas, pause again.

Let one full breath pass before continuing.

2. Eye Contact Without Connection

There's a difference between eye contact and eye connection.

Instead of scanning the room, land your thought on one person. Deliver your point directly. Then shift.

Stillness plus eye connection feels intentional, not performative.

3. Pacing Under Pressure

Nervous energy often shows up as unnecessary movement.

Establish a base position:

Feet shoulder-width apart.

Plant them.

Move only when it supports your message—then plant again.

Movement should reinforce your message, not replace it.

4. Collapsing Posture

Under stress, many leaders subtly shrink.

Stand tall. Imagine a string pulling from the crown of your head. Roll your shoulders back.

Good posture:

- Steadies your voice
- Improves breath support
- Increases perceived confidence

In nature, submissive animals make themselves smaller.

Executive presence requires expansion, not aggression, but grounded presence.

5. Shallow Breathing

Tension tightens the body and speeds up speech.

Before high-stakes moments, try this reset:

Inhale for four.

Hold for four.

Exhale for four.

Hold for four.

When breathing steadies, movement steadies.

When movement steadies, presence strengthens.

Stillness in Virtual Meetings Counts Too

Executive presence isn't limited to in-person rooms.

On camera, stillness may matter even more.

Watch for:

- Staying centered in the frame
- Keeping shoulders relaxed and upright
- Looking at the camera for key points
- Avoiding constant nodding or exaggerated expressions

On video, less movement often conveys greater credibility.

Try This:

Choose one upcoming meeting.

Don't change your content.

Don't add energy.

Simply reduce unnecessary movement and allow pauses after key points.

Then notice:

Do interruptions decrease?

Do people lean in?

Do your ideas carry more weight?

Executive presence doesn't start with confidence.

It starts with restraint.

That iceberg didn't demand attention.
It simply occupied its space fully.

Presence works the same way.

This is the kind of deliberate presence work we practice in [Executive Communication Mastery](#)—
reducing distractions so your leadership carries more weight.

Dimension 2: Your Voice Is a Leadership Signal



In the last section, we explored stillness as a leadership signal —
how visible restraint communicates authority.

But leadership isn't only seen.

It's heard.

Your voice is constantly signaling:

Are you certain?

Are you steady?

Do you trust your own message?

Should others trust it too?

Before people evaluate your ideas, they evaluate how you sound when delivering them.

Voice is not decoration.

It's data.

Gravitas Is Deliberate Delivery

Gravitas isn't about depth, volume, or impressive vocabulary.

It's about sounding deliberate.

Controlled pace.

Steady breath.

Clean endings.

Absence of rush.

When leaders sound hurried, listeners infer uncertainty.

When leaders sound measured, listeners infer control.

Pace Reveals Pressure

When stakes rise, speech often accelerates.

Fast speech can signal:

- Nervousness
- Over-eagerness
- Lack of certainty

You don't need to slow dramatically.

Just slightly.

Ten percent slower than your default under pressure is often enough.

Deliberate pace communicates cognitive control.

Pause: A Vocal Framing Device

In the “Stillness is a Leadership Signal” section, pausing functioned as a stillness tool, evidence of visible composure.

Here, pausing plays a different role.

Pausing becomes:

- A pacing regulator
- A weight amplifier
- A signal of thoughtfulness
- A marker of authority

Pause before a key phrase to signal importance.

Pause after a key phrase to signal finality.

Pause before answering a question to signal deliberation — not hesitation.

The absence of pausing often signals internal noise.

The presence of pausing signals internal control.

Endings Matter

Upspeak quietly erodes authority.

“I think this is our best approach?”

“We're ready to move forward?”

Rising tone turns conclusions into requests.

Instead, come to a full stop.

Pause.

Finish downward.

“This is our best approach.”

“We’re ready to move forward.”

Small adjustment. Stronger signal.

Breath Drives Tone

Voice rides on breath.

Shallow breathing speeds speech and raises pitch.

Steady breathing lowers tension and stabilizes tone.

Before high-stakes moments, reset:

Inhale for four.

Hold for four.

Exhale for four.

Hold for four.

When breath steadies, voice steadies.

When voice steadies, others relax.

And relaxed listeners are more receptive.

Filler Words Reveal Internal Noise

Um. Ah. So. Like.

A few aren’t fatal.

But frequent fillers signal hesitation and mental clutter.

Replace filler with silence.

Silence feels stronger than verbal static.

Awareness is the first step. Record yourself. Notice patterns. Reduce one at a time.

Authority sounds clean, not cluttered.

Speak Like a Leader, Not a Script

Overly formal language can sound stiff.

Short sentences carry more force.

Simple words land faster.

Contractions sound human.

Gravitas isn't complexity.

It's control.

Projection Is Reach

You don't need to shout.

But you do need breath support.

Stand tall.

Engage the diaphragm.

Send your voice to the back of the room.

Weak projection signals uncertainty.

Supported projection signals presence.

Try This:

In your next important conversation:

- Slow your pace slightly.
- Insert one intentional pause before a key idea (take a breath).
- Finish statements with a downward tone.
- Replace one filler word with silence.

Don't change your content.

Change how you deliver it.

Notice what shifts.

Presence in the body creates authority you can see.

Presence in the voice creates authority you can hear.

This is another dimension of executive presence we refine inside [Executive Communication Mastery](#), aligning how you sound with the level of leadership you already hold.

Dimension 3: Visual Signals Are Leadership Signals



Before people evaluate your ideas, they evaluate you.

Not your résumé.

Not your title.

You.

Your posture.

Your eye contact.

Your gestures.

Your facial expressions.

Leadership is seen before it is understood.

In high-stakes meetings, presentations, and client conversations, visual cues shape credibility long before your message is fully processed. They're subtle. Often unintentional. Always interpreted.

Here's what to watch.

1. Posture Signals Status

Clarity begins before you speak.

An upright, open posture communicates grounded authority. A collapsed or closed posture communicates containment.

Open posture means:

- Shoulders relaxed and back
- Chest open
- Hands visible
- Front of your body facing the room

Closed posture often looks like:

- Crossed arms
- Hunched shoulders
- Hands hidden in pockets or behind your back
- Turning partially away from the audience

These signals are rarely intentional—but they register instantly.

If you tend to sway or shift under pressure, plant your feet shoulder-width apart, one slightly ahead of the other. Grounded posture isn't rigid. It's steady.

When you own your physical space, others are more likely to trust your leadership within it.

2. Gestures Should Reinforce, Not Compete

Gestures either clarify your message or compete with it.

Strong leaders use gestures to:

- Show structure (“three priorities” while holding up three fingers)
- Indicate scale or comparison
- Highlight transitions
- Emphasize key points

Their movements are purposeful, not repetitive.

Weakening behaviors are often unconscious:

- Fidgeting with jewelry, pens, glasses, or hair
- Touching your face or neck
- Repetitive chopping motions
- Hiding hands in pockets
- Excessive steepling that reads as arrogance

If your words signal calm and control while your hands signal agitation, people believe the hands.

3. Eye Contact Is Authority

Eye contact is not scanning the room.

It’s controlled connection.

In person, hold eye contact for one complete thought—about three to five seconds—before shifting. Think of it as a series of brief, individual conversations.

On video, look at the camera lens when delivering key points. That small lens represents your audience’s eyes. You don’t need to stare at it constantly, but use it intentionally.

Avoid explaining everything to your slides. Your message should land with people, not the screen.

Steady eye contact signals confidence. Darting eyes signal something else.

4. Facial Expressions Must Align

Your face is like a second voice.

A warm smile signals openness.

A serious expression signals gravity.

Raised eyebrows can signal emphasis or curiosity.

Misalignment weakens credibility because it creates mixed signals.

When your expression contradicts your message, people don't know which one to trust.

For example:

- Smiling while delivering difficult information
- Rolling your eyes in frustration
- Tilting your chin up in subtle superiority
- Maintaining a blank expression when energy is required

Even micro-expressions register.

You don't need range. You need alignment.

When your face matches your message, your leadership feels authentic.

Visual Alignment Builds Trust

You don't need dozens of delivery techniques.

You need alignment.

When posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expression reinforce your words, your message lands with greater authority and less resistance.

When they contradict your words, friction increases—even if listeners can't explain why.

Visual signals don't replace substance.

They amplify it.

Try This:

In your next important meeting:

- Before speaking, check your posture. Sit or stand tall, shoulders open.
- Keep your hands visible and relaxed.
- Hold eye contact for one complete thought before shifting.
- Eliminate one distracting physical habit.

If the meeting is recorded (Zoom, Teams, webinar), watch five minutes of it afterward.

Not for content.

For optics.

Ask yourself:

Do I look grounded?
Are my gestures aligned with my message?
Does my face reinforce what I'm saying?

Leadership alignment is visible.

Executive presence is not a personality trait.

When the Signals Align

It is a pattern of signals.

Stillness regulates how you occupy space.

Voice regulates how your ideas land.

Visual alignment regulates how your credibility is interpreted.

When those signals are intentional, leadership feels steady.

When they are misaligned, friction increases—even if the content is strong.

In [Executive Communication Mastery](#), we don't try to change who you are.

We refine how your leadership is experienced.

Because when presence, voice, and visuals align with your capability, authority doesn't have to be forced.

It's perceived.