How Would You Grade Your Executive Presence?   by Lisa Parker

   Executive presence is the ability to project certain "executive qualities" such as confidence, grace under pressure, courage, and decisiveness, combined with important skills like effective communication and the ability to read an audience or situation and respond with emotional intelligence. Thus, presence is the sum of actions and behaviors, and because everyone behaves differently, presence manifests differently.

   There is no single definition of the "correct" presence. Instead, leaders must make conscious choices about the kind of presence they want to project. Successful leaders understand that their actions and behaviors are highly visible, and therefore subject to judgment, criticism, or even emulation. They know that every interaction is a data point, and those data points form a pattern that can become synonymous with one's reputation. Consequently, they manage their presence thoughtfully, always mindful of their body language, word choices and impact.

   Take a moment and think about your last six months at work. You likely had some good days and some not-so-good days. Do know what "showed up" when you showed up under the stress of tight deadlines or shifting priorities or uncooperative colleagues? What might others have noticed about your presence? Did you pick up on any non-verbal cues from them that made you wonder, "Uh-oh, what did I just say?"

   Everyone has moments of regret at work. But how many "oops" moments is too many? Are you managing your presence thoughtfully? Let's see: which of the following best describes your presence over the past six months?

>   A. Consistently professional; top of my game.
>   B. Mostly good, with a rare slip-up now and then, but hey, I'm human.
>   C. It really depends on the day and what's going on, but I suspect it could be better.
>   D. I don't know; besides, I have more important things to focus on.

The Results:

- If you chose (A) keep up the great work! Thank you for being a role model for others. You likely have a high degree of self awareness. Focus on leveraging your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses through training, feedback, and continued self-reflection.
- If you chose (B) you are on the right track, but may want to analyze when or why things are going well, and when or why the slip-ups occur. Self-awareness is essential for self-management, and this means having *objective* knowledge of your strengths as well as your weaknesses...you can't "fix" what you don't know.
- If you chose (C) you might want to explore how others perceive you through formal or informal feedback. (See feedback questions below.) Your actions and behaviors could be painting an inconsistent picture that makes it difficult for people to know how to approach you and what you *really* mean when you make a comment. Inconsistent behavior can impact the degree to

which people trust their leader. Again, self-awareness is the first step towards creating the kind of presence you want to create.

- If you chose (D) you are missing a valuable opportunity to invest time and energy into something that will, in the long run, have a bigger impact on your career than many of the important things on your "to do" list right now: Your executive presence. Research shows that 25-30% of a person's promotability depends on executive presence. How would the executives around you rate your executive presence? You can find out by seeking feedback using questions like the ones shown below.

Seeking Feedback On Your Executive Presence

To build objective self-awareness, you'll need data. Ask people at work or outside of work one or more of the questions below. Remember to choose people who are in a position to observe you with some regularity, and be sure to listen thoughtfully -- and non-defensively -- to their answers.

1. What have you noticed about my professional presence that you think is an asset (or strength)?
    - Can you give me an example of a time you noticed that I used this well?

2. What do I do (or not do) that could have a negative impact on the way people perceive me?
    - Any specific examples?
    - Is this behavior negative enough to become a career derailer?

3. What have you noticed about my interactions with people when I am under stress (or pressure)?
    - What could I do differently the next time?

4. What suggestions do you have for how I could improve my communication skills?

5. What is one thing I could do differently/less of/more of in order to enhance my reputation as a leader?

Feedback is the gift that keeps on giving, so be sure to thank your feedback providers, and then show you heard them by putting their suggestions to work for you. Remember, the people who make decisions about your future are the ones who interact with you every day.

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