

# Do You Have a Leadership Presence?

## LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

*Leadership presence is that illusive quality that sets you apart for the next promotion and gives your career an extra boost. It's a blending of personal and interpersonal skills that makes you **STAND OUT!** It's the ability to bring your authentic, charismatic self into every encounter.*

*Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D*

Leadership presence is a blending of attitudes, qualities, and behaviors that send all the right signals and makes you stand out from your peers.

But leadership presence isn't automatically assigned to you because you have a leadership title, advanced technical skills, or a high-level of leadership potential – and it's not necessarily an accurate reflection of your true qualities and talents.

Instead, leadership presence depends entirely on how other people evaluate you. (It's what they say about you after you've left the room.) Knowing how to influence people's perception of you requires a deep understanding of the impact of your appearance, your body language, your emotional state, and your communication style.

The good news is, leadership presence can be developed. Like any other skill set, it takes application and practice. But

unlike other skills, even minor changes in verbal and nonverbal habits can have a major impact on people's positive impression of you. To help you align people's perception of you with your best authentic self, I wrote my latest book, *STAND OUT: How to Build Your Leadership Presence*.

Throughout my speaking and coaching career, I've worked with thousands of wonderful, high-performing professionals, helping them project the qualities needed to advance their careers. Here are the five qualities of leadership presence: Credibility, Confidence, Composure, Connection, and Charisma.

**Credibility:** You may be knowledgeable, skilled, and innovative, but that doesn't guarantee that others see you as the credible leader you authentically are.

Attention spans are so short today that you have to communicate in a way that's both compelling and brief.

- One sure way to increase people's perception of your credibility is to get to the point. (It's a technique I call "start with the headline," in which you start your conclusion first and fill in detail later.

- You can also practice stating your points simply and succinctly. Simplicity isn't just a "nice to have" communication skill. It's a necessity to be perceived as credible. If you ramble or beat around the bush, any hope of holding people's attention is lost. A good test is to ask yourself: "In 10 words or less, what is my key message?" If you can't state it succinctly to yourself, you are not ready to communicate it to others.

**Confidence:** Confidence is the trait most associated with leadership presence, and your body language can help send the right message.

- When you want to look your confident best, remember to stand and sit with good posture – shoulders squared, head straight,

arms slightly away from your torso, feet flat on the floor if seated and about shoulder-width apart if standing. Posture is especially important in a virtual environment where your body language makes an instantaneous statement about your authority and personal power. A side benefit is that good posture not only makes you appear more confident, it also makes you feel more grounded and self-assured.

**Composure:** Staying poised under pressure can be difficult, but it is essential to projecting leadership presence. By keeping your composure in stressful situations, you appear reliable, capable, and in control – all qualities that people look for in a leader.

If you don't have a strategy for dealing with high-stress situations, here's what likely happens: That situation becomes the trigger for a reaction commonly known as the "flight or fight" response. As your body gets flooded with the "stress hormone," cortisol, your heart rate increases, your breathing gets rapid and shallow, and your muscles tense. In addition, your amygdala (the emotional region of your brain) begins to override your prefrontal cortex (the rational decision-making part of your brain). In other words, you literally lose your ability to think straight.

To unlink a trigger event from this self-defeating reaction, the moment you're aware that you are in a stressful situation, mentally say the word "stop." Then take a deep breath and exhale slowly. Instead of automatically reacting to the trigger event, pausing gives you the time needed to take back control and choose how to respond.

**Connection:** Your ability to connect with others has everything to do with how you make people feel. Which is why the most important skill for connection is empathetic listening.

If you already rank high in empathy, you gain a genuine professional advantage. If not, empathetic listening is a

skill worth further developing. Here is what's required:

- Be fully present. Put away all distractions and focus all your energy on what the what the other person is saying.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand: "Tell me more about this situation." "Did I understand you to say (restate what you heard) . . .?"
- Ignore the urge to prematurely offer your opinion or advice. Not everyone is looking for a solution. Often, people just want a "sounding board," where they can safely express their feelings and ideas. Make sure someone wants your help before you offer it.

**Charisma:** When most people think of charisma, they picture a celebrity making a flamboyant entrance to command the attention of all those present. While that may be a fitting display of charisma for celebrities, it's not realistic nor needed to project leadership presence. You can exude charisma without being flamboyant, extroverted, or commanding.

Charisma is a flow of energy that attracts people like a magnet – and you project this energy when you are genuinely enthused and engaged.

That's why I wholeheartedly endorse preparing and rehearsing for an important presentation. But when you are actually standing on stage or at the front of the meeting room, you'll be more charismatic if you stop thinking about your technique. Instead, remember these two things:

- 1) When you are genuinely invested in what you're saying, your body language automatically aligns with your words.
- 2) When you focus on the audience, rather than on yourself, you connect with them at a deeper, more personal, level.

You can't avoid making an impression, but you can learn how to align the impression you make with your best authentic self.

By understanding the five C's of leadership presence, you can help people see you as the outstanding leader you truly are.

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**Author's Note:** *This Thursday is Thanksgiving Day in the U.S., and I give thanks for all of you who sign up for my newsletter, buy copies of my book, write reviews on Amazon, send me creative, beautiful, and funny photos of you with the book, and bring me to your audiences in webinars and interviews. I am so very grateful!*

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