

Executive Presence

It's hard to define it but you know it when you see it.

By John Kuypers, author and collaborative leadership expert

Executive presence. It's hard to define it but you know it when you see it in someone. Their eye contact is strong but not over-bearing. They are confident but not arrogant. They are focused on you, undistracted by the melee around them. They listen extraordinarily well and are in no hurry to speak out their own agenda. They are calm, even under pressure. Indeed, Ernest Hemmingway said it best: *"The definition of guts is grace under pressure."* Somehow, the right, empathetic words tumble out of their mouth – words that are encouraging yet frank, honest yet tactful, just right for the moment at hand. Executive presence is the polish inside of a person. How does one attain it?

Presence begins with the word itself. Leaders with presence are 'present.' Their attention is fully focused on the here and the now. Indeed, it takes only a moment of reflection to realize that everything real happens in the present. No one can change the past and no one can control the future, as much as we would like to! All words and all action happen in the present moment so it only makes sense to pay attention to what you actually say and do. This is self-awareness and it is the foundation to growing your presence with others.

Fifteen years ago, I discovered the truth of this simple idea and have since written three how-to books on this theme. My latest book is geared to rising managers and executives who want to develop their skill at shifting the way people do things. The book is called, *Who's The Driver Anyway? Making the Shift To A Collaborative Team Culture*. While the book offers many organizational insights, the heart of it lies in a remarkably practical model that develops a leader's ability to influence the behaviour of others freely and willingly, right in the present moment. The model is called *The 7 Performance Drivers Collaborometer*. The 7PDs creates an in-the-moment awareness of the hidden power-sharing dynamic that happens in the present moment, all day and every day between any two people. Once understood, leaders who use it are able to graciously yet openly shift the dynamics of any conversation in order to impact others wisely and graciously.

The 7PDs model works because it recognizes that every relationship involves making decisions. Whether it is to approve a business decision, decide on lunch location or even engage in a conversation at all, we are constantly making decisions. *Who's The Driver Anyway?* focuses on who gets to decide and to what degree. After all, no two people can both be in control of the final decision. The book makes this clear by using a driver-passenger metaphor. One person may be the driver, but either person can be in control of where the vehicle goes. If they don't agree, conflict or resistance will be evident.

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Leaders who want to develop executive presence will enjoy the practicality of this communication tool. The reason for difficult conversations becomes instantly apparent. Your own “driver” comfort zone becomes apparent, helping you to stretch yourself. As you do, your ability to stay present, focused and calm during challenging, tough conversations will soar. When you complement your finest outward appearance with a polished inner grace, your impact on others will be noticed, appreciated and rewarded.

John Kuypers is a collaborative leadership trainer and organizational change consultant. He is the president of Performance Shift Leadership Tools. His work can be found at www.performanceshift.com and he can be reached at johnk@performanceshift.com To read about his new book, go to www.whosthedriveranyway.com or search Chapters-Indigo on-line.