

The One Secret to Enhancing Executive Presence

Your heart is racing, your palms are sweaty, your mouth is dry. Welcome to the uncomfortable world of public speaking. Tessa Desatnik reveals the secret to enhance your executive presence in the boardroom and beyond.

It's an important presentation and conventional wisdom says you need to do two things. First, ensure you are in full control of your content. Second, be yourself. Relax. Be natural. But while both notions are valid and practically beneficial, we all too easily ignore a third—and crucial—element of public speaking. The audience.

It's about them, not you

Whether you're at the podium, in the boardroom, or chatting over a cup of coffee, what listeners see and hear are key elements of your executive presence. Accessing this external perspective can, however, be tricky. Even the most mindful speakers struggle to understand how we are perceived by others.

Formal speaking appearances, such as corporate townhalls, offer obvious opportunities to build your reputation, but they also offer an excellent mechanism through which to explore the nuances of the audience's perspective. The reason for this is simple. Formal speaking events almost always have a camera running—and *video footage, along with the insight it can provide, is the secret to enhancing your executive presence and delivering presentations that resonate with audiences.*

Overconfidence can be a trap

At the executive level, most are probably very comfortable giving public presentations. This confidence can, however, become a trap, especially when most have support from communications specialists and speech writers. Often an inherent sense of self-confidence combined with a busy schedule results in the speaker stumbling through unfamiliar words and phrases as they read a script verbatim. Equally often, the routine applause and congratulatory handshakes that follow

mask a failure to genuinely connect with the audience. In other words, there's rarely any honest or critical feedback afterward.

The confidence trap doesn't only apply to those who fail to prepare or have speeches developed on their behalf. It's just as relevant to those who prepare thoroughly, yet still aren't aware of their own idiosyncrasies regarding body language, vocal delivery, and other nuances that help speakers better connect with their audience.

[Writing in the Harvard Business Review](#), cognitive scientist and host of the popular [Two Guys on Your Head](#) podcast, Dr. Art Markman, calls over-rehearsal the TED-talk paradox:

"Paradoxically, if your presentation is too polished, you may reduce the amount of work that your audience has to do to understand what you are telling them, which may inadvertently make the content of your talk less memorable..."

My experience is that colleagues will remember that they saw a particular TED talk without remembering any of the content of that talk later because the talks are so fluently delivered."

Our worst fear, our best friend

While you'd be hard pressed to find an executive who isn't happy to hop on stage, going through the footage afterward reliably sees volunteers evaporate. One of the primary reasons for this is good old human ego. Most of us hate the sound of our own voice and struggle seeing ourselves in photographs and videos. The good news is this isn't mere vanity. It is, in fact, a common human trait rooted in physiology (*The Washington Post* does a good job of [explaining our self-observation vulnerability](#)). Regardless, natural resistance to self-observation must be recognized, and then overcome.

The bottom line is simple: if you want to significantly improve your executive presence and captivate audiences on all occasions and of all sizes—the camera is your best friend.

Video reviews enable improved narrative technique

Verbal and non-verbal communication profoundly influences the audiences' general perception of a speaker, as well as their ability to absorb the content under discussion.

Spending regular sessions reviewing video footage, ideally in the company of an expert, is the most effective way to master narrative technique, and to achieve two important goals:

1. *Spot the things you do that you don't know about (but that are strongly perceived by the audience)*

Do you use vocal fillers like “okay”, “right” or “um”? Do you hop onto your left foot when you feel like you’ve lost your flow? The only way to answer these questions is to look at yourself from the audience’s perspective.

2. Identify key content points that require more work

Active use of video footage also allows the speaker to work carefully on the way key concepts and important messages are presented. This matters because not all content is equal, and it’s up to the speaker to ensure that the important information remains with the audience a week later.

Conclusion: Self-reflection is a practiced skill

In the 21st century, video reviews are assumed to be a fundamental part of many sectors, including professional sports. Indeed, it’s hard to even imagine a star athlete who refuses to analyze their performance by watching footage of previous performances. Executives should follow this lead, even if it feels uncomfortable at first. Once you adjust to the awkwardness and practice regular, structured self-analysis, the quality of your connection to the people in your audience will dramatically improve.

Recommended for you:

Want to communicate with confidence and maximize your potential? [Learn more](#)