EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

Getting to the Bottom
of What Takes
Leaders to the Top

Suzanne Bates

The factors that determine whether you'll get promoted to a top job in your industry can be rather mysterious.

After all, you can have the experience, skill and technical know-how, and still feel stuck in your career. How can you demystify this process and put yourself in a position to be considered for top jobs?

This question arises for every leader, many times in a career. The closer you get to the top, the more mysterious it can be. Case in point: two leaders were being considered candidates for CEO. The first was known as analytical and quietly confident. The second was thought to be action-oriented and outgoing. Despite their contrasting styles, the two did have one thing in common: The board of directors advised each to develop stronger executive presence. What did they mean by that?

It's not an easy question to answer because executive presence has long been a catch-all phrase. When you ask people to define it, they often answer, "I'm not sure, but I know it when I see it."

When pressed they might say it's body language, gravitas, charisma, or presentation skill. Countless books, articles, and TED talks reinforce this idea. All you need to do is walk on stage like you belong there, open up your gestures, and command the room.

Yet it seems like there's more. And there is.

A couple of years ago, we decided to research precisely what executive presence is for senior leaders. We looked at decades of studies in disciplines from management theory to communication, social action theory, psychology, and philosophy and ethics. Out of this, we developed a more complete, yet common-sense definition of executive presence, based in science: the qualities of a leader that engage, align, inspire, and move people to act.

" Put aside the desire to have instant pleasure (and avoid tasks) in favor of completing not-so-pleasant tasks now, which will make life easier and happier for you in the future.

The goal of having a research-based model of executive presence with 15 specific qualities was to explain not just what it is but why it matters to leaders and organizations. The qualities are tied to a leader's ability to influence and make an impact. They go beyond first impressions and public speaking, capturing it in three dimensions: character, substance, and style.

The good news is that everybody has some of these qualities. You can figure out which are your strengths and which are the areas you need to develop. We've documented how some of the top leaders in the world develop qualities of presence, get promoted, become more effective, and drive better organizational outcomes.

The first step in developing stronger presence is to understand that it's more than presentation skills; it encompasses other essential qualities like authenticity, concern, resonance, humility, and practical wisdom, to name a few. It is enhanced by qualities such as interactivity, inclusiveness, integrity, and vision. Through our work with thousands of leaders, we've seen how small changes in our behaviors can make a big difference in how others view us.

Let's take a look at the 15 qualities of in the Bates Model of Executive Presence and then consider a few stories of how it can change a leader's career.

The dimensions of executive presence can be summed up this way:

Character: the fundamental qualities that build trust and goodwill

Substance: the qualities of mature leadership that give leaders credibility

Style: the qualities of communicative leadership that build motivation and drive execution

What's exciting is that you can actually measure your presence by asking your peers, direct reports, managers, and other constituents to weigh in on the qualities of presence. We recommend that you do this through a Bates ExPI Assessment; however, you can start by getting to know the qualities of presence and asking yourself, "How do I think I measure up?"

Bates ExPI™
Executive Presence Model

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Character - qualities of temperament developed early in life and critical to building trust.	Substance - qualities of mature leadership that inform and inspire others and build a leader's credibility.	Style - qualities of communicative leadership that build motivation and drive execution.
Authenticity – being real, genuine, transparent, and sincere in interactions with others.	Practical Wisdom – displaying insight and judgment that gets to the heart of issues and guides decision making.	Appearance – looking and acting like an able executive; showing up prepared and full of energy.
Integrity – behaving in alignment with one's values, beliefs, and promises.	Confidence – being self-assured in decision making and ready to accept responsibility for actions.	Intentionality – clarifying direction and keeping actions aligned, without stifling the need to adjust course.
Concern – demonstrating interest in others and encouraging adaptive development.	Composure – being able to calm and focus others in a crisis, and bringing perspective to critical decisions.	Inclusiveness – actively involving others, welcoming diverse points of view, and encouraging initiative.
Restraint – displaying a reasonable, calm disposition and avoiding emotional impulsiveness.	Resonance – connecting with others and being attuned and responsive to their feelings and motivations.	Interactivity – promoting interpersonal and timely communication to coordinate action.
Humility – showing awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses and appreciation for others' worth.	Vision – generating strategic thinking and inspiring others about the future.	Assertiveness – speaking up, valuing constructive conflict, and raising issues without shutting others down.

CAN YOU REALLY MEASURE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE?

Some people may be skeptical about measuring presence. After all, there has never been a research-based model of it. We have relied on common sense, observation, anecdote, and guesswork. Yet these alone have only resulted in "approximating" executive presence.

You're undoubtedly familiar with that old adage, "You can't manage what you can't measure," originated by W. Edwards Deming and often reiterated by such luminaries as Peter Drucker, Larry Bossidy, and Ram Charan. We thought measurement was so important that we operationalized this model into a multi-rater assessment. This means we can provide accurate data that measures how others perceive you. As a leader, you expect accuracy in business data, and you should expect the same when it comes to evaluating your performance.

We believed that measuring the right things and generating data would offer leaders a break-through in views of their own presence. We developed an assessment, piloted it in 20 global compa-nies, validated we were measuring the right things, and, later, looked at the historical data to understand trends. The headline, after all this? It's a game changer. Leaders who become aware of others' perceptions and work on presence move the needle. And they tell us that it brings sharply into focus what they sensed but couldn't put their fingers on about their areas of development.

THE STORY OF ONE LEADER'S JOURNEY

We all know promising young managers who been stuck in a role, not understanding why they aren't advancing faster. "Tory Bellingham's" colleagues in finance described her as an energetic, outgoing, authentic person. She exuded the polish, demeanor, and professionalism that you'd expect in an SVP of a multinational company. Her direct reports would have said she defined executive presence, in the ways it is usually described.

However, those in senior management were not as certain Tory was ready for the next role. They were having some trouble describing exactly why. They certainly wanted her to succeed. She was smart, well-liked, and respected in her field.

The organization asked Tory to go through the Bates ExPI assessment and work with a coach on executive presence. They were clear about one thing—perceptions needed to change if Tory were to be considered as a future CFO. Tory was up for the coaching, though she felt a little daunted by the initial feedback and unclear as to what changes she could make. What exactly did they mean by executive presence?

We should add that a year earlier, Tory had completed the company's traditional 360. It hadn't revealed most of what we learned when she later completed the Bates ExPI. This was not because the company's assessment was inadequate. It was fine for what it was designed to measure. It simply didn't incorporate the more current ways of thinking about executive presence – what it takes to engage, align, inspire, and mobilize people to go above and beyond. The company 360 mentioned communication and influence, but it was vague.

When Tory reviewed the results of the Bates ExPI assessment, she learned that while her direct reports saw her as confident and assertive, she could come across as very intimidating. They gave her lower ratings in qualities such as restraint and composure. In meetings she often expressed deep disappointment when they didn't deliver what she expected. She had also been known to roll her eyes in meetings with her peers. She made it obvious when she didn't have much time for what they had to say.

The impressions at the top were different. She learned from the ExPI that those in senior management wanted her to speak up. She was quiet in these meetings. They wanted to see what she could contribute to the strategic dialogue. They gave her lower ratings in practical wisdom. None of this had been apparent to her up to now. People may have held the views but they had not themselves had a language to describe what was missing.

CLOSING THE GAPS

Tory went to work to change her approach, beginning with her own team. She started checking in earlier and more regularly with her direct reports before a project was finished. This way she wasn't surprised, whether things were going well or not. Her team told her they noticed the change. They started lining up outside of her office to express appreciation. Some who had been afraid of her were asking her advice. The tenor of her staff meetings changed dramatically as people began to perceive she had more confidence in them.

With peers, she also made changes. Rather than allowing her frustration to show on her face, she made a point to ask questions. She used words to describe how she felt. A statement such as, "I'm a little frustrated that we're going around and around on this issue and not making progress" would respectfully bring the problem to people's attention, and open the door to productive dialogue. One of her peers told her later how he had noticed a calmer, more respectful demeanor.

Tory also made noticeable strides with her senior management. She took extra time to prepare to deliver executive briefings. She worked to concisely articulate key recommendations and do so upfront in the first one to two minutes. She came armed with questions that got to the heart of

the matter. Her manager reported within three months that the CEO and senior team were really impressed by the recent discussions with her.

When we conducted a second assessment, we affirmed that Tory actually improved in 14 of the 15 qualities of presence. This is not unusual, as a matter of fact, in the same company, we found 74% of leaders improved in 10 or more areas. As you might guess, this is because many of the qualities are related: composure and restraint; assertiveness and confidence; concern and resonance. Closing the gaps in any one area can improve perceptions about many aspects of executive presence.

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WHY MEASUREMENT ALSO MATTERS TO ORGANIZATIONS

Measurement isn't just valuable to you as a leader. It is enlightening to look at patterns in leadership qualities that define the culture of your organization. It can help you to understand what is holding you back in areas like driving transformation, attracting and keeping great talent, and improving employee engagement.

For example, one organization discovered its leaders had high ratings in integrity, confidence, and appearance, however, they were not perceived as strong in the qualities of resonance, humility, and composure. This didn't mean the leaders lacked the capability of tuning into people's thoughts and feelings, or making room for others' ideas. But as a group they needed to become aware of why they weren't being seen that way as well as the impact this was having on the organization.

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In this particular organization, an action bias had always been rewarded. Leaders that rose to the top were the ones who got things done with speed. They made timely decisions and brought energy and focus to their work. All that was good, to a point! The problem was they were making all the decisions and not empowering their teams, which ironically slowed things down because people were waiting for direction from the top. It also had an impact on engagement—people felt their managers didn't want their opinions. They didn't have the confidence to speak up. As a result, there was a decided lack of engagement, alignment, and sense of purpose within the ranks of employees.

EVERY LEADER IS DIFFERENT

One thing we want to emphasize here is that while it's valuable to look at group data and organizational trends, every leader is different. We all have strengths and gaps. Organizations need to provide leaders with their own blueprint for development. There is no "one size fits all."

Patterns in leadership qualities in executive presence can inform organizations about the culture. It is then important to address these at the individual level. Coaching and mentoring group programs with a component of individual assessment are the best ways to help leaders address and change behaviors.

YES, APPEARANCE STILL MATTERS

Even as we emphasize the many qualities of presence, we don't mean to imply that the more traditional ways of defining it don't matter. We deliberately included appearance, confidence, and assertiveness in the model, for instance. But we were careful to define these broadly, to make it clear why they are important.

For example, appearance describes not only whether you look the part of a leader and are dressed appropriately for your business environment. It also measures how effectively you engage others by bringing energy and vitality into the room. In addition, we look at whether you show up seeming well-prepared and "ready for the game."

Here's how it helped another leader we'll call Jonathan Jaxtimer. Jonathan had been promoted into a strategy role, supporting the president of a large division in his company. Within weeks, his performance began to suffer. His appearance began to change. He showed up looking fatigued and sometimes disheveled. He was making haphazard clothing choices that didn't play well in the room with the rest of the executive team.

Not only that, Jonathan was short and impatient with his boss, yelling at him on the phone. The boss respected Jonathan but soon was concluding he had been promoted too soon. What few knew was that in addition to the new demands of the job, Jonathan was feeling challenges at home. He had elderly parents with health problems and was the only sibling in a position to be helpful to them.

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SMALL CHANGES, BIG DIFFERENCES

Jonathan's coach started with a Bates ExPI assessment, which brought to light some urgent and troubling perceptions about him. Up until then, he had not been aware of how negatively others had viewed his readiness for the role. He started working immediately to get his schedule under control, to get sleep, and be rested for work. He addressed the clothing issues right away, which sent the signal he was more on top of his game.

Jonathan's lower scores in appearance were not the only issue: he was rated lower initially in restraint and composure. He worked with the coach to help him head off stress, so he could avoid reacting in the moment and think through how he wanted to handle difficult conversations. Within a few months, with the help of a coach and his manager, he was able to address all these issues. A year later, he was among the most trusted members of the leadership team and had earned the respect of his boss and peers.

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DO SOME QUALITIES OF EXECUTIVE PRESENCE MATTER MORE?

We're often asked if some of the qualities of presence matter more than others. The reality is they all matter, though you don't have to have perfect scores in all categories. To become the best you can be, you need to leverage your strengths, while also looking for ways to close the gaps that hold you back. And these are different for each of us. Likewise, leaders vary when it comes to their business goals and challenges.

As a result, some of the 15 qualities may loom a bit larger when we consider what that specific leader needs to accomplish in the coming year. If a leader needs to show up as more of a strategic partner and trusted advisor for clients, for example, we might take a longer look at facets such as practical wisdom and vision. If breaking down internal silos is the current priority, we would want to understand how others see that leader in the qualities of interactivity, inclusiveness, and resonance to name a few.

Regardless, the challenge for many leaders, especially as they get closer to the top of the organization, is that they simply are not conscious of how others view them. Neither Jonathan nor Tory was aware of perceptions that could have derailed their next promotion.

Had they not also been open to feedback and coaching—and benefited from accurate measurement of perceptions of their executive presence—they never would have known where to focus their development. You may connect with their experience. So often, leaders simply don't know how their words and actions are perceived. Assessment gives you a good idea how to assess perceptions—and then address those perceptions.

WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE RIGHT NOW?

Whether or not you complete a Bates ExPI Assessment, we would suggest that you make a point to ask people you know and trust how they see you. Get familiar with the model of executive presence and ask people to weigh in. Being open to feedback is sign of good leadership. It is critical to becoming all the leader you can be.

We also recommend that you take our complimentary, pre-assessment survey here: www.alltheleaderbook.com. It will give you a general overview of the types of challenges that may be arising for you given your level and challenges. While a full assessment is the best way to know how you're perceived, you will also find value in reading and learning about the Bates Executive Presence Model in the book *All the Leader You Can Be*.

As you learn about the qualities of presence, you might also find it helpful to reflect also on leaders you admire. Look at the 15 qualities and analyze which ones have helped them succeed. In noticing this you may ask yourself, "What changes might I make that would help me to grow as a leader?" How can I be a better version of me?

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Just as this new view of executive presence is helpful to individual leaders, it is also changing the conversation in organizations. If you coach, mentor, or work with high-potential leaders, this will give you better language for describing what it is. It will show you how to offer actionable advice as you guide their development. This is a critical step in establishing your value as an advisor.

It's not that we have had the definition all wrong; we just haven't had it quite right. It has been frustrating for leaders as well as those who support their development. But now, armed with a reliable model and way to talk about it, you can give leaders like Tory and Jonathan a path to achieving it. Think of this as finding a few missing pieces in a 1,000-piece puzzle. Perhaps it's been sitting on your table unfinished for a while. Now, you can help other leaders complete the picture.

LABELS DON'T WORK

You may have noticed that we don't have names or categories to capture "types" of leaders. This is because we know that leaders are different. We sometimes use the analogy of a snowflake: Many leaders may look similar at a glance, but each is unique. And even if two leaders happened to have nearly identical ratings on the 90-item assessment, their feedback would still vary because they're driving different business outcomes in different organizational cultures.

The Bates Model offers a far richer, more complete picture of each leader. The technical term for this is an ideographic assessment, which means looking at leaders as unique individuals in distinct situations, facing particular challenges while reaching toward any number of business goals.

We sometimes use the analogy of snowflakes here: While many leaders may look similar at a glance, a closer inspection reveals that no two are exactly alike. Even if two leaders were to have identical assessment results, our advice to each might be completely different depending on their role, function, team, and business objectives.

The bottom line is that we don't believe that labels serve leaders well. We don't want you to say, "Well, I guess this is who I am!" because it's very possible to change how you're perceived across all three dimensions and 15 facets of the model. We'd prefer having you sat, "Wow, now I know what to keep doing and what I should change!" This empowers you to take action. It's powerful stuff.

BECOMING ALL YOU CAN BE

The most important advice we can give any leader, especially as he or she moves closer to the top, is that you may realize that aspects of your brand of leadership have served you well but no longer are enough. It is important to see yourself as a work in progress, even later in your career, and to embrace your development as the exciting journey it is.

The two leaders we told you about at the beginning each embraced this process and it paid off. The first left to become CEO of another company. The second was named CEO. Both succeeded. Each said the work on executive presence was one of the keys to his success.

Getting to the bottom of executive presence will take you to the top. As you stand on bigger and bigger stages, the spotlight will shine brighter. You owe it to yourself to learn where you can grow and invest in your own success. **You have the power to become all you can be. While there is no "one way" to achieve extraordinary executive presence, any leader can build a roadmap that will get you there.** ⬕

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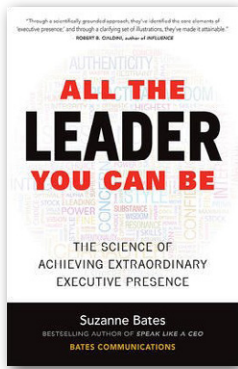
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Suzanne Bates is a CEOcoach, author, Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), former award-winning television news anchor, and CEO of Bates Communications, Inc. Her books include the bestselling *Speak Like a CEO*, *Motivate Like a CEO*, and *Discover Your CEO Brand.*

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