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communication, empathy and calmness under pressure. Think of it as something similar to the "it" factor we often associate with Hollywood celebrities.

Paul McDonald • Feb. 08, 2022



When accounting professionals map out their path into management, they often focus on the technical abilities they'll need — the know-how and work experience to get the job done. But while traditional skills like financial reporting, account reconciliation and forecasting are certainly critical to success in the field, they're only part of the picture.

Great managers, regardless of the industry they work in, carry themselves confidently and inspire those around them. They have what is sometimes called *executive presence*.

What is executive presence — and why does it matter?

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management role as a step in their career path. If you want to climb to the next rung on your career ladder, it's vital you find ways to differentiate yourself. Improving how you communicate and carry yourself could be your trump card.

Furthermore, it's a card you will need to play in many different settings. In the COVID era, more and more accounting firms are operating [hybrid workforces](#) and offering increased remote work opportunities. Knowing how to project your executive presence across [online channels](#) is an essential skill for would-be leaders.

How to build your presence

As with many abstract concepts, executive presence may be something you'll just "know when you see it" in action. Still, there are some aspects of it that can be broken down, described and emulated. Here are some approaches to consider when you think you're ready to begin launching a major career move.

- **Be yourself**

Leadership is often associated with gregarious, outgoing characters, but introverts can also be great leaders. For every manager known for their rousing team pep talks, there's another respected for their ability to engage individual employees by being straightforward with them and sometimes applying humor to discussions. Developing executive presence is about channeling your personality in productive ways, not reinventing yourself.

- **Have confidence**

When you are self-confident, it shines through in the way you speak and present yourself. On the flip side, if you're unsure about what you're saying, others will pick up on it. Remind yourself that you can depend on your skills and experience to communicate clearly and with authority.

- **Act decisively**

Good leaders understand the benefits of brainstorming and consultation but also

the costs of letting discussions drift on aimlessly. Gather the facts you need to

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...by asking to accompany, but people who really want to be leaders will make the courage to ask for feedback from colleagues and managers. If possible, ask someone whose leadership style you admire to be your mentor, so they can observe your development over time and steer you in the right direction.

- **Speak up**

When assessing candidates for promotion, businesses don't just look for people with poise and self-confidence, as important as those traits are. They want professionals with business smarts who understand the business strategy of the company — how the firm makes money and an insight into how it must evolve to stay profitable. Do your homework and ask questions that can help you learn more about these fundamentals. This will not only raise your visibility as you move through your projects but also demonstrate that you are someone who understands what's most important to the executive team — a team you hope to join one day.

- **Learn how to manage stressful situations**

Anyone can stay upbeat when receiving good news. Great leaders stay positive when things go awry and start looking for solutions rather than people to blame.

- **Sharpen your communication skills**

Professionals with executive presence are equally good talkers and listeners. When speaking to someone in person, stand close enough to show you're engaged but not so close as to appear intimidating or overly familiar. When someone is speaking to you, give them your undivided attention and **listen actively**. When communicating virtually, you'll need to make more of an effort than just using the sound of your voice. Take advantage of all the tools available to you, including screen sharing, video and presentation software.

- **Pay attention to your appearance**

This should go without saying, but “dress for the job you want” definitely applies to creating an executive presence. Make sure your clothing fits appropriately and that your appearance isn't distracting. While business casual dress has long been

acceptable in many offices, don't go even more casual just because you're working

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Paul McDonald is senior executive director at talent solutions and recruiting firm [Robert Half](#). He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace, leadership and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 35 years in the staffing industry, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

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