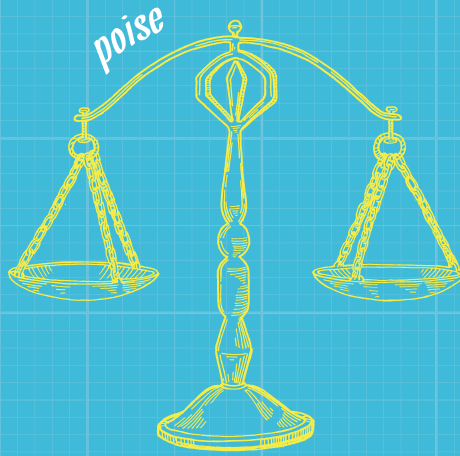


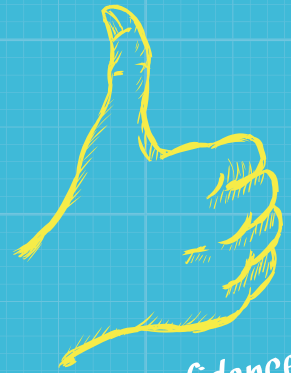
HIGHER



*influence*

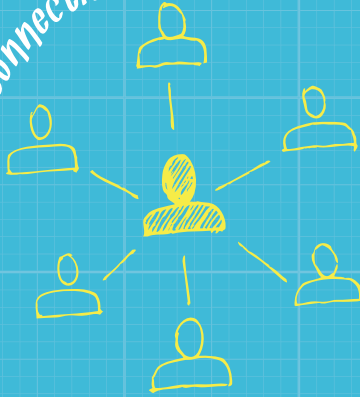


*poise*



*self-confidence*

*connections*



*authenticity*

AVERAGE

LOWER

#### CHEAT SHEET

- *Exhibit poise.* Handle unexpected situations by controlling emotions and acting quickly and decisively.
- *Earn influence.* Convince others of the wisdom of your strategies through inspiration, rather than direct positional authority.
- *Practice authenticity.* Acting true to your values, personality and spirit results in a consistency that attempting to please others simply cannot.
- *Cultivate connections.* Build trust and inform constituents of the value you bring to the organization.

## More Than Your Average Lawyer:

# DEVELOPING EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

Kathryn K. Mlsna and Amy D. Cline

An in-house lawyer with executive presence can persuade constituencies in the organization over which the lawyer has no direct or positional authority, thereby allowing the lawyer to secure buy-in and support from the senior leadership team, the board of directors and business units. Executive presence is not based on your job title — rather it is evidenced by how a lawyer uses her personal communication style to connect with others within the organization.

While some characterize executive presence as illusive and indefinable, an in-house lawyer with executive presence has exceptional interpersonal communication skills, polished boardroom presence, and is persuasive and influential. In today's "doing even more with less" environment, lawyers must possess the right combination of hard work, expertise and focus. While these traits are commonly understood and need no explanation, they are not enough to succeed. Successful lawyers have an executive presence that, while challenging to describe, differentiates merely competent lawyers from impactful business partners.

The phrase "executive presence" is often cited but frequently misunderstood. If you ask five people to define executive presence, you are likely to receive five different answers. "You know it when you see it." The "it" factor. The "X" factor. Magnetism. Leadership. Authority. Charisma. Visibility at the right time. While "[f]irst impressions are awfully important," said Peter Pan to the Lost Boys,<sup>1</sup> executive presence is much more than first impressions or ability ... it is an indefinable quality that enables a lawyer to stand out in the company and to engage internal clients.

Lawyers who are committed to developing an executive presence will not only instill confidence in their clients, but will also be well-positioned to achieve career success. For in-house counsel, executive presence is best described as creating a consistent

long-lasting impression over time by the manner in which a lawyer expresses herself and engages others. While there is no broad consensus about the definition of executive presence, there are five characteristics common to lawyers who possess it.

### Definition and myth

How often do lawyers hear that they are great leaders and would rise to the next level if they only had presence? Many lawyers believe that executive presence is an inherent trait that is impossible to achieve. However, while some lawyers naturally exhibit executive presence, many others have learned the skill set.

Although there is no single method to develop executive presence, there are a range of skills that a lawyer can master. A lawyer with executive presence exhibits five distinct but equally important traits. A framework for developing executive presence includes understanding, identifying and developing (i) poise, (ii) confidence, (iii) influence, (iv) authenticity and (v) connection.

### Cultivating executive presence

#### Exhibit poise

The adage "grace under fire" describes a lawyer with poise (i.e., the ability to handle an unexpected situation by reacting quickly and decisively). A lawyer exhibits poise by remaining calm, rational and in control in stressful situations. Simply stated, exhibiting poise means being able to control emotions when upsetting situations arise in the work place.

Consistently maintaining composure is critical to an in house lawyer's career success. Poise enables a lawyer to disregard distracting emotions that diminish her ability to focus on creating business solutions, and it inspires others to focus on the immediate problem and move toward a solution. It goes without saying that maintaining composure in a crisis is critical.

It can be challenging to exhibit composure in high-stakes, high-pressure situations. A lawyer who controls unproductive emotions by taking a deep breath and committing to address these emotions later will be able to focus more completely on productive thought.

However, rather than controlling the emotions generated by stress, some lawyers embrace them to create an all-hands-on-deck mentality that fuels productive thought and inspires innovation. "Lawyers who are able to repurpose stress as a catalyst for problem-solving are demonstrating the leadership that senior management values," says Myla Barefield Young, vice president and assistant general counsel of Re: Sources USA. "They contribute not only substantive solutions, but also a sense of calm that supports the wisdom of that advice." As lawyers increasingly are expected to be strategic thought-partners, rather than simply legal advisors, their ability to develop workable solutions will position them well as business people who have legal training, rather than lawyers who practice in a business setting.

Poise is a behavior that can be learned. To make poise a habit takes time and repeated exposure to challenging situations. Similar to building a muscle, the more a lawyer practices composure in difficult situations, the more likely it will become a reflexive action that grows stronger with use.

### Project self-confidence

Self-confidence is an attitude or belief in one's competencies. It is the ability to take control of a challenging,



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## Risk management template: Professional effectiveness of an individual lawyer

Elements of professional effectiveness	Perceived performance of lawyer	Risk to organization	Priority of risk [Low/Medium/High]	Actions to address the risk [Eliminate or Mitigate]	Measurement of success	Actions to address unsuccessful results
Knowledge of the law						
Business acumen						
Clear communication						
Ability to work as a team member						
Timeliness of response						

## Risk management template: Executive presence

Elements of professional effectiveness	Perceived performance of lawyer	Risk to organization	Priority of risk [low/medium/high]	Actions to address the risk [eliminate or mitigate]	Measurement of success	Actions to address unsuccessful results
Executive presence	Does not demonstrate self-confidence in all situations	Legal advice is undervalued. Client consensus is not achieved.	High		Real-time feedback from colleagues and clients	
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unpredictable situation, make tough decisions in a timely manner, and advocate a position to strong-willed and stressed members of the senior leadership team.

How often are a successful lawyer's innate intelligence, acquired skills and experiences magnified by her self-assured manner? Contrast this with a less confident lawyer who is unable to leverage her higher level of intelligence, greater skill set and richer experience.

The interplay of abilities and confidence might look like this: The lawyer with strong abilities and high confidence will exhibit executive presence and is most likely to progress to the next level in her career path.

It has been said that if a person does not believe in herself, others have no reason to do so. As an attorney attempting to persuade and advise, the substantive message may be lost on clients and colleagues

who may doubt the validity of the attorney's recommendations. The strength of one's convictions will be an important catalyst to success in these interactions.

For many attorneys, self-confidence is built on a foundation of preparation, comfort with a certain amount of ambiguity, and a history of successful business and legal outcomes. For others, self-confidence comes more naturally and engenders more of the

<b>Abilities</b>	More effective	Most effective
	Not effective	Most effective
	<b>Confidence</b>	

same. As with athletes who envision success on the field, lawyers can learn to exude confidence even if they do not yet possess it.

Inspirational speaker and author Esther Hicks has observed that, “worrying is using your imagination to create things you do not want.”<sup>2</sup> Effective lawyers have little time to address imagined and unfounded outcomes, and instead, develop the self-confidence to repurpose the energy devoted to worry as the strength to believe in themselves.

**Earn influence**

Influence is defined by Merriam Webster’s online dictionary as “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.” The lawyer who is able to convince others of the wisdom of her strategies and tactics is seen as an influential leader. As a lawyer rises in the organization, the ability to influence the actions of the people in her increasingly broad sphere of influence through inspiration, rather

**The successful lawyer must cultivate connections with other departments and the senior leadership team. These bonds build trust and inform constituents of the value one brings to the organization.**

than direct positional authority, becomes more critical. Whereas a direct supervisor can request an action by a subordinate, an executive several levels above typically must rely on indirect influence or persuasion, which is more difficult to attain.

As entrepreneur and philanthropist Steve Case has said: “It’s stunning to me what kind of an impact even one person can have if they have the right passion, perspective and are able to align the interest of a great team.”<sup>3</sup> Organizations reward leadership that impacts action. A successful attorney partners with the client to achieve business goals by articulating alternate courses of action and the associated risks and benefits, identifying the recommended alternative, and building the rationale for that recommendation. “Lawyers are inherently risk averse,” notes M. Gayle Packer, executive vice president and chief administrative officer for Terracon Consultants, Inc. “Recognizing that there is a difference between a legal and business risk and offering solutions is key to influencing internal clients. One of the best ways to earn influence within a company is by placing yourself in the internal client’s shoes and considering the risks and benefits important to them.”

The “right” advice, without more, will not advance the ball. It is not enough to be educated, intelligent and insightful. Without the ability to apply those competencies to solve problems, an executive is not able to contribute to the success of the organization.

Influence is a skill that can be developed with experience and with honest self-reflection. The lawyer can identify her influencer style. Does she collaborate to achieve buy-in? Does she base her influence on well-presented facts? Does she appeal to emotion? Does she inspire? While the office might be a convenient venue in which to develop influencer skills, consider volunteer work as another setting to create these skills.

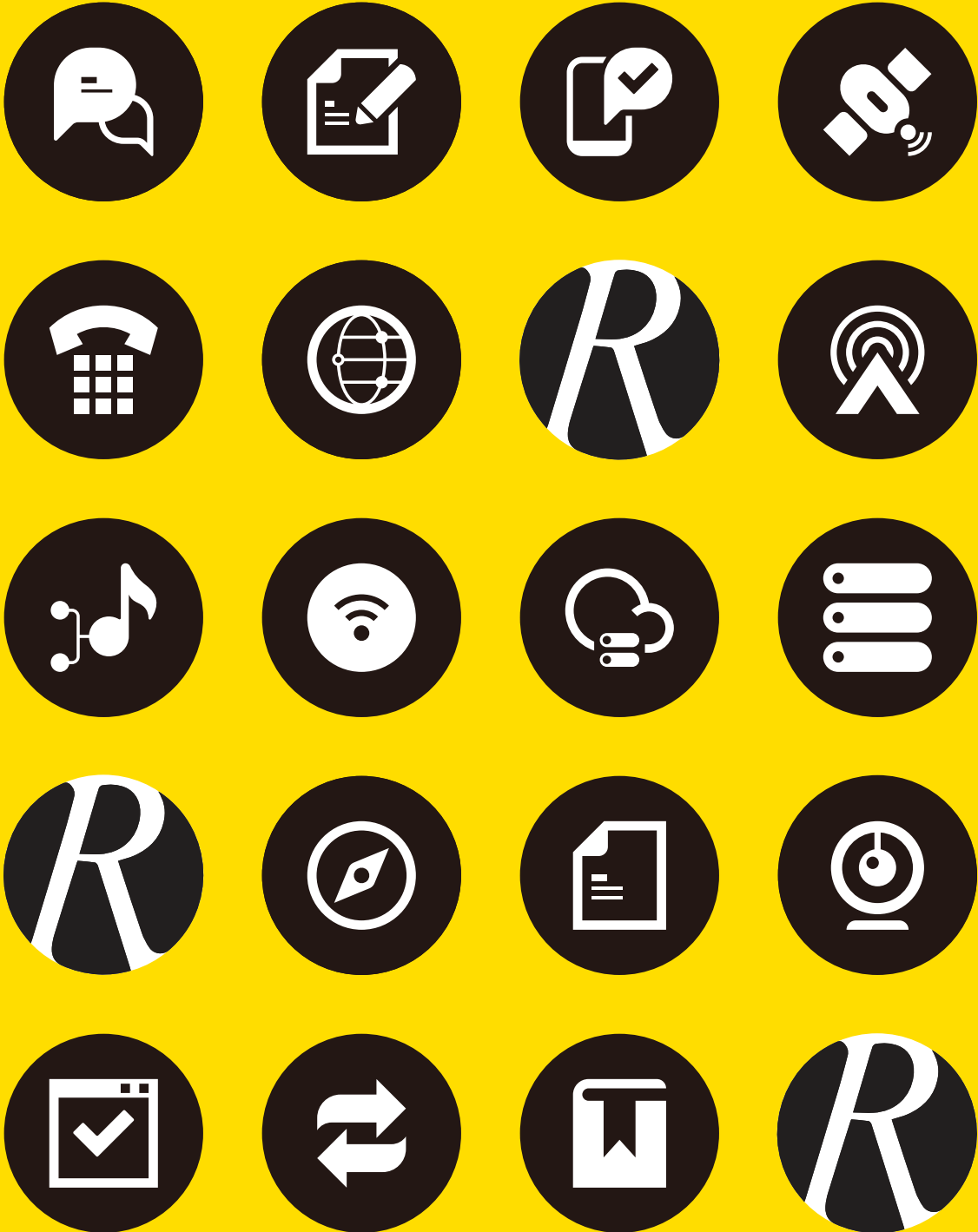
Volunteers typically cannot be required to act in specified ways, and so the ability to persuade can be an effective tool to achieve desired action. Committee, board and operational work for a not-for-profit organization are proven ways to hone skills that can be used in other parts of a lawyer’s professional and personal life. Leading a committee of individuals from varied backgrounds and with a range of personal agendas can be an excellent way to not only develop these skills, but also to observe others in action.

**Practice authenticity**

A key factor for a lawyer interested in advancing her career and demonstrating executive presence is to be authentic in her interactions with others. A lawyer who practices authenticity exhibits a genuine self with the senior leadership team, the board, colleagues and others. Acting true to her values, personality and spirit results in a consistency that attempting to please others simply cannot. A lawyer whose words and actions are in sync develops a reputation for stability valued by clients. “Be true to your work, your word and your friend,” Henry David Thoreau advises<sup>4</sup>.

Authenticity is important, because clients and colleagues know when words and actions do not align with values. “You can spot a fake a mile away” captures the peril of presenting a façade. A lawyer’s reputation is

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critical to her ability to develop the professional relationships and respect that enable her to shape the future by addressing the challenges that occur in the work place in a direct and deliberate manner.

Developing authenticity is a lifelong process that begins with a lawyer identifying any gaps between her core values and actions taken in the workplace. Practice narrowing the gap by consistently aligning words and actions with values, and by determining a unique value proposition and how it benefits the client. Actively seek and respond to honest feedback from others, either informally by creating a peer team, or by retaining a coach who can identify

the “brutal truths” about any misalignment between core values, words and actions. A lawyer can practice integration by analyzing whether she presents herself consistently across different situations and environments.

Lawyers not only are held to a high standard of integrity and honesty, but also are often stereotyped as people lacking these traits. “Knowing that unflattering media, client experience and untested assumptions often support these stereotypes, lawyers who are able to demonstrate alignment of their core values and actions can be more effective contributors to the success of their organizations,” says Mary Lynn Bedell, vice president,

**One of the best ways to earn influence within a company is by placing yourself in the internal client’s shoes and considering the risks and benefits important to them.**

food and regulatory law, for The Hillshire Brands Company. Clients who view their lawyers as inauthentic might disregard their advice as invalid, regardless of how soundly researched, logically developed and well communicated.

Authenticity enables a lawyer to interact with clients and colleagues in a predictable manner that they value. It is the building block of the fifth trait: cultivating connections.

#### Cultivate connections

The days of a lawyer keeping her head down and working hard to attain the next level are over. While the appropriate skill set is a baseline for any lawyer working in an organization’s legal department, it is no longer sufficient to come to the office and do a competent job. The successful lawyer must cultivate connections with other departments and the senior leadership team. These bonds build trust and inform constituents of the value one brings to the organization. Time spent on developing these connections and marketing one’s “brand” is an investment in one’s career.

Cultivation creates opportunities to interact with senior management and to take a leading role in the company. The days of going it alone, if they ever truly existed, are gone. Today, in-house counsel maintain visibility with the senior leadership team by creating opportunities for interaction. Being top of mind allows others to consider that lawyer the “go to” person for new projects or responsibilities. “Executive

## Managing Risk: Crafting an Enterprise Risk Management Plan

Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, an enterprise risk management plan is only as effective as the people who contribute to its creation. Involving the in-house lawyer in the development of the organization’s enterprise risk management plan is not enough. Although the plan will address the risks inherent in each department of the organization, does it reflect an analysis of each lawyer’s effectiveness as a member of the legal department? Because the enterprise risk management plan is only as effective as the people who develop it, each lawyer can best support the plan if he has an individual professional effectiveness plan that is aligned with the organization’s enterprise risk management goals and is an important component of that plan.

To develop this individual plan, an in-house lawyer can ask himself a number of questions that will address the risks that can jeopardize his effectiveness:

- How does the organization define professional effectiveness?
- What is the difference between this definition and the lawyer’s perceived performance?
- What risk could this gap create for the organization?
- How significant are these risks?
- How can these risks be eliminated or mitigated?
- How can the lawyer measure and communicate the success of these actions?
- What actions need to be undertaken to address unsuccessful results?

Common elements in an individual lawyer’s professional effectiveness plan are (a) knowledge of the law; (b) knowledge of the business/business acumen; (c) clear communication; (d) ability to work as a team member/collaboration; and (e) timeliness of response. Each of these elements can be characterized as a skill or expertise. Using a risk management template to analyze each of these elements is a good starting point for an individual professional effectiveness plan.

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**Offering to be on a cross-functional team is a proven way to expand professional connections and to demonstrate a skill set to others in the organization.**

presence takes time to develop,” says David G. Susler, associate general counsel, National Material L.P. “It requires building confidence with your client over time, not solely on the basis of subject matter expertise, but also on the basis of the credibility you have established with the client.”

The lawyer who maintains strong working relationships with colleagues on the audit committee, senior management, contractors, outside counsels, insurers and the human resources committee, among others, will be ideally situated to contribute to the creation and implementation of the risk management plan.

Although busy lawyers might not think they have time for cultivation, they can devote undivided attention to the person across the table by refraining from checking email, text messages, taking phone calls or playing games on mobile devices. These techniques may seem like common sense, but they can and do make a difference. Understanding what matters to the

other person by actively listening, even if for a short time, means a lot in today’s frenetic world.

Offering to be on a cross-functional team is a proven way to expand professional connections and to demonstrate a skill set to others in the organization. Volunteering for a high-profile assignment, such as making a presentation to the board or senior leadership team, will cultivate important connections.

The successful lawyer has the right combination of attributes that will create a professional brand, a unique identifier for which the lawyer is known. Poise, confidence, influence, authenticity and cultivating connections are five attributes that can position both the organization and the attorney for success.

The successful management of risk is critically dependent on the competencies of the in-house lawyer, who is ideally positioned to contribute to the success of an enterprise risk management plan. As a member of the organization’s team, which includes the audit committee, senior management, employees, contractors, outside counsel, insurers and the human resources committee, among others, the in-house attorney typically has the expertise, experience and authority to play a leadership role in the risk management process.

The identification, assessment and communication of risk to relevant stakeholders, as well as the

determination of risk tolerance and the development, implementation and measurement of the success of the risk management plan, benefit from the leadership of the in-house attorney. Knowledge of the law and its interpretation, the potential negative impacts on the organization’s brand, and a deep understanding of the business and corporate goals will inform the best risk management protocols. **ACC**

**NOTES**

- 1 J.M. Barrie, “Peter Pan,” Chapter 6 “The Little House” (Dover Publications, 1999).
- 2 Esther & Jerry Hicks, “Ask and It is Given,” p. 27 (Hay House, Inc., 2004).
- 3 Steve Case, quoted in LogoMaker in a post by Rob Marsh dated Dec. 17, 2012 at ([www.logomaker.com/blog/2012/12/17/7-quotes-from-steve-case-on-small-business-vision-and-risk-taking/](http://www.logomaker.com/blog/2012/12/17/7-quotes-from-steve-case-on-small-business-vision-and-risk-taking/)).
- 4 Henry David Thoreau, cited in Classic Quotes, Quotation #34411 ([www.quotationspage.com/quote344111.html](http://www.quotationspage.com/quote344111.html)).

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*It is impossible to think small in a place this big.*

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*Together, we can move mountains.*

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