



# Power of presence

**Executive presence compels others to listen and act, and the lack of it can hold you back professionally. But can that X-factor be consciously crafted?** By Jackie Sloane

**Y**outhful, blond and reminiscent of model Claudia Schiffer, Michelle Gloeckler addressed 800 at a leadership conference. She had the audience laughing as she shared stories of what she'd learned about

business from her mother, a veteran sales rep. Unexpectedly, she invited a special guest onto the stage: her mom, who proceeded to demonstrate where Michelle got her sense of humor from.

Gloeckler, a senior vice president at Wal-Mart and incoming president of the Network of Executive Women, wasn't überformal in communicating. Authentic and playful, she engages with her vulnerability and builds a powerful experience of community in the process. Watching her celebrate her own professional lineage with a group founded to nurture the success of women leaders was touching and powerful. At least one executive new to the group called it the highlight of the day-and-a-half meeting.

Executive presence establishes credibility and engages others through how you communicate, hold yourself and connect with and treat others. Gloeckler has cultivated an extraordinary executive presence. She said later that her intent had been to make an emotional connection with the audience and leave them with the sense that her industry is a great place to build a career.

Mike Wadden, a partner at Accenture, says executive presence inspires trust and generates excitement about you, your mission and what you can do for the other person. People hear the opportunity you present and want to be part of it. He uses executive presence to establish powerful relationships and cultivate enthusiasm, which results in meetings and deals.

What has your executive presence done for you lately? To cultivate a more powerful presence for yourself or your staff, consider the following.

**Compelling authenticity** makes it easier for people to relax around you, as well as trust and be candid themselves. Aloofness and pretense are distancing.

**Grace** in how you hold yourself, speak, respond and move physically—and in how you are with others and under pressure—sets a tone that is calming and impressive. It communicates intelligence and power. Harshness and volatility suggest imbalance or a lack of self-control.

**Active listening**, including the questions you ask, is often what people remember most.

**Taking initiative** by reaching out, saying hello, making a good point, holding your ground, and making requests and offers raises your visibility. When Gloeckler joined Wal-Mart, she expanded her executive presence by volunteering for high-risk assignments, such as live television and board presentations, that supported her business goals and credibility. She was promoted not long after she arrived at the firm.

**Clarity** in your speaking and listening communicates seriousness and respect, and it saves time.

**Superior speaking skills** are vital if your role requires speaking to groups.

**Impeccable personal presentation** is a fundamental. Good grooming shows that you respect yourself and others.

Where might you develop stronger executive presence? Mastery of any area involves continuous learning. **ET**

*JACKIE SLOANE is an executive coach specializing in leadership communication. Her clients achieve greater satisfaction and results through how they and their teams communicate, engage others and cultivate relationships.*