

■ Maintaining Executive Presence in a Digital World



It looks like we all just got handed what we've been asking for all along — the flexibility to work from home!

For our clients who routinely manage projects or processes, communicating virtually will prove pretty effective. But if your job is more nuanced — if you need to motivate, inspire and influence people — things just got a little trickier. If your ability to drive organizational performance is tied to leadership attributes like building trust, demonstrating credibility or influencing others, then your ability to “command the room” or convey your executive presence through your digital device may require extra care. We're delighted to share some of our best practices with you now.

LOOK THE PART

Whatever this means for you in terms of style or clothing, be consistent. Don't suddenly show up on camera in your running clothes, or with your hair pulled back fresh from the shower. Trusted leaders demonstrate predictable and consistent behaviors. While it's okay to relax your style, don't leave it behind!

CHECK YOUR POSTURE

When it's your turn to talk, pull your body forward so that you are sitting in the middle of your chair, with your feet flat on the floor. This gives you a solid, confident posture. Your hands should be resting on top of the table or desk, not in your lap. This gives you the ability to use big gestures, which convey energy. Energy is engaging and inspirational, and something that's challenging to muster on a conference call.

LOOK THEM IN THE EYE

The question we've been asked most frequently this week is, “Where do I look on the screen?” Do we speak to the little images of our colleagues? Do we avoid looking at our own image at all cost? Here's the simple answer, but it's not easy to execute: When you are speaking, look directly into the camera lens. In many cases, there is a tiny green light to indicate that it is on. Look there. If that feels awkward (and it will), adjust the view to reorient the images across the top of the screen. If that's not possible, put something on top of your screen or device to look at. I draw friendly eyes on a mini Post-It note and stick it above the camera lens. One of my more creative clients stuck a little plastic Mickey Mouse above the lens. Use anything that will help you focus there — and if it makes you smile, all the better! (*Don't worry — no one will think you are staring at them. They'll look away when they want to, and you don't have to look at the lens when you are not the speaker.*)

CLEAN UP THE KITCHEN!

Yes, we are all working from our homes. No, this doesn't give you a pass on the background. Make sure you know exactly what shows up in the video frame. Test it out with a trusted colleague, or the kids at home. Then, tidy it up. If you're in the kitchen, put the dishes away. If you're in the bedroom, make sure your participants see the wall and not the bed. Take clothes off of doorknobs and hooks. All of these things create unnecessary distractions. As always, you want the focus on you and your message, not your décor or living habits.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

Take this literally. Position your device — computer, laptop, notebook or smartphone — so that the camera lens is about eye level. We've seen enough shots that travel “up the nose” or “down the forehead” — both of these are unflattering and unnecessary. The way my desk and chair are configured, I need to raise my laptop 7” above the desktop. To get the ideal height, where I am naturally looking into the camera lens without looking up or down, I stack two thick books on top of each other and perch my device on top.

A final piece of advice: **YOU ARE ALWAYS ON.** To my own coaching clients, this is a familiar refrain. It means that when it comes to building and increasing your executive presence, there is no time when you aren't communicating at some level — be it consciously or subconsciously — your personal brand as a leader. Just because you are working from home...or attending the holiday party...or participating in the teambuilding adventure trip...it doesn't mean we are your family or closest friends. We are still your stakeholders, direct reports, and peers, and we will view you through that lens.

If you haven't checked out our website lately, please visit us soon and click over to our Tools & Resources page. We'll be adding more helpful content there. And, since you're saving time on the commute, consider investing in your own professional development. Ask us about virtual coaching engagements and webinars for your teams.

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