

Women in Business

Key Points for Increasing Your Professional Presence

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Entrepreneurs can enhance their effectiveness by developing their level of professional presence. As a business owner, it is advantageous to create a positive impression on people, because the impressions you make can directly impact the quantity and quality of the clients that you attract. Consider that it only takes 3 seconds for people to form a first, and often lasting, impression. If you don't consciously choose what you want to convey, people will still form impressions, although it will be largely by default. It's too important to leave to chance.

What is professional presence and how do you know if you have it? When you walk into a room do you convey a sense of confidence and credibility? Envision a CEO of a top organization entering a room. Most CEOs exhibit strong leadership qualities including professional dress and mannerisms, confidence, credibility and ease of communication. This is also sometimes referred to as "executive presence" or the "wow factor".

It's time for you to begin thinking of yourself as a CEO, because in fact you are the CEO of your business. Determine the image you wish to portray and choose the top 3-5 characteristics that you want others to associate with you. An example would be that you decide on professionalism, knowledge and communication skills. These qualities can be conveyed through your appearance, mannerisms, vocal tone, and words. It may be helpful to do a self-assessment of the image you deliver. Strengthen the assessment by seeking additional honest feedback from trusted family members, friends and professional colleagues. Listen carefully in an open-minded and curious manner. Be prepared to not become defensive if you disagree with a few items. Take some time to reflect on the feedback and prepare a list of strengths and areas for growth in each category.

Utilize your list of strengths to immediately elevate your confidence and presence. Choose a few areas for improvement and seek out resources to help develop those. For example if dressing professionally is an area selected for improvement, seek out resources to assist you: these can include books, personal shoppers, trusted friends, family, WEB and even television programs. Remember that our community is rich in educational resources such as workshops and courses that can help you reach your goals. Visit my website at <www.toclimbhigher.com> and select *resources* and *professional presence* for a more specific list including books, workshops, WEB and television programs.

Once you have strengthened your professional presence it is vital to be seen and heard. You might have a great product or service but if no one knows about it or you haven't established your competence, you will not have a successful business. As an entrepreneur it benefits you to convey a favorable impression each time that you go into the community; you never know when you may encounter a potential client or referral source.

As you look for opportunities, you will find many ways to increase your presence through both formal and informal networking. As I discussed in last month's article, the key to effective networking is to find ways to advance the interests of others. Become not only an expert in your area of business, but become a reference point that people will seek out for information. Not only does effective networking strengthen your presence, professional presence will enhance your confidence and ability to network. It's a win-win strategy.

As discussed, professional presence can benefit entrepreneurs in numerous ways. You have a significant amount of power to influence people and help them remember you in a positive manner. In addition to helping entrepreneurs in business, having a greater presence will serve you in a variety of ways, including personally. As a life coach would point out, not only are you the CEO of your business, you are the CEO of your life!