

## Executive presence and the art of getting people to pay attention

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What if you're new to the job and leading a conference call, where your body language and great suit won't win them over? Time to employ the Five Ps

We often hear the term “executive presence.” Most people think about such attributes as body language, or how a person manages the room.

“How I define executive presence is the combination of three interconnected dimensions: what a person does, what they look like to others, and how they communicate in conversation,” says Carol Lempert, keynote speaker and executive coach.

But what happens when you have only your voice to rely on?

Executives spend countless hours on conference calls, in which their only means of communication is their voice.

“Part of what people perceive is the words you say, but another important piece is how you say them,” Lempert

asserts. “Do you sound believable? Do you speak in a way that people are interested in what you say? Are you letting others finish their thoughts before jumping in? These are all important aspects to consider when engaged in phone conversations.”

When conducting workshops, Lempert often refers to the 5 Ps of Vocal Variety – each of which plays a crucial role in enforcing an executive presence when you don't have the advantage of a visual connection. “Vocal variety makes what you say engaging and listenable.” Here's how you, as an executive, can put your best foot (voice) forward:

### Pitch

When on a conference call, monotone can quickly alienate your audience.



Keynote Speaker, Carol Lempert: “It's not just what you say, but also how you say it.”

Lempert recommends standing up during the conversation when you can. “It works especially well if you are working from a home office. Standing supports your breath and gets you more

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engaged. Others can hear the quality of energy in your voice.”

Another way to modulate pitch is to smile when starting a call, or delivering good news.

“Smiling alters the pitch of the voice and makes it more engaging,” Lempert explains.

An interesting phenomenon is that when men are discussing serious issues, their pitch will often go lower and they tend to default to a monotone.

“That is hard to listen to for any length of time,” Lempert says. “Women, however, will go to a higher pitch under the same circumstances and lose the gravitas that comes with their lower register.”

## **Pace + Pause**

Pace and Pause are closely linked. Talking too fast on the phone means listeners can’t catch every word, and it makes the speaker sound nervous. At

the same time, people who talk fast don’t pause and leave no room for input from others. When these two habits are combined, people will not only struggle to understand what’s being said, they will feel that they are no longer a part of the conversation and aren’t important. “It’s no longer a conversation at that point. It’s a lecture – which no one wants during a business meeting,” Lempert says.

To combat the run-on talking problem, people need to get out of the habit of not stopping at the end of their sentences.

“They often connect sentences with an ‘and’ or a ‘so,’ which makes it harder for them to slow down,” she notes. “Like a rock going downhill, it just picks up steam.”

Lempert encourages executives to replace the ‘and’ or a ‘so’ with a breath or a pause. “This can profoundly change the listeners’ experience and make you sound more authoritative and confident. Having a moment of silence

on the phone can also be very effective in building suspense so the listener will tune in rather than multitask while the call is going on.”

## **Pronunciation**

It is important to ensure that words are crisp and understandable, Lempert notes. “When people ask you to repeat something, the inclination is to simply speak louder. But what you actually need to do is improve your articulation.” She encourages people to make a conscious effort to hit all consonants in words, particularly the plosive letters, such as T, K and P.

## **Projection**

Projection refers to the volume of your delivery. “It’s not just about being louder. Rather it’s about the quality of the energy in your body,” Lempert says.

Professional actors understand that proper projection relies on mastering diaphragmatic breathing, she notes. “It

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expands the body and allows you to feel the energy flowing with the breath. It improves the quality of your words.”

Whether you are delivering good news or bad over the phone, paying attention to your vocal variety will play a key role in getting your message across.

“It’s not always necessary to agree in discussions. What is important is that your audience clearly understands your point of view and can engage in meaningful conversation with you.”