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Context to the nugget conversation

Rajiv breaks down the notion of Executive Presence and speaks about some of the elements that constitutes it. He speaks about importance of gravitas, credibility, quality of communication and appearance. He also expands on the notion of Authenticity and the link with credibility and presence.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to a different theme, Rajiv, I also like the way you break down executive presence, it is often a very nebulous term and people do not flesh it out, but you talk about four elements, gravitas, credibility, quality of communication and appearance. Can you talk a little bit about what these terms mean, especially gravitas, which often ends up being a term that is often used but people do not exactly say what they mean when they say gravitas?

Rajiv Vij (RV): I know, a lot of people get this feedback but then, it is so fuzzy and like what exactly they want me to do. I would put it this way, I think two-three key features of each of these words. I would say gravitas is really firstly around being calm, emotionally in a calm place within, being assertive, so you are neither aggressive, nor permissive, you are assertive, being very thoughtful and most importantly, being secure within, so being in a place where you are really comfortable with yourself, comfortable in your skin. Because the more you are in that place, more you are in that state, the more your presence is going to grow. Just that sense of security draws people into you. So that is on gravitas. Credibility I would say, I mean the starting point is of course authenticity, I mean if you are not authentic, nobody is going to trust or believe you. So authenticity is important, being direct is important because when we are not direct, even though we may be trying to massage the message and so forth, but actually how we get experience by others, is as we are manipulative, even though that is not our intention, you know, we are only trying to, sometimes, we have to give a tough message and we are trying to soften it, but the other person is, because if we are direct, they get it, you know, being direct actually makes the assumption that you are talking to an emotionally and mentally balanced adult, that is the assumption. The moment we believe that, oh, this person may get hurt, he or she is very sensitive, etc., etc., we are already diluting what we are thinking about them, and then we are trying to say things in a massaged way and which is what then loses the directness and the credibility. And of course, openness as well, again, being very open and again, not whether it is hiding facts or just even hiding our emotions. I mean leaders, as we all know, we have grown up in with that is, many a times would hide their emotions. I mean, putting a certain brave face was believed to be so crucial. It is now that everyone is beginning to appreciate the whole mental well-being and how leaders themselves, besides employees, are carrying so many of these insecurities and so on and so forth and it is affecting them emotionally, and just being open and sharing about it, willing to be vulnerable, that is what makes you credible, and that is what creates

trust. Communication, I mean a lot can be said on that but very specifically, I would say there are two-three things, one is being direct again, and besides that, two things, one is being able to tailor-make your comments to the audience, and which requires being perceptive. So, people with high executive presence are very perceptive, they can read the room very well, and which is why then they can tailor-make their comments to suit the audience. And again, not in a manipulative way so that it lands well, it connects with the audience. And the other piece of communication is accent, very brevity is, I would say, quite important thing if you want to build that presence as well. And appearance, of course, it is not about being the sharpest looking person in the room, but really about looking and dressing appropriately to the occasion so you are not aligned in any way to the environment. So, I would say those are some of the pieces which can help people build presence.

DJ: Hmm. And of the various things you said, Rajiv, if I were to ask you to expand on one word, authenticity, what does that word mean to you?

RV: I would say, it is being true to yourself in your expression. So, one is being true to yourself within in how you are feeling in yourself, and the other is how you are expressing yourself. So how you are going to be experienced by others as a result of that, so being true to who you are, that is what I would say.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the point Rajiv makes about reading the room. At senior levels, it is as much about being aware of the dynamics in the room and tailoring your response to the context. It is as much perceiving as projecting. I also love the point he makes around authenticity. I had the opportunity to speak about Authenticity with a Stand Up Comedian Papa CJ (P.CJ). He has something interesting to say in this context.

P.CJ: *“What I find I admire the most in any comedian is authenticity. You see, we operate in a profession that has no rules, no boundaries, no guidelines, and no social norms that say you can say this or you can’t say this. So, for the first time, you are thrown into a space where you have to ask yourself, what I genuinely feel about these things without any social conditioning. And it is an incredible journey of self-discovery. I mean, I call stand-up comedy an outward expression of an inward journey. So, for me, authenticity is critical. If you’re trying to be somebody else on stage, the audience will see through that. Finding your voice is a journey. You can’t be this person right at the start. When you start performing, you’re trying to please everyone. You want the confidence that you can make people laugh. Over the course of time, as you find your own voice, you’re just being yourself. I mean, at this point of time, I’m doing it more for myself than for them. If you like it, fine; if you don’t like it, also fine, you can leave. Eventually, your audience will find you. The people who don’t like your kind of stuff will wean themselves out automatically.”*

DJ: I have noticed that if this piece is missing then pretty much everything else falls apart whether you are a leader in an organization or whether it is a personal relationship.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Papa CJ that is referenced: [Stand-Up: What it takes.](#)

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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