



EPISODE 2

Executive Presence — The 26% Nobody Explains

Research by Coqual found that **executive presence accounts for 26% of what it takes to earn your next promotion** — and it's one of the most cited, least understood factors in who gets picked. Presence alone won't promote you, but its absence will stall you. This episode decodes what presence actually is — and the observable behaviors that signal you're ready.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

The three pillars: **Gravitas** — how you act (67%); **Communication** — how you speak and write (28%); **Appearance** — the impression you leave (5%). The pillars interact: gravitas without clear communication is invisible, and even at 5%, appearance works as a filter. One guardrail from Harvard Business Review (2026): **substance first, signal second** — presence amplifies judgment; visibility without judgment reads as noise.

1. Lead With Your Recommendation

In your next meeting, state your point of view in the **first thirty seconds**, before the reasoning. Most mid-senior leaders bury the lead; flipping it — *here's my read, here's why* — screams gravitas.

2. Finish Your Point

When interrupted, don't yield the floor with a rushed sorry. Pause, hold your ground warmly, and complete the thought. When challenged, stay visibly composed. Composure under pressure is gravitas in its purest form.

3. Claim Wins in the First Person

Not *my team did great* but *I led the turnaround on this*. It feels uncomfortable — but senior leaders can't sponsor what they can't see, and they can't see it if you keep handing the credit away.

4. Audit Your Digital Presence

Watch yourself back on your next video call: lit, framed, looking at the camera? Read your last three emails to senior leaders: do they open with the point or bury it? Small signals, big filter.

ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- ☐ In your very next meeting, lead with your recommendation in the first thirty seconds. Notice how the room responds.
- ☐ Finish your point this week. Pick one moment after an interruption to complete your thought — calmly, without apologizing.



SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 2 · WORKSHEET

- ☐ **Write down one win from this month** and practice saying it in the first person, out loud, the way you'd say it to a senior leader.

My win, in the first person:

- ☐ **Tonight: run the five-question presence check.** Three or fewer yes answers, and presence — not competence — is what's capping you.

- ☐ Do I lead with my recommendation?
- ☐ Do I finish my point when interrupted?
- ☐ Do I state my view before asking the room's?
- ☐ Do I claim credit in the first person?
- ☐ Do I stay composed when challenged?

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus