

## The careerist

# 'You want to connect with and inspire people'

### Developing presence in the workplace

**Having a powerful presence at work can be a huge asset. But is it something you are born with – or can you cultivate it?**

#### What is presence?

Presence can be hard to define. Jennifer Holloway, of personal branding consultancy Spark, says: "Presence has been defined as someone who moves the air when they enter the room."

Nick Smallman, chief executive of presentation and interpersonal skills consultancy Working Voices, says: "Executive presence is about a consistent, long-lasting reputation. The most important factors are real comfort within yourself and awareness of the environment and the moods of the people in the space."

Kristi Hedges, author of *The Power of Presence*, adds: "Companies have started asking for presence as a professional quality. It's going up the chain of importance."

#### Can I improve mine?

Some people have natural presence, but most people learn it. Ms Hedges says: "Everyone has the ability to have a stronger presence. Remember that you want to connect with and inspire people, so when you talk to them don't just think about what you say but also how you want them to feel." She adds that the language you use is important: "People who have great presence are very declarative. They say 'I will do this' or 'I believe in that'. Most of us use hedging language."

Mr Smallman says: "Psychologically, the most important thing is to be 'completely in the moment' in the way people who are in love are when you see them speaking in a bar.

Obviously, it's not love, but it's a massive desire to do your best." This is why, when you meet someone with great presence, you often feel like you're the only person in the room.

Ms Hedges suggests: "Ask colleagues and friends what their perception of you is. People often feel this is a very personal question but you can get transformational feedback."

#### Who has it?

"You want to emulate the person you've never heard of who walks into a room and commands it," says Mr Smallman.

Ms Hedges says people often confuse presence with assertiveness and speaking skills: "There are overlaps, but you need to show presence in all sorts of settings – and you do meet introverts with great presence."

Attention to detail is important. "You shouldn't let stupid little mistakes undermine your presence before you start," says Ms Holloway. "Things like unpolished shoes or bad breath or dirty fingernails make a real difference."

#### What about my presence online?

"Virtual communications have made the ability to influence people – which is part of presence – more important," says Ms Hedges. "But at the same time you don't have a lot of the more traditional aspects of presence, such as visual cues." Possibly because of this, on social media, "people tend to be personal and real".

Ms Holloway says virtual presence presents real opportunities: "A David can be a Goliath online."

Rhymer Rigby

*The writer is author of 'The Careerist: 100 ways to get ahead at work'*