

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

You can listen to past episodes at www.TheFutureOrganization.com/future-work-podcast/. To learn more about Jacob and the work he is doing please visit www.TheFutureOrganization.com. You can also subscribe to Jacob's [YouTube](#) channel, follow him on [Twitter](#), or visit him on [Facebook](#).

Jacob 00:19

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the future work with Jacob Morgan. My guest today is Tom Henschel. He is an actor, coach, and he's also the host of The Look and Sound of Leadership podcast. Tom, thank you for joining me.

Tom

Well, thank you for having me. It's great to be with you, Jacob.

Jacob 00:37

Today's topic is going to be all about executive presence and why it's so important and actually how to create executive presence. It's not a topic I've actually covered on this show. So I'm looking forward to it. But you have a pretty interesting and diverse background. So I thought maybe we could start with a little bit of information about you because you did a bunch of acting. I wanted to be an actor for the longest time.

Tom

Did you?

Jacob 01:04

Yeah, I mean, I was an extra in some things. When I was in high school and middle school, I did a bunch of plays. And I was really into that for a long time. And I don't know why I didn't end up going down that direction. But hey, you know, what is a speaker and content creator I kind of bring some of that to what I do anyway.

Tom

Well, then I'll bet all that kind of preference when you were young makes you a pretty comfortable speaker, right?

Jacob 01:29

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I did have to speak and present an act in front of large groups of people, oftentimes doing things that made me very, very uncomfortable. So I suppose that's true. So what about you, how did you get involved in what you're doing now? How did you get involved with acting?

Tom

Well, the acting part came first. So I was that same kid as you in school, I was in a school district that had lots of arts and I was always in the plays. And then I got to go to Juilliard. right out of high school when Julia just started its drama program. So this is a long time ago now. And then I graduated with my union card, and I worked in television and theater for I don't know, into my 40s. And then I found this career around coaching and training.

Jacob 02:17

Wow, well, Juilliard. I mean, for those who don't know, I think it's the world's top acting and theater program in the new world.

Tom

It's one of them. Yeah, for sure. And we all know so many people now who went to Juilliard and won Academy Awards and won Tony Awards, so yeah, yeah, it's a great school.

Jacob 02:37

Super cool. And so how did you get from the acting into leadership stuff? Because I see some similarities, but they're also pretty different.

Tom

They are. The connection for me, really Jacob, was always around teaching that I when I was in high school, I taught others. When I mean, in high school, I even taught junior high school, believe it or not, that was so weird. I taught through Juilliard, I, I've always taught when I came to Hollywood, I taught at a conservatory. So when the I saw my career ending, because I could kind of see that my career was not going to my television career was not going to sustain me until I was like 60. It just wasn't, I thought I would be a teacher. And I, I taught for a couple semesters at a college out here, and just was so unhappy Jacob, oh, my God, it was not a good fit for me.

Tom

And then I found this thing called corporate training. And literally in the first, I don't know, couple years, somebody said to me, would you work one on one with our division presidents? And, you know, actors never say no, whether they know what they're doing or not actors never say no. And so I said, Sure. I'll work with your presidents not knowing what I was doing. And I was doing coaching. I mean, that's it. I was suddenly coaching. So I've been coaching a long time.

Jacob 03:54

Wow. Yeah. And executive presence is a huge, huge topic and a very crucial one. So why don't we start off with what is executive presence because you do a lot of coaching on that. So what is it and why do you think it's so important for leaders today?

Tom

Listen, I'm gonna guess you have opinions about this, too. I'm going to guess every one of your listeners has an opinion about what executive presence is, right. And one of the things that I've found is, it is not uniform. So I mean, picture this, I literally, this happened to me one day, you know, I'm based in Los Angeles. So I coach at a lot of the movie studios, just because that's one of the big businesses here. So one morning, I'm at Warner Brothers coaching this guy, but Warner Brothers. He's a senior executive, but he deals with creatives all day long, right? It's a creative community at Warner Brothers.

Tom

I go from there and after lunch, I'm down at this financial capital group that has, I don't know a billion dollars in assets. Those executive presence in those two places felt really different. And they were both effective in their places. But they were really different. Do you have that sense where executive presence isn't kind of, I don't know. How do you experience it?

Jacob 05:08

Yeah, I suppose it depends on the industry that you're in. I mean, when I think of executive presence, I think of, I don't know somebody who walks into the room and they, they command the room, not from like a authority perspective, but they just have a presence of being both approachable, but at the same time, also, like an approachable leader, somebody who you, you kind of trust, you know, that they're capable of making decisions, you know, that they can get their point across, but somebody who's also very approachable, that you can come talk to some kind of imagine, like, an example of a real person. I mean, I've interviewed, for example, a lot of CEOs on on my podcast, like Hubert Joly for example, the CEO Best Buy, and or the former CEO of Best Buy, he retired recently. And he, I think, has a very, very strong executive presence where you'd like, you know, you talk to him, and he's making jokes, and he's friendly, and you kind of, you could see yourself grabbing coffee with him or grabbing a drink with him. But at the same time, when he talks about business, you're kind of like, wow, this guy knows his stuff like he has the presence of when he talks. I'm going to listen. So I don't know, it's kind of hard to put my finger on. exactly what it is.

Tom

Interesting. You named a whole bunch of stuff in there that I would love to tease out. No, no, no, because, so I listened, Jacob, I've been talking to people about executive presence for as long as I've been coaching. And I think of it as having two different kind of pieces to it, one of which is behavioral. And the other which we might call, I don't know, attitude, or kind of your wiring. And you talked about confidence. Actually, you use the words command the room. Can I point you to a study that I found really, really interesting about executive presence.

Tom

So there, there used to be this group called the Center for Talent Innovation, they've renamed themselves now to Coqual. Their run by a woman named Sylvia Ann Hewlett. She's been there, she started as an economist, but now she's a researcher. And they did I don't know, probably 10 years or so ago, they did this study on executive presence. They interviewed 4000 people in fortune 100

companies, and it didn't matter what level you were at, but you had to be a college graduate to participate. And they asked him, you know, what's executive presence? One of the, one of the qualities that got called out was the exact phrase you used, command the room, the ability to command the room. And that involves what she identified as, quote, great speaking skills. And yeah, I think that's, that's a set of behaviors. And great speaking skills can be taught and learned.

Jacob 08:05

So is it just speaking skills? Or is that also body language? Is it appearance? I mean, is it a bunch of different things?

Tom

Can I give you her model and tell you how she...

Jacob 08:18

Of course.

Tom

Great. So she identified gravitas as the big one, like 69%, of executive presence is some part of gravitas, which has to do with confidence. The ability to command a room? It's funny, I was on a call, can I tell you a quick story?

Jacob 08:44

I love stories. Yes.

Tom

Oh, cool. So as a coach, I do what are called chemistry calls where an executive is going to interview two, three or four coaches and pick one. So I was on a chemistry called yesterday. And I've read a little bit about this woman. I don't know much about her. I know a little bit about her. But I have no idea I'm going to see. And to me, it's by the way, speaking of acting, it's just another audition. Right? It's like, I know how to audition. auditions are fine with me. I don't care. I'm always gonna have a good time.

Tom

I'm on the call with this woman. I literally she pops onto my screen. I've never seen her before. I'm suddenly in her room and seeing this woman up close. And in the first, I don't know, 60 to 90 seconds, Jacob. It was completely clear to me that this woman had gravitas. She was completely confident in herself. There was nothing about her that was fear based. She was happy for me to look at her. She didn't mind being judged. If I was gonna be a hater. She didn't really care. You know, she was just completely present and it was great. And I could get it literally right away. That sense of gravitas. I thought she had it. And that might be part of what you were talking about with the guy from Best Buy. I'm not sure

Jacob 09:54

Yeah, yeah. I mean, it also seems I guess, like some of executive presence is a little bit subjective. Like what I think would be executive presence might not be the same for somebody else.

Tom

But I think that goes back to that idea of, you know, Warner Brothers versus the Capital Management Group, right. different situations. And yeah, although I do think I don't know, I think that there's, there's, there's a consensus around people that we are attracted to. You know, you think of somebody who's just incredibly charismatic, I don't know, if you, you know, we would all pick different people, Tony Robbins, Brene Brown, you know, whoever it might be, where you just go, I love watching this person, right? I mean, that's a certain kind of executive presence, but it's different than what you were talking about with the CEO leader.

Jacob 10:39

Yeah. So for people who are listening or watching Why is executive presence so important to have? I mean, do you need it if you want to be in leadership position?

Tom:

Wow, do you need it? No, I think executive presence is one of those things that will not get you promoted, nor will it keep you in your job. But I think it will keep you from getting the next job. I think it could keep you from moving forward. And it's particularly true, Jacob, if you're a woman, or if you're a person of color. If you are a woman, without executive presence or a person of color, without executive presence, the hill is much steeper. Will it ultimately get you that job? No, no, but you can't get there with that. Or it's harder without it.

Jacob 11:35

Yeah. And what happens and I don't know if you, you've seen this from some of the people that you've coached if you get to leadership position, but you don't have that executive presence. I mean, I would imagine for example, it's a little bit harder to motivate, engage, empower people to communicate your vision to get things done.

Tom

Oh, I think it absolutely can be, sure. But think about if if I'm going to work with a leader who I feel does not have gravitas, or confidence. Yeah, it will be hard for me to follow that leader. Sure. So I do think it is hard. I think it's hard. One of the things that this is a kind of big concept that I think can really be helpful for people to think about executive presence, and how they might want to develop themselves to get it, to think about the fact that you won't always know what's working for you, you're going to need feedback, it's going to be a requirement for you to get feedback.

Tom

But then I go, think about all the things that are required in actually getting good feedback over time, which by the way, may mean years, you need to be non defensive, which means you need to have some confidence, you need to be able to be a good listener, which means you have to have great speaking skills. I mean, it does act of committing to getting really good feedback over a long period of time, is I think, in itself, the development of executive presence.

Jacob 13:07

Yeah. And feedback is not something that everybody's comfortable with either.

Tom

No kidding, right? It's hard. I mean, listen, as an actor, I got feedback publicly. And you know, that was a challenge for me. But what's been really interesting as for me, as an executive coach is delivering feedback, Jacob and watching different people's capacity to take it in.

Jacob 13:30

Do you think a lot of leaders struggle with executive presence?

Tom

Struggle, no. It is what I coach on. I think people work to develop it. Struggle, I don't know. Can again...

Jacob 13:47

Or they are they don't have it maybe.

Tom

Well, certainly, I think again, if executive presence is multifaceted, then you know, I think it is inevitable that you as an as a leader, we will be missing some part of it, you'll be stronger than others and need development. So can I tell you a story about a guy?

Jacob 14:05

Yes stories. I love it.

Tom

Okay, so this guy is leading an enormous business at a chip manufacturer, these people create certain chips that go in there in your home, I promise they are in your phone, I promise. I mean, this guy leads a great big business. But he got there because he's really technical. And he's technically he can think at a very high level about the technology. But he is now running a huge business for this company. And the board of directors wants to hear from him at every board meeting. And he's having trouble communicating at the right level for the board. That's a executive presence problem. Right? He can't get the right altitude for his audience. And I think it's hard. I think the whole concept of altitude is it can be a struggle, for certain leaders, and it's a challenge for this guy is, yeah, it's really interesting to watch him learn it. He's getting there. It's hard.

Jacob 15:08

So when you say altitude, what does that actually mean?

Tom

It's about where you think about the work. So can I give you an analogy? This is one that I think we all now know, which is think about looking at your property on a map on your phone. And you can zoom in and you can see the cars parked on the street, right, you can see the walkway that leads up to your house. That's I think the the altitude, quote, unquote, that most of us do our work at. Right? We're doing the work every day.

Tom

And so when someone says, how's your work going, what you want to talk about is the walkway and the car and the sidewalk, because that's kind of what you're thinking about. Your boss does not care about that stuff. That's the beginning of altitude, right? So your boss is now seeing kind of thoroughfares. Great. But that person's boss is seeing arteries, and landscape and how counties connect. Right? It's hard, I think, for the person who's been working on the driveway, to think up at kind of county level altitude. It's a challenge for people to think up. But I do think it gives you executive presence. I think it's great to try and think at your boss's level about your own work. Try and think of your boss's boss's level about your own work.

Jacob 15:36

It reminds me of, so I interviewed the CEO of IDEO a little while ago, Tim Brown. And he was telling me about this video, which is on YouTube, anybody can watch it, I think it's from the 80s. It's called the powers of 10. I don't know if you've ever seen this. But it's a video and it starts off showing a couple and you just see them on a picnic blanket, a little thing of grass, and then it zooms out, and you see the whole park, and then it zooms out again, and you see that around the park, there's cars and you see neighborhoods, then zooms out again, you see the city zooms out again, country zooms out again, so you kind of get the idea keeps zooming out, up until the point where you're like, in galaxies, right? Looking at many planets. And then it does the exact opposite, where it shows them sitting on a picnic blanket, and the minute zooms in, and you see like the person's hand, and then it goes to atoms to molecules to. So it's, and I love the analogy. And what Tim told me is that really what makes a great leader is you have to have the ability to focus on the powers of 10 to zoom out and see the big picture, but also to be able to zoom in to see exactly what's going on.

Tom

Oh wow

Jacob

And so that really made me think of kind of what you're saying.

Tom

Yes, it sounds very much the same. Oh, that is so cool. Yeah. To put altitude on that.

Jacob 17:51

Powers of 10. Anybody can look at powers of 10 on YouTube. It's a great video.

Tom

Yeah. I will believe me, you know what I'm doing as soon as we get off this call, absolutely.

Jacob 18:02

It's an old video, but it's worth watching. Okay, so at least for this particular leader, it sounds like he struggled with being able to kind of zoom out a little bit and to communicate that. What are some of the other common areas that you think leaders have a hard time way that we need to work on and when we think of executive presence?

Tom

So one that I think is particularly true among women, is making statements as questions. I'm on a call the other day with a woman. This is a Ph. D. She does huge analytics for Amazon. And she and I were talking about an idea. And I was like, great, I mean, I'm endorsing this idea of hers, like going "Great. Can you go into that meeting and actually ask for that?" I'm not sure that I didn't plant the idea of asking. But I said how would that sound in that meeting? And she turned it into a question. And I was like, wait, why is it a question all of a sudden? And We then talked for probably 10 minutes about the fact she was like, Oh my god, I do that all the time. I take my statements and turn them into questions. And you know what? I think it's why people don't take me seriously she said

Jacob 19:28

That's a good one. I like that one a lot.

Tom

Isn't it

Jacob 19:34

Yeah. All right. Now I want to unpack a couple more of these. I like this. So statements into questions, being able to zoom out, think big picture. What are some other things that you coach people on?

Tom

One of the things that I coach people on is short sounds confident and you hear It Right? I mean, it's completely clear what I'm saying. But it is hard to do. It is really hard to do, by the way, especially if you're at the sidewalk driveway level. It's hard to not talk about the next brick. But yeah, short sounds confident, it's hard to stop talking. And by the way, I'm doing it right now I'm continuing to talk. But I know you understand me.

Jacob 20:22

Well, for a podcast, it's good, I want you to keep talking.

Tom

It's funny, I got a letter from a listener of my podcast recently with just this question about how do I be more concise, and it is hard. And Jacob, I listened to people for a living. Again, in a coaching conversation, I want them talking. But then like, I'll shadow them at their meetings. And it's like, I don't, wow, they're using way too many words, and I can't even follow them. So short, sounds confident, but it's hard worked with you think about it, to formulate your thinking, as you're speaking to stop talking at the end of a paragraph to look to others, like what comes next? Do you hold the ball? And are you going to a new topic? Do you throw the ball to somebody else? Like, it takes a really active kind of thinking about what you're communicating? And that mentally is really hard work. And some people develop that skill slowly.

Jacob 21:20

Yeah, I think I think a lot of people are uncomfortable with silence with just space. And so whenever we hear that we're kind of like, Oh, god, it's three seconds. Nobody has said anything like, I, I gotta jump in.

I gotta let me ask another question. Add another comment. Throw something else in there. So it's not weird.

Tom

Yes. So I got two quick things about that. Number one is leaders who feel compelled to speak in meetings, as if they have to hold the ball. And that's like, it's a very interesting thing. When I see that I'm like, you can like just hand the ball off. You don't have to keep talking. Or do you? Because if you do, then what does that mean about your team? Right? Like, why are you still talking? So that's one thing.

Tom

On a totally different thing. I told a story about I was gonna stop coaching someone and I went to that person's boss. And she literally basically said to me, she said, you're gonna stop coaching him. And then she, like, didn't speak again, for a long time. And it was the most interesting, she was completely comfortable with whatever I said, but she was not going to pick the ball up. And I filled the silence very slowly. It was really interesting. The longer she stayed silent, and I went, this is an amazing executive Jedi mind trick. You know, it just works. It's incredible.

Jacob 22:46

Yeah. Well, are there any other? So I think we talked about three so far. Are there any others that you want to bring up that you think people need to be aware of?

Tom

Oh, my gosh, Jacob, I could go all day on this. This is what I do for a living.

Jacob Morgan 23:00

Alright, let's..

Tom

Yeah, you want me to keep going?

Jacob

Yeah, this is great. Because I think what it'll help with is people who are watching or listening to this, when they're thinking of developing their own executive presence, these stories of keeping things concise, of being able to think big picture, making sure their statements are not questions. You know, these things add up and I think it will help everybody watching and listening develop their own executive presence. So yeah, if you have a couple more, by all means.

Tom

Oh, my gosh. Okay. By the way, that was a great recap that you just did. So Nice job.

Jacob 23:35

I tried to remember all of them

Tom

Yeah, no, that's great. And by the way, that's an executive presence skill is listening. The fact that you could listen, you know, while we're doing this conversation together, and you're hearing this stuff for the first time, the fact that you can capture that you clearly have taught your brain how to capture information. That in itself is an executive presence think when I think about great communication skills, going back to Sylvia Ann Hewlett, right. Yeah, great speaking skills, I think includes listening. So yeah, good job. Well done. Okay, so that was one but here's another. Hold on. I just need to grab my thought because it flew. Oh okay. One of the things that I think executives have to do all the time, is answer questions. I mean, right, they just do. I think most people answer what they want to answer and do not answer the question. They do not answer what's asked. Have you ever been deposed? You Jacob

Jacob 24:46

I don't think so. No.

Tom

Have you ever heard what it's like to be trained to be deposed?

Jacob 24:53

Yes, I've seen some movies.

Tom

Yeah, like what do they tell you to do if you're going about to be deposed, Can you remember?

Jacob 25:02

I don't know--answer the questions.

Tom

Yes, that's exactly right answer what they asked. So if they asked you, when were you at the store? You don't tell them where you were before or after? And you don't tell them what you were in the store for. And you don't tell them anything. You tell them you answer what's asked. That's a really hard executive presence thing to do answer what's asked. Because I think, actually, Jacob, I think most people hear almost every question as an essay question. You know, and they just think they have license to speak, especially executives, I have to say executives think they're being paid by the word. And I get that, by the way, they're carrying enormous burdens. And when people invite them to talk, they have a lot to say, that's fine.

Tom

But answer what's asked, so, you know, three of the questions we use with each other in English, hold on wait, let me start that a little differently. There are only four kinds of questions in English, three of them are all closed ended. And the fourth one is an essay, but only one out of four is an essay. Right? So if you want to develop executive presence, just start listening for the difference. Right. And to just quickly name the three, so people aren't wondering what that is. The three closed ended questions are Yes, no. Multiple choice. Wow, the third one just went out of my head I will get it No, sorry, Jacob, that was weird. I've been talking about this forever. And I can't remember anyway.

Jacob Morgan 26:34

No worries.

Tom

So of these three, when I asked them to, if I'm the asker, right. And you are going to have executive presence and answer appropriately. If I asked you, can we make those numbers? My slot is open in my head, I've got a slot that needs a yes or no. If you're going to answer with an essay, I'm going to stop listening pretty soon. It's like you're trying to shove a mattress into my slot. And it doesn't fit in there. And it's not right. And so it starts to close up. And I want to say for executives, people often stop listening to you, if you're not answering what's if you're not answering what's asked.

Jacob 27:23

Well I see this all the time just even with friends and family members, you ask them a question and instead of answering the question, they like you they go off on some crazy tangent. It's like what do you think of that book? Well, you know, the other day I was sitting watching this show, and I'm like, Whoa, let's take a step back there, buddy. It's not what I asked you. Or sometimes I'll ask people, you know, even sometimes members of my team, I'll come up with a piece of content or I'll come up with a title for an article or something and I'll say hey, what do you think of this title? And then they'll respond to my question with a question of well, what are you trying to convey? Like No, no, just this is this is the title. What's good, bad you read the article. So yeah, I think people in general have a hard time just answering the question that you ask.

Tom

Yeah, they absolutely can. And we talk about what's important to us. And so, again, I think, leaders who want to do it, answer what's asked, but it leads to one more skill that I talked about with people all the time. So people often get lost in their thinking, again, I don't know if you have witnessed this. I witnessed this a lot, where I'll ask a question, and people will start talking. And again, think about what I'm doing in the room. I'm a coach, I'm there to listen, and that's all good.

Tom

But I can tell that they are drifting in a way that has no connection to what we were talking about. And so I with those people, I'm working with one guy right now. It's and he's so willing. But what I got an agreement to play a game with him, Jacob. And here's the agreement. Here's what I basically said, I said, may I play what are we talking about right now? That's the game. What are we talking about right now that anytime when you are talking, I say to this guy. I get to put up my fingers stop you and say, what are we talking about right now. And the game is for you, the speaker to get to the highest level of hierarchy possible. Like that you would get to the first level folder. And I want to tell you, Jacob, it happens all the time. And it becomes kind of funny at a certain point like, Oh my god, people get lost in their thoughts and have no idea what they were talking about. Literally none, they cannot retrace their steps. They were truly unconscious of their own path. That is not executive presence, right? It's just not

Jacob 29:51

Yeah. Yeah, that's pretty funny. So for people who are listening or watching how can you tell if you have Executive presence. I mean, does somebody come up to you and say, Hey, you got executive presence?

Tom

I think you get feedback over time, I think you get given opportunities to be in front of others. Because by the way, if you exude executive presence, this may have happened to you when you were young, because you were used to being onstage and you were used to doing all that, right? That people would then invite you to do other things. Because you had presence. And I think that's what happens. And so you start to get feedback, because your people are watching you.

Jacob 30:34

Yeah.

Tom

So I think that's how you ultimately know, it's over years. You've heard it.

Jacob 30:40

Yeah. And so I suppose the feedback that you get is around a set of different criteria, right? You're, you're a good speaker, you're a good listener, you're a good communicator, like those. Those are the types of things that you would probably be-- emotionally intelligent. Maybe it's another one.

Tom

Right all those things. And again, you're going to get, I hope, balanced feedback that says, you know, you are really great making connections with people when you speak. We can't always hear the ends of your sentences. Right? And you would get, I hope you get rich feedback, where you also get stuff to work on because nobody's got all those things that you just listed. We're all in development, right? So yeah, listen, I have a guy who literally just his diction is terrible. People cannot understand what he says.

Jacob 31:32

And he's a leader.

Tom

Well, he's managing people, he would like to be a larger leader, but he's managing people. And literally, like, Oh, my gosh, and it gets worse on video. It's like, yeah, so then either people get embarrassed about like, I'm sorry, can you repeat yourself? Or they think they know what he said and they guess at it. It's like, Ah, oh, that's, that's an executive presence problem, right.

Jacob 31:36

Yeah. Well, actually, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the virtual setting. Because, you know, as a result of COVID, a lot of leaders, a lot of employees in general, are or have been in a virtual setting. And even though I think a lot of people will end up going back to the office, I think we're going to have a much more flexible environments where some of your time will search certainly be virtual. And so you're going to need to get more comfortable leading and communicating and collaborating in a virtual world. So do you have any thoughts on developing executive presence in a virtual world where you're just looking at a screen and talking to a microphone?

Tom

Yeah, boy, listen, I'm gonna guess, again, that every one of your listeners has thoughts about this, both in terms of what they've seen that looks good, and what they've seen it's horrible or their own self consciousness around it. I mean, I don't know. I heard recently, a psychologist talk about video fatigue. And he said, which I thought was interesting, I had not thought of this before is that one of the reasons we get fatigued is because we are seeing ourselves all day long. And that that has a kind of energy sucked to it.

Jacob 33:06

Interesting.

Tom

Yeah, I heard that. I was like, Wow. Okay. But I do think that communicating on video is different. I still think things like short sound confident are going to transcend. But then there's also the video piece of it. So for example, I was I'm talking to someone about doing a presentation skills training for his team over video, which is not like the old days, right? I mean, it's not like I'm gonna walk in with a video camera. And we're gonna do video feedback. It doesn't work that way on video on virtual. But here's, here's what he said, was the challenge for his team is they have to present to the CEO, who is a very smart man. And he said, Look, the instant they put up a slide, that he's read it and is ready for the next slide. He's not listening anymore.

Tom

And he said it didn't happen the same way in a room. Do you know what I mean? In a boardroom, where they were the expanse was bigger. But he said the CEO, in some ways has the opportunity to kind of gather information differently, and move on. And what a problem that is. That's an interesting challenge to have of how fast you dispense information to other people on video. How close do you actually want to be to your camera? Right? Because it really is like, I'm very close to you. All those things, I think are hard. And I what I am finding is they are not the same in every culture. That's what I'm finding is different teams run their videos differently, which is interesting.

Tom

Somebody there's one team that I work with Jacob, I don't know if you've seen this where one of the members of the team kind of like a secretary is actually managing the call and putting people on spotlight and taking them off spotlight or managing the screenshare. So that like, by the way, with the call that I was on, she did not let slides burn for very long, she would put up a slide the person be talking, and she would take it down pretty fast. So we could watch the person. And I was like, Oh, that's really interesting. I was, you know, that the sharing was going on and off and on and off. So I think there's lots of ways to manage it and be creative, to kind of think like a filmmaker

Jacob 35:27

And it's interesting because I think there's even some stuff in a virtual or having a virtual executive presence that most people don't even think of in person. For example, having a good quality microphone, having a good quality camera I've attended or have seen some meetings and sessions delivered by executives who in person have an amazing executive presence. You know, they're they're great at commanding the room, they have that gravitas but they're delivering a virtual all hands meeting

to their team and they have this you know, the, the shades are open behind them. So there's a big bright light behind them. So they appear as his silhouette. They're, you know, they're a little blurry. Maybe they're using a regular laptop mic, so you can't hear anything super clear and the message, and that entire executive presence is just totally lost. Because you all you see in front of us somebody who is not adept at using technology to get their message across and it's I think it's hurt it. I mean, it hurts the leader dramatically hurts the team as well.

Tom

I agree with you. I think the lighting thing is a big thing, Jacob, you know, as young actors, what we were taught was, if you are not standing in your light with light on your face, the audience cannot hear you. That's what young actors get taught. And by the way, it's true. And there's a whole thing in the theater where their actors are told, quote, find your light. And what it means you feel literally the heat of the light in your eyes, but it's not in your eye line, you have to feel it. Well. It's amazing how many people do not have any idea what it means to find your light. And so their face is in shadow, and it actually is harder to hear them, it's harder to understand them, because we can't see their lips anymore. By the way, it's one of the problems with masks, right is that children cannot see our lips. So they often cannot understand us in the same way.

Jacob 37:19

Yeah, yeah. That's interesting. You know, the other thing I think is interesting is what if people are introverted? I mean, does executive presence favor extrovert extroverts more than introverts? Or can you be a leader with executive presence even though you're introverted?

Tom

I hope you can, I hope you can find a way. I have worked with this and talked about this with many people over the years Jacob in it, and some people suffer with it. And some people kind of tolerate with it. But it's not always easy. So I do think you can do it. And I think what powerful introverts find out is that it takes a kind of game day attitude, that you get up for it, you do it, you let go of it when it's over, and it's going to take some effort, it's not going to happen automatically. So for you and I who have a different kind of energy, perhaps right as extroverts, I'm assuming you're an extrovert. I don't know if that's true. But I think based on the fact that you wanted to be in theater when you were young, I'm guessing you are an extrovert, but maybe not.

Jacob 38:21

Maybe

Tom

Yeah. So you know, I think it's different for those people where they have to kind of manufacture it, but the leaders that I see who are very successful. And by the way, I'm thinking particularly of women now, who also are introverts, they have made the choice, that it's not a gender thing, it's not a victim thing. It's really a choice for them. Like, okay, I know, this is what it takes. This is what I'm going to do. And they and they do it. And then they let it go when it's over. I hope you can.

Jacob 38:55

Yeah, no, no, no, that makes sense. Do you have any tips on how to make your presence unique? Like, how do you stand out with your executive presence? It's not just like somebody else's.

Tom

Wow, what an interesting problem, you know, that one never occurred to me, because how could my executive presence not be unique, right? I mean, it's always going to be mine, right?

Jacob Morgan 39:17

Yeah, yeah, maybe it's a bad question.

Tom

No, no, but no, the question that I actually think it leads to, I'm serious. The question I think it leads to is confidence that your executive presence is good enough. Your executive presence is what you want, and to find the words that you can actually name it to people. Like when you work with me, I'm this right. So I, no I think it's a great question is like, I think you here's what I'm wanting to help people understand. The awareness of your uniqueness can help you have executive presence, trying to kind of adapt it, I think is not effective. It makes us feel out of balance or, you know, it's it's adaptive behavior. It's not natural behavior. I think maybe when you're young, maybe?

Jacob 40:11

Are there any leaders or personalities out there that you think have a great executive presence that maybe those listening or watching might be familiar with?

Tom

Sure, yeah they do. And they're and look, one of the things that I love about it is, they're all different. I mean, if you look from...

Jacob 40:23

I don't know. Like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk. Do any of those guys have executive presence?

Tom

Elon Musk to Tim Cook, like, really, you know, like, and everybody may not be to your taste. But yes, they are all clearly in full command and awareness of their own self, they are putting forward a very intentional persona. At that level. Again, anybody who's been doing earnings calls for that long, has to learn how to do them in an effective way, right, that you can't just, you have to say the script, but you have to read the script well. And to be honest, Jacob, that is a really hard skill. I mean, look, that's what people win Academy Awards for. Right?

Tom

It is hard. But it means that you get trained, you learn to manage yourself, you learn to be self aware, you learn to do things differently, you get very conscious of what you're doing, and not self conscious. You build it as a muscle and as a skill. And I think, again, going back to the Sylvia Ann Hewletts model, this idea that gravitas, that's a set of attitudes you can develop. And by the way, I don't know if I ever said number two and three. Number two is communication. It's all those great speaking skills. That's all

just behavior. Right? So yeah, I think they all have it in their own way. I don't know if that was helpful. I was not trying to avoid

Jacob 41:59

And what was number three. So gravitas, communication, and the third one is

Tom

Appearance, which is a teeny little sliver. And this is again, one of those where appearance by itself isn't going to get you the job. But if you don't have it, you cannot have executive presence.

Jacob 42:15

So let's unpack appearance a little bit. Does that just mean wearing a nice suit?

Tom

No, I mean, no, I don't think it's necessarily about how much you spend on your wardrobe. I don't know if that's what you meant.

Tom

No, I think appearance is really reading what's appropriate. A lot of times managers talk about young employees needing to be told the quote unquote, dress code, although we don't have a dress code here at work, and it's somebody who just like is not looking around and picking up on the cue. Now, I'll tell you the hilarious version of this. Oh my gosh, I used to. I used to coach at a biotech firm, where this is a long time ago where the leader wore Argyle vests. And I coached over a period of probably six or seven years, by the time I was leaving, like, there were Argyle vests everywhere. It was hilarious. Everybody was suddenly wearing argyle vests like Bill. It's like, that was just amazing. So that's one way that appearance can kind of everybody reads the message and everybody takes it on. I don't know that that's a good thing, but having some sense of what's appropriate. And these days, by the way, we're casual, right. Like business casual can mean all kinds of things. business casual can mean a black t shirt some days.

Jacob 43:31

Is appearance also related to posture and how you carry yourself. You know, how you how you walk, you know, do you shuffle your feet? Do you take confident steps? Do you slouch? Do you walk with your shoulders back? Is that a factor of appearance too

Tom

Wow, that was a great list. Oh my god, everything you described was so behavioral. Right? We could all do that or not do that. That was fantastic. So when I think of it as behavior, I put it in the communication bucket, which is number two, whereas appearance is kind of external. You know, your haircut, grooming all that stuff. It's, it really is outwards, which is why it's such a tiny little slice of the pie.

Jacob 44:15

Okay, got it.

Tom

Yeah, but I loved that list that you did. That was great.

Jacob

Alright, so just so just to recap those, because I think it's great. I think it's a great framework of how to tell if you have executive presence. So gravitas, appearance and communication are kind of like the three broad buckets that we're looking at.

Tom

Right, and communication, although you put it last is actually number two in terms of dimensions. Right. So gravitas is kind of the biggest bucket communication is next appearance is smallest

Jacob 44:47

And I think indication and appearance people can understand, right? I mean, it's you can tell if somebody is a great communicator, you can look at someone's appearance, gravitas. I feel like is The hard one for a lot of people to wrap their minds around. So are there like some sub elements or buckets of gravitas that kind of make up that broader bucket that people can think about?

Tom

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So the first one is always going to be confidence. Right, right. So there, there's a wonderful book called The confidence code. Do you know this book?

Jacob 45:30

I don't

Tom

It's written by two women journalists who are having a very successful careers and. And yet, were having struggles with confidence. And they were like, they went on a journalistic journey exploration to find out what the hell, like, why were they having this experience? And they found all this social research that was like, Yes, women actually have a different experience of confidence than men. And one of the things they found was this thing called NAT, negative automatic thoughts that women have, but I don't think it's only women, I think many of us have self talk, that is not helpful. And they talked about in the book and the confidence code, which I think is a really, it's a fun read. And it's really helpful, got a lot of good tools in it. And it's written for women, so it's great.

Tom

But this idea of negative automatic thoughts and being able to recognize them, and talk back to them, and manage them. I think until you can do that, gravitas will be hard, and confidence will be hard. So that's one of the things that I think people can really start to listen for is when that voice goes, that wasn't very good. Or you shouldn't be up there, or they don't really want to hear from you.

Jacob 46:43

Yeah.

Tom

Oh, can I do a quick exercise with your listeners? And you?

Jacob 46:48

Sure

Tom

Ooh, okay, cool. So this is a thought exercise. So, I'm guessing, Jacob, I am guessing that you used to stand in front of rooms, maybe on a platform and speak to a whole lot of people all at once. Am I right?

Jacob 47:05

Back in the day when we could travel

Tom

Right. Okay. So picture yourself on the stage. And it's and it's a big event for you, whatever the stakes are high, you really want to do well this day. And you're like, I don't know, seven minutes into your 60 minutes. And some woman in the front row leans under her chair, you cannot not see this, right. She leans under her chair, she gets her purse, slings it over her shoulder stands up, turns and walks up the center aisle and straight out the room. While you're on stage speaking. What do you think just happened?

Jacob 47:42

I don't --that happen a lot, actually. Because some of the well, because I mean, some of the events, and I've even been that person too, right. I mean, some of the events I've spoken at, there's 1000s of people in there, and it's bound to happen that somebody is going to need a call, somebody's going to need to go to the restroom, somebody needs to leave to go to a meeting, somebody has had an emergency. So the larger the venue, the more people I think you see, moving around, and sometimes I've been that person too, right? I mean, you go listen to a keynote, and maybe it doesn't resonate with you, maybe you need to leave, maybe you want to get a coffee, I don't know, you're thirsty, who knows? And, and you leave because a lot of these sessions, you know, I'm up there talking for an hour. And I've definitely had this happen. I think everybody has had this happen. And for me, I I think I just see the person, but I don't I don't take it personally. I just say Oh, some you know, in my mind, I'm just thinking like, somebody's got to go. And that's it. Because I mean, I think if you're up on a stage thinking like, oh, must have been something I said, maybe I didn't do something, right. It's gonna derail your talk. And can't go down that path.

Tom

You know that Jacob, but Well, it's really detrimental if you do but Jacob, I don't know if you know, many more people say that story than your story. I've been asking groups this question for years, and many more people say she hated me. She couldn't stand being in the room with me. I mean, they do they say that out loud. Now you and I know that. That's not helpful to take it personally. It's just it's too distracting. And by the way, it's probably not true anyway. But here's my point. gravatars confidence, negative automatic thought that's a negative automatic thought because whatever your audience thought, right, we don't know how your audience is calibrated. How your listeners are calibrated, but it's like, yeah, many people have that automatic negative thought.

Jacob 49:49

Yeah. And I think I think the context is important because I mean, I've even been in a situation before, right. I gave a talk. I think this was a few years ago. It was like, like, 3000 people. And then, after the session, the company sent me feedback from the speech that I gave where they collected survey respondents and, you know, whatever they do, and they sent me feedback, and they're like, oh, Jacob, you got terrible reviews, I think out of a score of five, I got back like 2.8 or three, you know, something like not not great. And I said, Wow, that's really shocking, because a lot of people came up to me after my session and told me how much they enjoyed it. So I said, Can you can you send me the feedback form, like, I want to see the responses, I want to see what people actually wrote why they gave me negative reviews. So they sent me over the form. And immediately when they sent it over, there were a couple red flags that popped out. So first, from the 2500 people who watched, I think only like 50 or 60, people filled out any kind of feedback form. And then I, and then I started to read through the feedback form, somebody said, it was too dark in the room. Somebody said, they were upset because they didn't get a break between one session and the next, somebody said they weren't happy with the food. Somebody said delay. And so the point is that a lot of the feedback that was negative had nothing to do with me. People were just unhappy at the situation or the circumstance or about something else. And it had nothing to do with me as a speaker at the event. And I always remember that story, because I think context is so important, not just bad feedback, or somebody walked out, but it's really important to understand why. So after I saw that feedback that changed my perspective on, you know, feedback and reviews for just anything in general.

Tom

But I just want to tell you, the part of that story that really stands out for me, Jacob, is that you advocated for yourself, you didn't simply accept the number. You know, you were like, well, what's here to learn? Right? What can I find out? And so you went towards the feedback instead of away from it. And there again, I just want to say, what an executive presence like thing to do. That was, I mean, seriously, like, that's a that's great that that's what your instinct was, and nice outcome, too. Right?

Jacob 52:11

Yeah, I mean, I'm fine with negative feedback, if there's some sort of, you know, context or merit behind it. But if you're mad because you didn't get a chance to go to the restroom. That's nothing to do with me. As a presenter, I'm sorry.

Tom

Yeah. So can I just echo I'm, this may be obvious, but I want to be really clear that that attitude that you have, is this whole thing we've been talking about around confidence. And, you know, one of the other ways that it gets described this gravitas thing is Grace under fire, which it sounds like you understand, right? And not everybody does. A lot of people, I have know plenty of leaders who really do not want to be under fire. So when they are under fire, it rattles them. They do not have grace under fire. Right. So yeah, and by the way, the part of the only way you learn to have grace under fire is to be under fire. Right. I mean, think about how soldiers get trained. I mean, you know what I mean? It's like, at a certain point, they have to use live ammunition, right? It's like, yeah, so it That's hard. I mean, who wants to go do that? It's hard to do.

Jacob 53:19

Well, I know we only have a couple of minutes left. So maybe before we wrap up, for people who are watching or listening who are thinking, I want to immediately start improving or working on my executive presence. Do you have some action items that people can start right after they're done listening or watching this? Watching this?

Tom

Yes, I do. So one of the things that we all have in our pockets is a filmmaking machine. Right? You can. So first of all, we're all seeing ourselves on video. You could actually watch but you're not that's usually not why you're there. But you could make a video of yourself explaining something, whatever. And then don't only watch it alone, because I don't think most of us know how to really be constructive watching ourselves in playback, I think that's a hard skill. But ask three, four or five people. And here's the question I would ask them. Would you watch this? I don't know. 45 second clip, would you watch this 90 second clip and would you send me back three words that it evokes? And just that's all you're asking for is three words, and see what the consensus is. See where it goes. Because it's kind of like you Jacob asking for all those feedback forms.

Tom

Ask for some feedback from others and just watch and see what how it goes. And see if you want to adopt those words or change those words over time. If you did one of those a week, I'll bet you would get really good at it.

Jacob 54:54

Yeah, yeah. Simple and I think very actionable. So where can people go to learn more about you? Or any content that you want to share with people? Anything for people to check out? Please feel free to mention whatever it is you want.

Tom

Sure, well can I start by offering you a PDF of that Sylvia Ann Hewlett thing? That and I can send it to you, and then you can post it for your listeners.

Jacob 55:25

Sure.

Tom

Great. So I'm going to do that. That's one thing. I run a company called Essential Communications. And our website is essential comm with two M's essential comm.com, So there. I mean, look, I've been podcasting since 2008 so Jacob, there's a lot on my website.

Jacob 55:30

Long time.

Tom

Yeah, right. It's a long time. So there's lots there lots of resources for free, please do it. And the app and the podcast is called The Look and Sound of Leadership.

Jacob 55:53

Very cool. Well, Tom, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to chat with me about executive presence. Really appreciate it.

Tom

Thanks for having me, what a pleasure.

Jacob 56:03

Yeah, it was a lot of fun. And thanks, everyone for tuning in my guest again, Tom Henschel. Make sure to check out his podcast as well. It's called the look and sound of leadership podcast and I will see all of you next time.