

## Two Physician Choices: Continue Path to Nowhere or Learn the Game



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I've come to the conclusion that many physicians within our ranks are often missing pages, even volumes, when it comes to the leadership skills fundamental to our roles as senior leaders. We are pleased to accept invitations to join management teams and boards of directors. Our excitement, however, is usually fleeting. Our pride and enthusiasm are swiftly replaced with tension as the action around the boardroom table plays out and we realise our shortcomings.

What's lacking is executive presence – the nucleus of successful leadership within the corporate sector. Our business counterparts hold executive presence in high esteem. They recognise its combination of leadership qualities, communication skills and engagement expertise are essential on four fronts. Executive presence strengthens a person's ability to forge alliances, to bring people on board, to enlist others in a shared vision, and ultimately, to move things forward. If it's so important, why do physicians have this void?

### **Lifelong Learning**

We're certainly not resistant to education. Lifelong learning is our universal mantra. Our learning is not confined to classrooms – we are round-the-clock students. From the day we leave school our education continues on fast-forward. In part, it's self-directed, the growing stack of journals our ever-present reminder to stay up-to-date. There's also extensive formal learning through the courses and conferences we're constantly attending.

With our thirst for knowledge, why have so many physicians failed to identify their need for leadership development – and specifically executive presence training?

As medical professionals, why do we allow our sense of authority and confidence to be diminished, the moment we enter a boardroom?

### **Boardroom Angst**

For years, I've been involved with many aspects of healthcare management. Repeatedly, I've witnessed brilliant, highly-respected physicians lose their way the moment they enter the boardroom. These same heroes who radiate grace under fire when faced with life-threatening patient crises, hesitate and often falter in boardroom settings. Their discomfort is palpable.

I know first-hand about this awkwardness and anxiety. There was a time when I experienced high-stress levels at the mere mention of impending meetings. The authority that underlies my operating room demeanor vanished in the boardroom. All the men and women at the table were consistently self-assured and adept at advancing an agenda, even when I sensed dissent. Rarely able to contribute, I became more uncomfortable as every minute passed.

See Also: [White Coats in the Boardroom: Why Executive Presence is Compulsory for Highly-Qualified Healthcare Professionals](#)

## **Eureka Moment**

I clearly remember my turning point. I asked myself: why am I so rattled, when I'm confident about the knowledge and experience I can bring to the table?

Then, it hit me. I didn't speak the language. The discussion was highly intense but everyone remained calm, an interesting parallel to the operating room. The similarity ended there. I was out of my depth, like trying to decipher a novel in a language where my vocabulary is strictly confined to tour guide phrases.

I realised that while I was reading medical journals and conducting research, these executive leaders were equally engaged with their own professional development. They read business journals and attended conferences with the same commitment as physicians.

During that meeting, I noticed the importance of body language. These highly-composed women and men used body language to communicate power. I felt like a soccer player on the basketball court! I didn't know the rules of the game.

I had two choices, continue my path to nowhere, or learn the game.

## **Executive Presence Training**

Last year, I stepped outside my medical circle comfort zone and enrolled in a two-day executive presence workshop. [Diane Craig](#), president and founder of [Corporate Class Inc.](#), conducted the program that coached me through the essentials of executive presence, specifically for leaders. I developed new language skills to ensure a presence in meetings, where I now serve my institution and my community with confidence.

## **Body Language and Executive Presence**

As a physician, I sometimes take more from my patients' non-verbal language than what they say. A patient could claim to be fine, but her body language could reveal the opposite. Physicians are excellent observers – but we need to learn to control the messages we unconsciously send.

My medical training provided a special advantage for the workshop sessions on body language, and its closely connected relation, micro-facial expressions. These silent signals people send, and receive, are fascinating disciplines. When we advance to high-profile leadership positions, our visibility increases and body language plays a heightened role in projecting executive presence. Our ability to manage the non-verbal cues we personally transmit is critical. It's equally important to develop the skills to translate, and respond to the signals other people send.

## **Micro-facial Expressions**

World-renowned researchers and scientists have proven that although physical gestures are cultural, micro-facial expressions are universal. These very brief facial movements last only a fraction of a second. A sense of fear triggers the same facial muscles in the Peruvian businessman as the Mongolian herdsman. This expression of fear is equally brief across all cultures and lasts only a microsecond. The ability to read these flash messages is critical to understand what really is being said. The workshop was a door opener on this subject and demands more study on my part.

The two days of training flew by. I'm confident I have the presence now to perform at the same high levels as my business counterparts. No question, my presentations have improved significantly and are on an upward trajectory. The previous stress of boardroom meetings is gone and replaced with an anticipation of sharing information. I look forward to my continuing journey. I hope you'll join me.

## [Executive Presence 2-Day Workshop](#)

Executive Presence for Healthcare Professionals: White coats in the Boardroom

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