

"This book can be a key aid in helping you make it to the next level! Great coaching for anyone who is even thinking of becoming an executive!"  
—MARSHALL GOLDSWORTHY, New York Times bestselling author of  
What Got You Here Won't Get You There



HARRISON MONARTH  
New York Times bestselling coauthor of *The Confident Speaker*

# Book Executive Presence

## The Art of Commanding Respect Like a CEO

Harrison Monarth  
McGraw-Hill, 2009

### Recommendation

Why is the lion king of the jungle? The reasons, says business consultant and executive coach Harrison Monarth, are his “impressive mane” and “even more impressive roar.” Though other creatures may be smarter or even bigger, the lion has a special blend of true power and “an image and related behavior” that convey that power. In today’s business jungle, image matters, too. If you want to rise to the top of your firm, whether you are a lion or a lioness, you must craft and maintain an “executive presence” by combining superior communication skills with the ability to “read” people accurately and influence their perceptions. Explaining these techniques and more, Monarth’s ambitious work is dense with information and strives to cover a broad range of topics, some complex enough to warrant their own books. *BooksInShort* recommends Monarth’s comprehensive advice to professionals who want to win the lion’s share of influence and power at their firms.

### Take-Aways

- To do well in business, cultivate an “executive presence,” a personal image that inspires respect. Learn to improve it through skillful communication.
- Making a pitch is at the heart of all “human interaction.”
- The success of your pitch depends on how people perceive you. Their personal filters and biases affect how they process your message.
- Raise your “social intelligence” to improve how others see you and react to you. Develop “presence, clarity, awareness, authenticity and empathy.”
- To strengthen your executive presence, use leadership opportunities to generate “buy-in.” Make work a collaborative process toward a collective goal.
- To engage people’s emotions, share a “success story” or a “case study.”
- Use the tenets of “ethical persuasion,” the “likeability principle,” to influence others.
- Manage conflicts so they don’t harm your relationships and weaken your presence.
- Proactively develop a “personal brand” that reflects who you are at your core.
- Enhance your brand online and through the media. Gain visibility by planning an attention-grabbing event or by publishing your work.

### Summary

#### Always Selling

In the business world, talent alone won’t guarantee your success. Indeed, “not only what you know but how you manage perception” determines how high you will rise. To gain influence in your firm, build and maintain an “executive presence,” a personal image that inspires respect.

“There is an entire behavioral discipline behind effectively communicating through the casting of positive perception, and when one masters it, one’s achievements can become the stuff of legend.”

You might not think of yourself as a salesperson, but you are one. Whenever you attempt to persuade someone to see your point of view, you are selling. People can’t help but “pitch” their ideas, hopes, wants and needs to those around them. The pitch is at the heart of all “human interaction.” Ultimately, the success of your pitch depends on how your audience perceives you, not on your message, intent or any other factor.

“Executive presence is the key to moving up and, once you are there, to becoming optimally effective.”

What influences how people interpret your message? People receive input through the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. To a degree, you can control what your audience members perceive through their senses, in that you can dress yourself a certain way, ensure that you smell nice, moderate your voice, and so forth. However, once people absorb information, they filter it through five corresponding categories of perception. According to the discipline of “neuro-linguistic programming” (NLP), these are:

1. **“Meta programs”** – The way people’s minds work.
2. **“Belief systems”** – Their individual visions of the world.
3. **“Values”** – What they believe is good or bad, right or wrong.
4. **“Memories”** – The events and learning experiences that shaped their lives.
5. **“Past decisions”** – The information they gained via the results of their choices.

“In essence, we are always pitching and have been since our first cries for food or attention were shrieked from the crib.”

People apply these filters to incoming data. For instance, an environmental activist might stop listening to a speech after learning that the speaker is the CEO of a company that created an ecological hazard. This form of filtering is called “deletion,” because the listener entirely or partially blots out the message. People’s filters also “distort” messages to align them with their belief systems. For example, the activist might remain open to the CEO’s message based on the rationalization that it could help the community in a way that “outweighs” the potential environmental harm. “Generalization” occurs when people create personal “truths” based on their experiences. For example, if your boss consistently rejects your ideas, you might become pessimistic about pursuing new chances to share them, possibly even avoiding those opportunities or sabotaging your presentations.

## **Boosting Your “Social IQ”**

The authoritative “do what I say, no questions asked” management style of past decades has gone the way of the typewriter and the record turntable. It has no place in the modern work world. Instead, managers who want to enhance their executive presence need to cultivate their social intelligence (SI). Social intelligence is the ability to influence how others perceive you. The five aspects of SI are “presence,” the level of confidence and awareness you project; “clarity,” the lucidity of your message; “awareness,” your ability to “read” people; “authenticity,” how genuinely you come across; and “empathy,” how well you relate to others’ feelings.

“You can’t get to the result you want without passing through the often rusty gate of human perception with all its pitfalls.”

You can raise your SI in one week by following a regimen of daily exercises. Day one: Develop hyperawareness of what is going on around you. Try to use all your senses, especially in situations you often take for granted, such as the drive to work. Day two: Look inward to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Day three: Test your authenticity by practicing honesty and projecting your genuine emotions. Day four: Focus on speaking simply and directly. Day five: Put yourself in other people’s shoes and empathize with their emotions. Day six: Be an attentive and empathetic listener. Day seven: Create a plan for continuing to practice these techniques.

## **“Reading People”**

Reading people and understanding situations accurately is a skill you can develop and improve as part of cultivating your executive presence. As you learn to interpret people’s words and actions, you’ll have a higher chance of obtaining your desired outcome. Pay attention both to what people say, and to how they express themselves, including their body language. Be aware of the role context plays in your interactions. After you make your observations and collect information, examine “how your personal filters may distort the true and useful meaning of that data.”

“‘To each his own’ has never been truer than it is when it refers to the way people filter information.”

People you know well are easier to read. Familiarity allows you to develop an understanding of a person’s “baseline,” or normal reactions to day-to-day occurrences. As you become acquainted with any patterns, you can reassess your first impressions to remove your biases. Then you can draw more accurate conclusions.

## **“Engineering Buy-in”**

The way you guide your team and imbue others with a sense of purpose will define how your bosses, co-workers and employees perceive you. An authoritative management style might get your subordinates to agree to your wishes, but it won’t generate buy-in. People might comply, but only out of fear of negative consequences. Instead, engender buy-in by making work into a collaborative process toward a collective goal. Take Google. The company abandoned command-and-control management and created a culture that produces buy-in at every level. The result is a high-performing, motivated, happy workforce. To achieve buy-in, do what you can to ensure that everyone in your firm has “shared values.” Align all your projects’ goals with organizational values. Give staffers a voice in business decisions to keep them invested in your goals.

## **The Art of Storytelling**

Great leaders have always understood that the best way to engage people’s emotions is by telling them a story. Facts and figures, or an outline of company objectives, won’t light a fire under people the same way. To make a story compelling, focus on a theme, use powerful “understatement,” “transport the listener” by varying your pace and including vibrant descriptions, be brief and “keep it simple.” Use different types of stories to teach, inspire and enliven your audience. For instance, “case studies” relate real-life scenarios that illustrate a point. Business school professors often use these accounts as instructional tools. “Success stories” are also based on real situations where, as the name implies, the outcome is positive. Success stories work best when they involve relatable characters who effectively overcome obstacles. By contrast, “rumors” are a potentially damaging story form. They can harm reputations and adversely affect people’s opinions. To safeguard your executive presence from rumors, respond to them immediately. If a rumor is true, take responsibility for your actions. If not, point out where the rumor deviates from reality. Enlist a credible third party to verify your account.

## **Get What You Want – Ethically**

Maintaining “the right attitude among your constituency” is a crucial part of enhancing your executive presence, so avoid manipulating people to get your way. Manipulation, a short-term tactic, is about getting people to do things for you without giving them any advantage. Conversely, persuasion influences others to do something because they will benefit, too. Respected leaders use “ethical persuasion,” which incorporates these principles:

- **“The visibility principle”** – People trust the familiar. Thus, the more you interact with others directly, the more they will have faith in you and your message.
- **“The supply-control principle”** – Shortages increase demand. A genuinely “limited supply of time or benefits” gives you an opportunity to influence others to act.
- **“The framing principle”** – Framing is “the creation of context and mental structures that evoke specific mental images and meanings that shape people’s view of the world.” Always choose your words carefully. Avoid “disclaimers,” such as Richard Nixon’s “I am not a crook.” Research shows that the word “not” fails to filter through to people’s subconscious, so such statements produce negative emotions in listeners.
- **“The authority principle”** – People are more willing to accept a message from an authority figure. Use whatever influence you have to earn others’ trust.
- **“The evidence principle”** – Build credibility by backing up your statements with research or third-party endorsements.
- **“The likeability principle”** – People instinctively wish to believe someone they like. Show interest in others and subtly “mirror” their body language to create a bond.
- **“The reciprocity principle”** – Do something good for people and they will want to return the favor. This helps you form ties in which persuasion “is natural and easy.”
- **“The experience principle”** – To reach your listeners, create a direct or indirect “visceral experience” that engages their emotions and helps them feel that they are experiencing something personally.
- **“The highlighter principle”** – Emphasize the positive parts of your message, but avoid contorting or hiding truths. Acknowledge any dissenting views.
- **“The passion principle”** – Selling something you don’t believe in is difficult. Find your passion, and people will follow you.

## Conflict and Resolution

Conflict is unavoidable, especially in the workplace. However, don’t let disagreements damage your relationships with others and, thus, weaken your executive presence. Conflict often occurs over differences in style and approach, rather than over matters of right and wrong. Not all conflict is bad; when handled effectively, it can even strengthen relationships.

“In a conflict, a tiny speck of emotion can detonate an otherwise reasonable disagreement.”

When you face a conflict, “use active listening.” Set clear behavioral boundaries early in the discussion. Be aware of your filters and biases so you objectively hear all counterpoints. Validate others’ opinions even if you don’t agree with them, and put yourself in their position so you can empathize with their reactions. “Be tactful,” and substitute “I” statements for accusations. Say something positive about the other parties to keep them receptive to your feedback. Lastly, be sure to address the concerns on the table instead of attacking the people involved.

## Your “Personal Brand”

Branding is no longer solely the domain of products or companies. Modern professionals must create personal brands – in the form of an executive presence. You already have a brand, which is the culmination of every impression you make on others, whether at work, on the internet, in the community or at home. Having a “random brand” you did not shape isn’t desirable, so take control of creating your personal brand. Become proactive in overseeing every aspect of how the public perceives you.

“An enlightened communicator knows how to impart criticism in a way that feels like supportive mentoring rather than punishment.”

The internet has become a Mecca for personal and corporate branding. Take a page out of comedian Dane Cook’s book. Cook had been doing stand-up comedy for years when he decided to develop an online presence. As his website took off, more people began to attend his shows. Now, he’s one of the most popular comedians worldwide.

“We live in a society that defines itself through the phenomenon of branding.”

Cook marketed to his constituency, people who cared about his message. You should do the same, using YouTube, Facebook and other social media sites. Develop a personal brand that reflects who you really are at your core. It must be authentic or it will not last. Be likeable and relatable, but not predictable. Share your opinions about issues you find meaningful. Join like-minded organizations that could use your help, or take up a cause. “Your brand will benefit from the glow of your good deeds.”

“Your personal brand – your executive presence – is the primary element of the process of attracting good fortune or what others perceive to be pure blind luck.”

The media offer many opportunities to improve your personal brand. Here are a few tips:

- **“Fashion yourself as a thought leader”** – Every field has an expert; it could be you.
- **“Mind your message”** – Write a pithy sound bite that sums up your message. It should grab the media’s attention and make journalists want to quote you.
- **“Create a stunt”** – No one does this as well as British business tycoon Richard Branson. To make the media notice you, devise an event that will attract attention.
- **“Write something worthwhile”** – If you are a specialist in your field, consider publishing an article, white paper or book.

## About the Author

**Harrison Monarth** is co-author of *The Confident Speaker* and founder and president of the GuruMaker School of Professional Speaking, an international consulting firm.

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