

## “What does Gravitas mean?”

by Cathy C. Bonczek

I recently asked a group of participants, “What does **Gravitas** mean?”

This was prompted by their question on how to get more of it. They remarked that it came up constantly in performance reviews and was used as a synonym for Executive Presence.

Not surprisingly, the definitions they shared ranged from “charisma” to “attracting people” to “being seen as you know what you are doing.” So what is Gravitas and how does it differ from Executive Presence or Charisma?

One definition is: People with Gravitas have credibility, people with Charisma radiate approachability. People with Gravitas convey a present, calm, centered and grounded energy (a gravitational pull); people with Charisma emit a magnetic quality that pulls people towards them (a magnetic exchange of energy).

The word Gravitas comes from the Latin word “Gravitas” which means “weight or heaviness.” Again, think about the weight of gravity. It also means formality, seriousness, importance of manner – a way of being that causes feelings of respect and trust in others.

Executive Presence can denote wisdom, seniority, and great bearing, and Charisma leaves room for excitement, high energy, and a different kind of razzle, dazzle. It’s no wonder we all want all of them.

Keeping our attention on Gravitas — here are some simple ways to give yourself more gravitas.

First, think about the nature of your messages and find those parts that are more serious or meaningful – then use these techniques to underpin your message.

1. Slow down – both speech and movement.
2. Hold eye contact for as long as you can (being mindful of your listener’s comfort).
3. Pause more in speech as if thinking about what you are going to say next. Listeners will lean in to hear what’s coming next.
4. Pull yourself to your tallest height and use the same bearing you would display if you were wearing a tuxedo or other formal attire.
5. Be more deliberate in your gestures.
6. Maintain a serious facial expression.
7. Inflect your voice to your lower register.
8. Listen longer and with intense interest.
9. Shorten your sentences.
10. Speak your truth.

You don’t need gravitas for every utterance, but if you want to be perceived as ready for the next step and as an effective leader, start incorporating more and more “weighty” moments into your work day.

