

Facet: Composure

Calm, Cool and Collected: Why Composure is an Overlooked Facet of Executive Presence

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This past weekend, my husband and I hosted 60 family members and friends in celebration of our son's baptism. As we were preparing our house for the party, we figured it would be a good excuse to finally tackle that never-ending to-do list. Since we moved in six months ago, the list just seemed to get longer rather than shorter - paint walls, hang shelves, finally unpack the boxes stacked a mile high...



In the throes of my harried, frantic efforts towards Pinterest-worthy home décor, I was a bit overwhelmed. And by a bit, I mean.... very. After multiple trips to Pottery Barn, Target, and Home Depot, and countless hours spent searching Google Images in search of the perfect



accent color, my husband began painting a wall in our living room. After the sanding, taping, and priming, he started applying the first coat. I went upstairs to see the results. My reaction? Not impressed. Disappointment spread across my face. The conversation went something like this:

“What do you think?”

“Well.....” I said.

“Does that mean you don’t like it?”

My sense of panic started to increase. “Well.....”

“Do you want to choose another color?” my husband asked, quite calmly.

“But we have to paint the wall before next weekend and if we change it we’ll have to go back to Home Depot and pick another color and prime the wall again and we have to go to the picnic tomorrow and we have to hang the pictures on the other wall and put the patio set together and I don’t know what color we’ll use since I spent so much time picking this one!”

Now, clearly it may have been in his best interest to nod his head and agree with my rant. After all, interrupting the process **wasn’t ideal given our timeline. It certainly would have** made his life easier to just keep on painting.

But he recognized that I was stressed out and making this decision from the standpoint of **“checking the box.”** Talking me off the ledge, he reminded me **that we’d have to live with this wall for years to come. We’d sit next to it while eating dinner every night and drinking coffee every morning.** Did I really want to settle, just for the sake of moving on to the next to-do?

Shortly before they closed on a Sunday evening, we went back to Home Depot. Early in the morning on Memorial Day, he started repainting. The result? A warm, inviting green that will be pleasant to look at while drinking coffee in the morning for the next five years.

Crisis averted. **My husband’s reaction to my frantic, stressed-out demeanor and misguided decision-making highlights one of the qualities proven by Bates research to be central to effective leadership and executive presence: *composure*.** In our Bates Model of Executive Presence and ExPI Assessment, composure is a facet within the dimension of Substance. **It speaks to the leader’s ability to be the steady hand in times of stress, chaos, or crisis.**



Composure is a quality that is crucial to leadership, whether the crisis is an ugly paint color or a headline-grabbing security breach or equipment failure. When leaders bring composure into a chaotic situation, they can focus others on the big picture, create a sense of calm, and bring objectivity and perspective to the decision making process.

It's worth noting that composure is a quality that's often confused with another facet in our ExPI Model – restraint. While restraint is a part of a leader's character and ability to avoid extreme emotion or impulse, composure speaks more towards their outward-facing behaviors of leadership. It encompasses the leader's ability to communicate and align people.

My tendency to want to “check the box” mimics the work pattern of many overwhelmed employees in organizations today. When faced with to-do list overload and competing priorities, people focus on the most urgent and current tasks versus what's most critical in contributing to the business strategy. Decision making is influenced by deadlines and short-term gratification versus long-term gain. People settle for the wrong color for the sake of moving on to the next project.

The most influential leaders have the ability to reel people in, bring perspective and help people focus on the long-term vision. They bring a sense of calm in times of stress, helping **people see the reasons for changing course when settling for “okay” is much easier.** As our research proves, leaders who bring composure to the table are more effective when it comes to driving business results.

I'd like to hear your thoughts – have you experienced a leader who brought a sense of composure to ultimately lead people through a crisis or time of stress?

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