



Facet: Composure

2017: One Quality of Executive Presence that will Matter Most to Leaders This Year

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2017 has the potential to be a year in business like none we've seen in our lifetimes. Elections in the US and around the world are disrupting government and business as usual.

Anticipated changes in tax law, immigration, trade policy and industry regulations are going to present both challenge and opportunity for business, requiring business leaders to be agile and front-footed.

Already we've seen changes make an impact on CEOs and business leaders.

- The President-elect's direct public call out to specific companies moving jobs overseas has put CEOs on notice and is causing many to reexamine plans.
- The impending repeal of Obamacare means health care and insurance companies are scrambling to figure out how they'll transition to a world of competition.
- The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement is already causing companies to change their strategies, and this is true both of global firms and small businesses alike.

Post-inauguration, we will move swiftly from a time of government gridlock to a period of rapid change. The question is how to lead through these times. What is one quality of leadership you need to cultivate most in your leaders now?

The need to bring forth and cultivate the rare – yet uniquely powerful – characteristic of composure

Our research has shown us that in times of challenge one of the most important qualities is composure. Perhaps not coincidentally, it is in short supply. We define composure in the



Bates Model of Executive Presence as the leader's ability to provide stability and calm to the organization. Leaders who have this quality are able to help people declutter decision making, remove some of the emotion and move forward with greater alacrity. Why?

Let's take David, whose team describes him as "steady in a crisis." David's business is reassessing building a new plant in Asia. His team is on the line to come up with options. **They aren't worried, though, because they can count on him to bring calm and focus even under pressure.** They mull over complex options and translate those into streams of work and manageable tasks. All this has helped them quickly prepare some new options to present to the CEO.

Composure is not something you're born with. You develop it over time, through reflection on experiences and learning from mistakes. Meredith, who is leading a task force to evaluate strategic acquisitions, lost out on an opportunity last year, but was able to get her team over the hump of the anguish. She maintained a calm demeanor and now the team has its eyes **focused on the path ahead, knowing not every deal will be a go, but that they'll find the right one.**

In times like these, leaders like Meredith who have a lot on their plates don't allow the frenetic energy around them to dictate how they lead. They know their job is to reduce anxiety for others. They intentionally de-escalate the temperature in the room, cooling heads and making for better decision making. In short, it helps people be more productive.

How do you know a leader is strong on composure? When the chips are down, they are the ones who seem to be at their best. This behavior has a ripple effect, as their teams begin to model this behavior with their own teams. You see it in the people around them.

Don't let reactivity undo your team's good work.

As we like to say, while the facts are the facts, emotions are data, too. We all feel anxious from time to time. If your leaders are highly reactive, though, it can derail productivity. For example:

- If Derrick is overreacting in a meeting, people assume the situation is really bad, or **that there may be more to it than he's let on.**
- If Sarah responds to bad news with a scowl, or recrimination, people won't come to her with more bad news, which means she won't know what she needs to know.



- If Tyler gets visibly upset when his team comes up short on a project, they will not only blame themselves, they may blame each other, which will create recrimination and instability.

Put a priority on developing your own composure in 2017

One way for leaders to develop greater composure is to get accurate data and feedback from others, which can include a multi-rater assessment, the Bates ExPI. The Executive Presence Index gives a leader specific insight on how people experience them. Very often when they learn the impact they are having on others and have some coaching and **mentoring, they're able to make small changes can make a big difference in their leadership style.**

What else can you do to help your leaders to develop composure? Put yourself in a position **to notice how they're interacting with their teams. Give them real-time feedback.** Model the quality of composure in your own leadership style. Do perspective taking with them. Making time for all this will help your leaders navigate uncertainty and lean forward in times of challenge.

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