

**Nyman Group**  
*Backgrounder: Got Gravitas? A Quick Primer  
on What It Takes to Lead the Pack*

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The ancient Romans called it *gravitas* – one of the intangible qualities of a true leader. While it's not easily defined, you know *gravitas* when you see it. A sense of gravity. A serious, dignified demeanor. Charisma. Leadership presence. A certain something that sets you apart from the rest of the pack. *Gravitas*.

It's easy to tell which executives possess *gravitas*. They're the people respected by leaders, colleagues, competitors, and employees alike – keep in mind, they key word is *respected*; they're not necessarily the most technically savvy, the most experienced, or the most popular. Not everyone with *gravitas* will make it to the corner office, but very few -- if any -- attain the highest executive positions without it.

Do you possess *gravitas*? You should know; one of the most noticeable features of a true leader is his/her self-awareness. If you're not sure about your *gravitas*, here's how to hone the leadership presence that may be waiting to come out.

**How decisive are you?**

Do you pride yourself on your quick, instinctive decision-making, or do you prefer to weigh options before making important decisions? If you take time for careful thought even within time constraints, you're exhibiting *gravitas*. Of course, there's a time and place for quick responses – for example, during times of crisis. But for the really important decisions, true leaders review their options and consider other points of view before acting. It's not a sign of weakness to wait before speaking up or to be the last to speak (if you have something to say), it's the sign of a leader.

**What's your verbal style?**

Do you shoot from the hip, sending off email responses at warp speed? Are you quick with a sarcastic comment? If so, you're undermining yourself in the *gravitas* department.

A true leader thinks before he/she speaks or writes. Never dash off an email or respond to a colleague in anger. Thomas Jefferson once said, "When angry, count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred." And, with thanks to Mr. Jefferson, one could add, "If you want to make a glib remark, count to one thousand." It may lighten the mood, but it won't shine

a beam on your path up the executive ladder. Can you name any CEOs who attained their positions because they kept the board of directors entertained? What you consider amusing, others – especially those who will decide your future as a leader – may consider flippant, unhelpful and even counter-productive. A leadership position will be given to the person with a sense of dignity, and less likely to the person who has a smart-aleck answer to everything. If you are a true leader with gravitas, you know when not to take yourself too seriously -- but more important you know how serious things are.

### **And what about your nonverbal style?**

Consider actors John Wayne and Tom Cruise, and picture some of their more memorable screen images. Which actor tended to play the roles dripping with gravitas? Correct: the commanding Wayne, even in his early screen roles. While the slicker (and boyish) Cruise may have some gravitas-packed roles in his future, the comparison between the two actors' recognizable on-screen personas is a simple illustration of how easily one's nonverbal image can be shaped. And while there's not much you can do about some aspects of your physical self, a correct nonverbal style can add to your sense of gravitas. For example:

- Talking too fast makes you appear “slick.” Speaking in a too-slow monotone puts people to sleep. Using big words in a professorial, pedantic manner turns many people off. Speak with respect and grace.
- How you carry yourself – standing, walking – matters at all times, not only during formal presentations and when you are “on display.” Be sure to make eye contact.

Of course, a leadership presence cannot be developed overnight. But, if you closely examine your decision-making style, the way you communicate, and your speech and movement – and you make adjustments, when appropriate – you will be able to stand out from the pack, a good start on the way to a senior leadership position.

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