

# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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# Own the Room

## THE NUTSHELL

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Leaders operating at their best—where the substance of skills and the power of presence have come together—have *signature voice*: a unique leadership presence that is confident, authentic, and effective across a variety of situations with diverse audiences. Like a signature, their presence is one that is recognizably unique and leaves a substantive impression on those around them and the organization. It takes that kind of presence to “own the room.”

All technical capabilities being equal, presence is what sets true leaders apart.

Much like an athlete preparing for a competition by training his mind, skill, and body, developing your signature voice is based on conditioning your *assumptions*, your *communication strategies*, and your *energy*. We call this ACE conditioning.

### Finding Your Signature Voice

A good tennis player will have a stronger forehand or a stronger backhand and will favor that strength. An exceptional tennis player will have a strong forehand *and* a strong backhand and will masterfully rely on the one that is going to help win each point, and then use them in concert to win the match.

Similarly, as you move along the leadership pipeline, you need to be able to bring together two capabilities: *the ability to demonstrate your value and distinction*, and *the ability to connect and align with your stakeholders*. When you

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are able to use both capabilities—a driving *voice for self* and a supportive *voice for others*—you will have found your signature voice.

As the demands of your role increase, it's natural to seek your comfort zone and lean more heavily on one voice than the other, like a tennis player whose preferred swing is the backhand. But when that happens, people may begin to question your leadership potential.

## **How Do I Get to Signature Voice?**

Leadership presence is the aggregate of three things: what you believe, how you communicate, and the energy you express. Over the years, to help clients remember these drivers of presence, we created the ACE model, which is an acronym for *assumptions, communication strategies, and energy*.

When building your signature voice, *you need to focus on the entire system*—what you are thinking (mind), what you are saying (skill), and how you are expressing yourself (body)—not just any one aspect.

## **ASSUMPTIONS – Mental Conditioning**

Your beliefs about yourself, others, and your situation have the power to bolster your presence but also to undermine it. To move to signature voice, you need to reframe your assumptions from the perspective of what you are trying to achieve and the leadership presence you want to project.

There are countless studies that show *what you think, believe, and focus on affects what you are able to achieve*. Your assumptions—the ideas and beliefs you hold about yourself and your team, others and their teams, and the terrain and playing field you operate in—become self-fulfilling prophecies. They have a seismic effect on your leadership presence.

## **COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES – Skill Conditioning**

People make judgments about your competence as a leader based on what you say and how you say it. Therefore, this is when you often gain the most traction with your presence.

As with the other parts of the ACE model, executives with effective presence are intentional about the way they communicate. They bring consciousness to what they say rather than defaulting to their preferred style. They interact with others flexibly and purposefully.

Unfortunately, most people do not use all the communication techniques available, like a golfer who only uses one or two clubs. When communicating at a leadership level you aren't simply trying to make your point; you are trying to make sure your message reaches your audience.

## **ENERGY - Physical Conditioning**

Whether you intend to or not, you send strong messages through your body language and energy. As people look at you, they make assessments about your knowledge, expertise, and competence as a leader.

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We have created a framework using the acronym **CENTER** to help leaders remember the six cue points where individuals signal to others what they are thinking and feeling: core posture; eye contact; natural gestures; tone, tempo, and timing; facial expressions; and regions and territory. The key is to catch the presence slide before it jeopardizes the situation.

## What's Next?

Think of any star athlete: Michael Jordan in basketball, Chris Evert in tennis, Tiger Woods in golf. Those athletes have been at the top of their games. But once they reached the pinnacle of their sport, they didn't sit back. They had a conditioning regimen: every day they practiced, they prepared themselves, and they improved. Even with skills that inspired awe, they were conscious and intentional about their sport, not asleep and on autopilot. They were always looking for an edge. Great leaders are similarly intentional about building their presence.

Developing a signature voice is a lifelong commitment. After you use ACE to enhance your signature voice, you can continue to condition it by returning to ACE when new situations cause your presence to slide.

## Helping Others Find Their Signature Voices

- *Offer a clear assessment:* Help your direct reports understand how their presence is currently perceived using the ACE model.
- *Create an integrated action plan:* Help them develop leadership presence.
- *Offer coaching in real time:* Help them work through issues along the way.
- *Celebrate growth and help overcome obstacles:* Help them recognize the successes and obstacles that are a part of the process.

If you are on the cusp of becoming a senior leader in your organization, you can find a way forward by being conscious and intentional about your leadership presence by redefining your value proposition and shaping the opportunities ahead of you. Finding your signature voice allows you to be the leader you want to be.