

**GURU
GUIDE**
with
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with
Ineke Pitts

19

**DEVELOPING
EXECUTIVE
PRESENCE**

A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'Guru Guide' is an attempt to refine decades of hard-earned expertise into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

INTRODUCING



**VIDUSHA
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.

INTRODUCING INEKE ANN PITTS



I met Ineke in my normative years in HR at Courtaulds Clothing. I had just been promoted to Assistant Manager HRD - and charged with setting up a separate division to focus on training and creating a leadership pipeline within the company. One of my first ports of call was to curate a series of development initiatives : and I scouted for 'interesting' trainers who had something 'unique to offer'.

Recommended by one of my peers at Slimline, I went for one of Ineke's training programmes and was absolutely convinced that she had something rather special to offer. Having come to Sri Lanka from the UK and made our little island her home, what

struck me about how Ineke 'taught' was how grounded and intensely practical her approaches and tools were. Rather than spewing out theory after theory, which was quite the norm then, here was a trainer who related everything she said to something we all had reference points to. Clearly, her training in NLP, coaching and vast work experience in a plethora of industries and cultural settings were all coming out - seamlessly...

Ineke started her equestrian school, in Piliyandala, a few years ago - and pours her heart into it. She is also the proud owner of a beautiful heritage Villa in Weligama which she runs as a boutique hotel for the discerning traveller looking for a bohemian getaway...

When she curated a programme on Executive Presence, using horses as her 'training tool', I must admit, I thought to myself : 'Here's a truly novel way of teaching how to command attention.' That was the inspiration for this volume of Guru Guide...

HOW DID YOU END UP IN SL ?



I first visited Sri Lanka in 1996, on holiday from Hong Kong where I was working as a computer-aided design specialist on the largest infrastructure project in the world at that time – The Hong Kong Airport Core Programme. By contrast, I found Sri Lanka to be restful and calm after a crazy period of intense work in high rise buildings: in Hongkong, I travelled further vertically than horizontally going to my workplace on the 24th floor of a high rise building from my home on the 32nd floor of the building next door. I fell immediately under Sri Lanka's spell and vowed to return. In 2017, after the handover of Hong Kong back to China, I returned to Sri Lanka and made it my home for the next 23 years. At first, I exchanged life in the fast lane for life in rural Sri Lanka, growing tropical plants and learning Sinhala so that I could communicate with my staff. Eventually, I found my way back into corporate life as a trainer and human resources consultant for the likes of National Development Bank, John Keells Holdings, MAS Holdings, Dialog GSM and many others.

In 2009, I was approached by the Dutch company, MDF, to take over their South Asia Branch as their Director based in Sri Lanka; a position I filled for the next 10 years and one which took me to some of the most remote and exciting places in the world. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates became like second homes, and occasional trips to China, Mongolia, Australia, Indonesia and Cambodia, meant I was outside of Sri Lanka for extended periods of time.

In 2017, I decided to step back from this position and refocus on my work in Sri Lanka to spend more time with my horses and complete my doctoral thesis.

WHAT'S THE STORY WITH THE HORSES ?



I bought my first horse, Firefly, on a whim and as a distraction from work which had taken over my life. I guess, if I had been another kind of person, I would have bought a motorbike. She was just one year old at the time, the daughter of a famous Australian racehorse called Boomerang living on a tea estate in Hatton. Over time, I rekindled my passion for horses and one horse became six and then ten, as people offered me horses and ponies that needed a good home.

I took on volunteers to help me run the stables and all of them found the activities involved to be profoundly healing in one way or another. I researched and studied hippotherapy and was lucky to be introduced to Paul Hunting, a British Psychologist, who had written the book: *Why talk to a Guru? When you can whisper to a Horse*. I stayed with Paul in the UK and learned his techniques for horse-assisted transformational work with corporate leaders. Famously, he worked with Carlsberg Brewery which declared Paul's training to be 'The Best Leadership Development Training in the World'. In 2019, I began working with MAS Intimates where I introduced HAT training as part of the Leadership Development Programme. It was a huge success and we continued with further programmes up till recently.

SO... HORSES... EXECUTIVE PRESENCE... WHAT'S THE CONNECTION ?

I think most animals instinctively 'suss you up.' Their question (and clairvoyance isn't one of my gifts !), I think, is rather simple : Is the 'human' in front of me my 'master' or not ? Horses in particular are instinctively proud creatures : and they will NOT allow you to ride them unless they accept you as their 'Master'.

So, in leadership, having the presence to be able to command the attention of others is important : NOT to be their 'Master' but, for them to take you 'seriously', which often becomes a huge impediment. Specially when you are promoted within the ranks and many who had been working with you on par, now have to perceive themselves to be 'under you' : or when you come in from outside the organisation and need to establish credibility fast, Executive Presence becomes something that is essential...

The issue is that most of the time we tend to 'fake it' and not really carry off that presence with poise, ease and inner authority. It doesn't come from a place of quiet confidence. The main reason is that unless you are innately confident and absolutely self-assured (which is often not the case), you have no reference point to draw from : and this always comes across...

Horses are unique in that they have a highly sophisticated social system. The leader of the herd is the matriarch; and although the alpha male drives the herd forward, it is the matriarch that decides which direction should be taken.

Horses are hard-wired for survival and that means they are in a state of constant alertness. When they encounter another horse, or a human, they quickly ascertain two things; 'Is it safe to be near you?' and 'Are you the boss, or am I?' The horse doesn't care what it says on your job description or how much money you earn; the horse only understands natural authority and authenticity.

So, I use horses, and the ability to command their respect to help my participants gain that 'inner confidence' so that they can 'hold their own' when it matters... Trust me : If you can 'talk to a horse' and get them to listen - chances are, you can do it with anyone !



THE PRIMARY ATTITUDE : I GOT THIS...



It is absolutely human to have a sense of trepidation about something you are going to do for the first time. Standing in front of your team, wanting to make that perfect presentation to inspire them to greater achievements together, is as daunting as standing in front of a fully grown horse for the first time and commanding its attention...

This is where you need to dig deep into your inner confidence and bring it out to be 'present' for you. 'I got this!' is an affirmation to yourself : positive self-talk that enables you to understand, that though you are venturing into the unknown, you have the ability to navigate it - and 'figure it out', and 'come out triumphant' on the other side...

The FIRST attitude you need to develop (whether you are working with horses or with people), if you want to have Executive Presence, is that inner voice that says 'I got this!' (rather than damn it, I am gonna screw this up !).

Attitude precedes behaviour : so, get your attitude right first...

TOOL 1: 'ANCHORING' YOURSELF IN A PLACE OF SUCCESS



Being able to 'ground yourself' at a moment's notice is important : because that instant 'shift' in your mindset sets the mood and the sentiment you present yourself with...

Anchoring is a technique used quite a lot in NLP. The most common use of NLP anchoring is to have a way to intentionally feel resourceful in the right situations. (Click [here](#) to learn more about anchoring technique.)

For Executive Presence, you need to 'take yourself' to a place of success and allow yourself to 'feel' what you felt when you were 'successful' and then be able to bring that emotion into the situation you are in. This helps bring out that sense of accomplishment, pride and confidence into play...

Learning anchoring helps you 'find confidence in a hurry' when you need it the most...

THE PRIMARY 'LOOK' - I OWN THIS...

'Being the part' is important.... Never underestimate the significance of the cues you let out even without your knowledge through your body language...

Much of what people 'read' about you is what you outwardly show. No one knows the pitter-patter of your heart and the cold sweat you have on your palms - but they certainly can see the shifting of your eyes, the shaking of your feet or the constant rubbing of your thumbs...

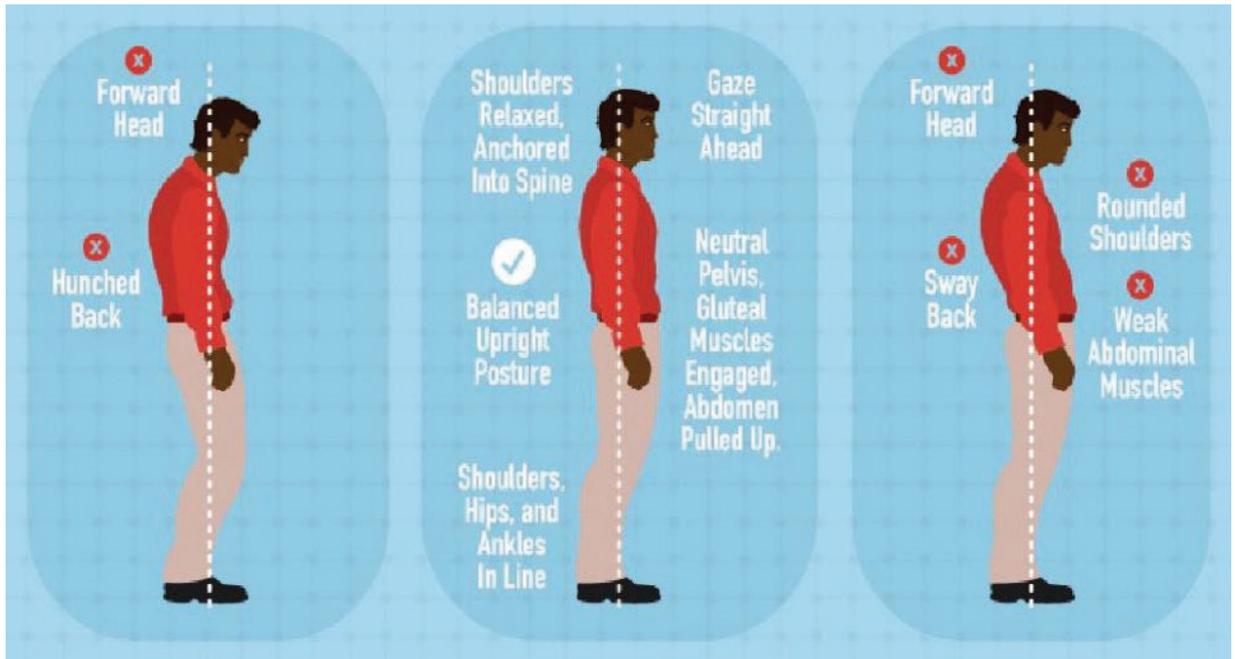
So, learn to have the 'look' of confidence and Executive Presence as much as feeling it. There are countless occasions that people who are ACTUALLY confident send out the 'wrong signals' as well - simply by the way they stand - or by the way they 'look': so, don't allow that to happen to you...

How you hold your body IS IMPORTANT but not just how you look. The authority comes from the correct posture.

Body Language ISN'T a perfect science for sure: BUT it IS important to be mindful of your body language - especially when you want to have your presence 'felt'.



TOOL 2 : JUST STANDING STRAIGHT



Sometimes, the simplest things give the biggest impact. Standing straight is one of them...

Most people actually slouch - or have a sway back : both of which do not 'look' confident...

Stand dead straight. Pull your shoulders back. Tuck your tummy in. Look up. Being able to 'straighten up' at that all important time instantly gives you a sense of confidence too - it happens without you thinking - but it happens almost all the time...

THE BIGGEST WEAPON : YOUR VOICE



Ultimately, Executive Presence is commanded most when you speak...

Nothing will give an air of confidence and authority than a well modulated speaking style. Have you heard Barack Obama speak? – You don't have to like him to admire the way he speaks. The moment he starts speaking, you DO pay attention : and that's because he is a master of voice modulation and also uses pausing, with great effect...

You don't have to go for speech and drama classes to learn to speak effectively and in a manner that commands authority. So, do pay some heed : and learn to use your voice correctly...

You don't have to talk with commanding authority all the time : but you DO need to know when to 'put it on' !

Remember though - you can't 'fake it' - so ensure you anchor yourself first - and truly FEEL confidence within you when you speak. IF you come across as 'putting it on', then it certainly becomes a right royal 'put off'.

THREE TIPS TO HAVE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN YOUR VOICE

1

Lower your voice

Don't ask whether it is fair - but the truth of it is that generally a 'lower' voice tends to command more attention than a higher pitched one which is associated with excitement or nervousness. So, lower your voice when you speak at important events or when you want to command attention...

2

Speak a little slower

Rattling off like a steam train is often interpreted as being too excited... So, slow down, and take your time. Please don't drag each sentence either : but, DO slow down...

3

Pause for effect

Pausing before and/or after an important statement always helps emphasize what you are saying. Don't overdo it : use it sparingly : but do use it to your advantage with great effect...

SOME FINAL TIPS THAT MY HORSES HAVE TAUGHT ME..



Horses are very forgiving creatures; they don't bear grudges or have any of the complex ego-related emotions of greed or envy, for example, that we suffer as humans. My horses teach me every day to be authentic and to be clear about what I want and who I am.

Once I am clear about that, they don't really care what the answers are, as long as I am consistent with my intention.

In human interactions, we are often unclear, conflicting and dishonest with ourselves and with others.

Horses don't buy our BS the way other humans do.



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