

S P E A K E A S Y



## GRAVITAS

DIGNITY, SERIOUSNESS AND  
SUBSTANCE IN  
COMMUNICATION.

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# GRAVITAS

## DIGNITY, SERIOUSNESS AND SUBSATANCE IN COMMUNICATION.



When you hear the word gravitas you might appropriately have an image of a leader from classical times or picture a table of robed men from antiquity. It is a Roman Virtue after all, one that was particularly appreciated in leaders. <sup>(1)</sup>

**It may be translated as weight, seriousness, dignity, and importance and connotes a certain substance or depth of personality.** It also conveys a sense of responsibility and commitment to the task.

Within the British education system, gravitas was largely viewed as one of the pillars of the English gentleman.

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In a demonstration of immense staying power, the word gravitas is still used today when evaluating leaders or anyone with a role where the quality is deemed necessary. **In the survey of senior leaders, 67% say that gravitas is the most important defining element of executive presence.**<sup>(2)</sup>

It's not hard to imagine that an HR leader or recruiter might ask out loud, "does he/she have enough gravitas for the role?" when considering a candidate. Gravitas is often discussed as if it is something one is born with – as inherent as having blue eyes or curly hair. To be fair, though,



gravitas is an amorphous quality that is not entirely tangible.

As we run the familiar mental checklist upon meeting someone new, many attributes are clear – punctuality, grooming, manners, intellect, at least on the subject at hand, and so on. When it comes to assessing gravitas though the definition is subject to interpretation. Some argue it can only come with age and others would simply say you either have it or you don't.

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**A communication coach at Speakeasy would disagree – as with any behavioral quality, it can be learned, honed and conditioned with appropriate focus and practice.**

This pursuit of gravitas is increasingly common among individuals looking to climb the ranks of their organizations. Even executives who are more established still voice the need for more gravitas. Why the resurgence? In a world brimming with noise from more sources than anyone can fact check, we yearn for leaders who clear the way when they speak. People want to feel unwavering conviction, trust the person speaking, and believe them enough to act on their words. Those perceptions are deeply connected to gravitas and to why it's becoming a buzz word in the business communication space.



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**In today's work environments it's not enough to rely on authority or title to influence others. What is required for modern-day gravitas is the ability to communicate, collaborate, influence and develop meaningful relationships.**

People with gravitas lead better, manage better, and network better because their communication skills are working smoothly and effectively. As one head of HR in the UK recently said: "People are often told that in order for them to progress in their careers they need to develop gravitas, but very few are given the direction and support to do this." <sup>(3)</sup>



To cultivate gravitas, as with any desired behavior, it's helpful to look at the qualities that comprise the overall effect – energy, confidence, connection, awareness, and conviction. In a recipe of sorts, each person has a unique formula built on those ingredients that helps them become someone who has gravitas.

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## Here are three specific communication qualities to consider:

1 **Confidence** can be as simply as “do you look and sound like you mean what you say”. Your listener needs to know you are fully committed to the words coming out of your mouth, otherwise how would you would expect your audience to get behind you? You can make a number of choices to avoid interfering with your projecting confidence such as the obvious body language suggestions of nervousness; fidgeting, shaking, and appearing unsettled.

2 **Energy** is a close cousin to confidence as to speak with conviction, appropriate volume and emphasis. It means more than just speaking loudly or quickly. Instead it requires using your voice, your eyes, and your body to really own your words and push them to your listener. Regardless of whether they are next to you, at a table, in the back of a large room, or across the world on a phone call.

3 **Connection** is the sum of both energy and confidence and this trifecta – when coupled with a clear awareness of your listeners role in the communication – will help you “close the deal”. True connection means you reach out – authentically – to bring your ideas, your energy, and your awareness to your listener in way that’s easy for them to accept. Your audience needs to feel the power behind your words and the weight behind your presence to become involved. The idea, product, or service you want them to take home is only as valuable as you make it... and that is directly related to your gravitas.

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These ideas do not come with a how-to manual and each person will project and perceive the qualities differently. The best way to genuinely build gravitas and heighten your communication competencies is to gain awareness on how you are perceived by those around you. There is tremendous value for people at any and all points in their career to work with a specialized coach as it relates to your communication. If you'd like to learn more...



1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravitas>
2. [https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00FJ350MQ/wwwcutomized-20reader\\_B00FJ350MO](https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00FJ350MQ/wwwcutomized-20reader_B00FJ350MO)  
Sylvia Ann Hewlett, author of "Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success."
3. <http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/identify-those-with-gravitas-to-increase-boardroom-diversity>

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