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*Growth*

## **Sustainable Leadership: Beyond The Leadership X- Factor**

A comprehensive guide to developing the intangible qualities that set exceptional leaders apart through communication, presence, appearance and calmness.

# What Is Sustainable Leadership?

## It is part of Executive Presence Is:

- Confidence + Poise + Authenticity
- Grace under pressure
- The ability to influence, lead, and command attention
- Emotional Intelligence: To be calm, self-awareness and able to regulate emotions in self and others

It's not about performance metrics or titles. It's about how you show up, your composure, and your ability to inspire trust and influence others.

Executive Presence and Emotional Intelligence are the intangible "X-factors" that distinguishes leaders. It's not about performance metrics or titles. It's about how you show up, your composure, and your ability to inspire trust and influence others.

# The Four Pillars of Sustainable Leadership and Executive Presence

## Gravitas

Your intellectual expertise and emotional steadiness that commands respect



## Communication

Your ability to convey ideas with impact, clarity, and influence



## Calmness

Maintaining composure and emotional regulation under pressure



## Appearance

Your personal brand and visual representation in professional settings





# Pillar 1: Gravitas

## Traits of Gravitas

- Calm under crisis (self-regulation not suppression)
- Courage to stand up for values
- Vision, clarity, and confidence
- Decisiveness and integrity
- Inclusiveness and presence

## Common Pitfalls:

- Being reactive when something unexpected happens (also see Emotional Intelligence)
- Being unclear about vision, purpose and the message you want to convey
- Having unrealistic expectations about others

# The Neuroscience of Gravitas

Gravitas touches on various aspects of the brain:



## Executive Function (Pre-frontal Cortex)

Executive function (or Pre-frontal cortex) is impacted by overwhelm or boredom. In its "just right state" we have access to empathy, clarity, motivation, goal direction, and we are able to look at complexity.



## Values & Brain Hemispheres

We know what is important to us – our values. This relates to the hemispheres of the brain who process information very differently. Left hemisphere sees the world in terms structure and details, right hemisphere sees the world in terms of big picture, holistic thinking and meaning. We need both for effective and sustainable leadership.

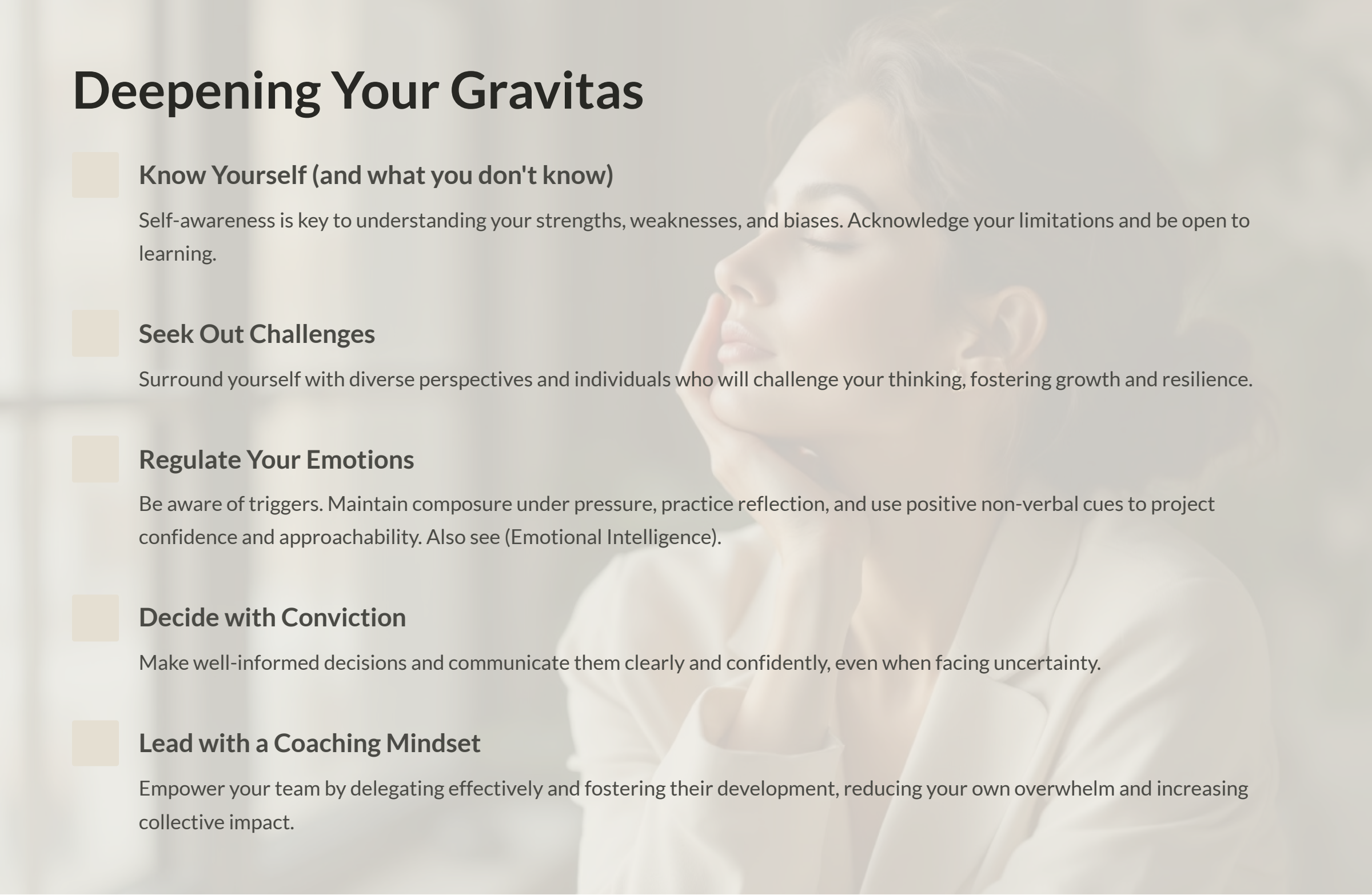


## Focus, Reflection & Brain Networks

And leaders with gravitas know how to be focused and have present moment attention while also being able to dream, ponder and self-reflect. This is about the networks of the brain.



# Deepening Your Gravitas



## Know Yourself (and what you don't know)

Self-awareness is key to understanding your strengths, weaknesses, and biases. Acknowledge your limitations and be open to learning.

## Seek Out Challenges

Surround yourself with diverse perspectives and individuals who will challenge your thinking, fostering growth and resilience.

## Regulate Your Emotions

Be aware of triggers. Maintain composure under pressure, practice reflection, and use positive non-verbal cues to project confidence and approachability. Also see (Emotional Intelligence).

## Decide with Conviction

Make well-informed decisions and communicate them clearly and confidently, even when facing uncertainty.

## Lead with a Coaching Mindset

Empower your team by delegating effectively and fostering their development, reducing your own overwhelm and increasing collective impact.



# Coaching Tips for Gravitas Development



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Start with values exploration



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Learn about the hemispheres and networks



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Share tools and resources so clients have more awareness about where they are effective or not

# Pillar 2: Communication

## Traits of Great Communicators:

- Use narrative (stories) and strategic data
- Are succinct, assertive, and aware of room dynamics
- Exhibit confident body language, tone, and pacing
- Command attention without overpowering

## Common Pitfalls:

- Checking devices during conversations
- Rambling or being overly apologetic
- Failing to make eye contact
- Shrill tone or monotone delivery
- Over-reliance on notes or appearing disengaged

- 📌 **Strategic Communication Tip:** Navigate the fine line between conviction and overbearing. Understand your audience, manage perceptions, and always convey your message with authenticity and impact.

# The Neuroscience of Communication

## Brain Hemispheres and Integrated Communication

This really relates to the hemispheres of the brain: We can communicate using succinct words that communicate structure and details, and words that communicate holistic and big picture thinking (including the use of metaphors).

Both are needed to convey intentional, empathetic and detailed information. It's always the use of both (in a way that's integrated) that is most effective.

## Reading the Room with Sensory Awareness

Reading the room points to the awareness of how we are feeling and what our body (and therefore our intuition) is telling us. We need to use sensory information to become aware of the "pulse", our audience mindset and state of mind to deliver a powerful message.

# Deepening Your Communication

1

## Prepare with Purpose

Clearly define your message and anticipate your audience's needs to ensure your point lands effectively.

2

## Be Intentional and Empathetic

Choose your words carefully, focusing on clarity and kindness, as communication leaves a lasting impression. Use stories and real life examples.

3

## Embrace Conciseness

Deliver your message succinctly, prioritizing impact and clarity over verbose explanations.

4

## Engage and Resolve

Address inquiries directly and approach difficult conversations with a constructive, resolution-oriented mindset.





# Coaching Tips for Communication Development

## 1 Help clients clarify communication goals

Help clients become clear on how they want to communicate. What is the integration of details/structure AND empathy/connection?

## 2 Set intentions for every interaction

Set intentions before every meeting or presentation. Who do you want to be? What can you predict about the audience? What do you need to know?

## 3 Manage unproductive emotions

What ineffective emotions do you need to leave at the door in order to be your best self.

## 4 Balance expertise with kindness

What's the balance of expertise and decisiveness and relaxed kindness?

## 5 Address unexpected questions honestly

What will you do when unexpected comments or questions come up? Do not sweep it under the rug! Be clear and concise. If you don't know simply say you don't. Be honest.

# Pillar 3: Appearance

It's not vanity, it's part of your personal brand and leadership message. Be You. Be Authentic.



## Traits of Successful Leaders

- Are well-groomed and polished
- Know your culture and your audience
- Dress for the message they want to send
- Maintain consistent online and in-person image – know your brand and who you want to be

## Common Pitfalls:

- Flashy or inappropriate clothing
- Visible signs of neglect (unkempt attire)
- Failing to match dress code norms
- Underestimating the importance of first impressions



# The Neuroscience of Appearance

## The Power of First Impressions

You only have a few seconds to make a good first impression. Our brains process how you look, how you hold yourself, walk, shake hands, tone of voice... all of that within seconds.

## Authenticity and Personal Brand

Appearance is the ability to be confident in your brand. What do you value? What's your "energy" – this subtle thing we call presence, expressed also in how we dress.

## Navigating Systemic Norms

This is especially tricky for women. In some systems (organizational, states, countries, families) there are norms that we have been introduced to since childhood. And this may no longer work. You need to create your authentic brand, but you also need to be aware what the system requires that you are a part of. Working in a law firm or bank requires something different from being a principal in a school or managing a restaurant.



# Deepening Your Appearance

Your appearance isn't just about looking good; it's about aligning your visual message with your leadership brand. It reflects your attention to detail and respect for the professional environment.



## Seek Honest Feedback

Proactively ask trusted colleagues or mentors for constructive input on your professional image, even if it feels uncomfortable. Their perspective can reveal blind spots.



## Self-Assess Objectively

Regularly evaluate your appearance with a critical yet constructive eye. Consider if your presentation truly aligns with the message you intend to convey.



## Align with Your Brand

Understand your personal brand and how it integrates with your organizational culture. Your style should reinforce your values and the company's ethos.



## Embrace Evolution

Be adaptable and willing to adjust your appearance as professional norms, your role, or your personal brand evolves. Static presentation can send dated signals.

# Coaching Tips for Appearance Development

## Seek Feedback

Seek feedback. People are not going to give you feedback freely on this subject because it's just too sensitive and scary to most.

## Evaluate Your Wardrobe

Look at your wardrobe and then look into the mirror. Is this in alignment with your brand? Do you need an upgrade? Be honest. Ask a friend, a mentor or a partner....

## Don't Take It Personally

Don't take it personally. This is just information that can help you have a bigger impact.

# Pillar 4: Calmness

## Traits of Calm Leaders:

- An awareness of their internal state and nervous system.
- Are calm, rather than agitated, frustrated, or anxious.
- Seek balance and recognize when they are over-extended.
- Prioritize self-understanding before assigning blame or responsibility.
- Exhibit high emotional intelligence.
- Have spiritual rituals and structures that help them stay regulated.

## Common Pitfalls:

- Reacting impulsively when things are unpredictable.
- Lack of balance and inadequate self-care practices.
- Disconnectedness from inner spirit or purpose.
- Unresolved internal stories and limiting beliefs that hinder effective leadership.





# The Neuroscience of Calmness



## Internal Radar & Ignored Signals

Our nervous system is our internal "radar" that shows us where we are: anxious, frustrated, hopeless, agitated, checked-out, overwhelmed etc. Leaders often ignore these signals because they think it's inappropriate to "talk" about "feelings".



## Stress, Empathy, and Clarity

Stress has a huge impact on calmness. Overwhelmed (or bored) people lose empathy and clarity (back to the Pre-frontal cortex).



## Self-Regulation and Mirror Neurons

Self-regulation starts with awareness. What are the triggers? And where do these triggers come from? Leaders are healers (or they should be). Self-aware, self-regulated leaders have a huge impact on the nervous system of others. Our mirror neuron system tunes into how others are feeling. We mirror "biochemically" the state of other people in our bodies. Talk about powerful impact and the opportunity to do some good in the world.



# Deepening Your Calmness

Cultivating self-regulation and calmness is an active process that requires self-awareness and consistent practice. It's about building resilience to stress and life's crises and maintaining equilibrium under pressure, projecting a steady presence to those around you.

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## Cultivate Mindful Awareness

Regularly check in with your physical and emotional states. Acknowledge your feelings without judgment to understand their origins and impact.

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## Implement Strategic Pauses

Before reacting to a challenging situation, create a brief moment of space. This pause allows for considered responses rather than impulsive reactions.

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## Integrate Restorative Practices

Prioritize activities that genuinely recharge your mental, spiritual and emotional reserves, whether it's exercise, hobbies, or quiet reflection.

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## Shift Perspective

Practice reframing challenges. Focus on what you can control and learn from setbacks, rather than dwelling on external stressors.

# Coaching Tips for Calmness Development



## Identify Triggers

Identify triggers, internal messages that point to limiting beliefs or old habitual patterns.



## Desired Change

Once uncovered, what is the change the leader is seeking?



## Assess Self-Care and Mental Health

Assess how well this person is looking after themselves, their self-care.



## Spiritual Life

How is their spiritual life? Do they have rituals and structures in place (meditation, prayers, journaling) that keep them regulated.



## Vision and Purpose

What is the vision and dream they have, their purpose and meaning that keeps them on track, engaged and "enjoying" life and work.



## Boundaries

Boundaries!! Where are they over-extending themselves? What needs to happen in terms of saying no, permission and delegation?



## Be Coach-Like

And last but not least how can they be more coach-like.



# Developing Sustainable Leadership



## Seek Specific Feedback

Ask for timely, actionable feedback from trusted sources

Create a circle of peers or hire a coach for honest assessment

Seek out a community that supports the idea of service



## Self-Reflection

Regularly assess your own performance and presence

Don't react emotionally to feedback; respond with accountability

Connect to servant leadership and what it means



## Give Leadership Feedback

Offer guidance frequently with emotional intelligence

Learning guidance not Feedback (Feedback can activate fear)

Focus on actionable improvements, on learning and service not criticisms

Executive Presence is a choice, not just an innate trait. Your presence can influence decisions, inspire confidence, and shape your leadership legacy.

# Your Sustainable Leadership Action Plan

1

## Assess Your Current Presence

Identify which pillar needs the most development—gravitas, communication, calmness/self-regulation or appearance

2

## Gather Honest Feedback

Ask three trusted colleagues for specific observations about the 4 pillars

3

## Commit to One Change

Select ONE specific action to implement this week to enhance your leadership presence. Hire a coach to support you this.

What's ONE action you'll take today to deepen your Sustainable Leadership?



# Inspired By

Portions of this content were inspired by the book **Executive Presence** by Sylvia Ann Hewlett. Her extensive research and invaluable insights have been instrumental in shaping the concepts and strategies presented in this document, providing a robust foundation for understanding and developing executive presence.

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