

# Gravitas

**Calm; Professional; Respectful; Dignified;  
Assertive; Impact!  
Your Intention Heard and Felt**

## **What is Gravitas?**

Do you know someone who has natural gravitas? Think of those people who command respect by the way they present themselves. Gravitas is a learned or acquired capability - a calm, steady, measured approach that earns attention and respect from others.

I remember some of my school teachers. There were those emotional, almost panicky individuals who constantly battled to control the class. Then there were those who caned us for the slightest transgression and so we behaved, but only out of fear and we didn't necessarily learn much. But then there were those individuals who addressed us as adults in a confident, calm and steady manner. They maintained eye-contact, and earned our respect and attention.



And what about the parent who has something serious to address? It's natural to respond emotionally after having repeated the same messages day after day. But when parents purposely and calmly address a child's specific behaviour, they have an immediate impact.

## **Practical tips to help you project gravitas**

### **Ensure that your emotions are under control**

It's not always practical to wait until you are completely calm before addressing some issues but it is important that you behave calmly when doing so.

### **Speak at a calm and measured pace**

Practise speaking with gravitas (yes, it takes practice). At first it can feel strange speaking so slowly and deliberately but it won't appear strange to others.

### **Talk softly**

It is not necessary to raise your voice to be heard. Speaking loudly or shouting often provokes a defend/attack response.

## Use silence and pauses

- Become comfortable with silence before speaking, after you've made a point, and when you have said enough.
- Make an impact even before you open your mouth by considering what you are about to say before you say it. Start with a few seconds of eye-contact and then once you've made the connection, begin to speak calmly.
- Pause for a few seconds to allow significant points to sink in. Ensure you maintain eye-contact whilst doing so.
- When you have made your point, stop talking. Pause for a few seconds to allow significant points to sink in. Ensure you maintain eye-contact whilst doing so.
- When someone else is speaking, give them your undivided attention and try to understand what they are saying. Listening to understand will create a reciprocal gravitas.
- When they have finished speaking, don't rush to answer. Wait a few seconds and consider what they have said before responding.
- If someone interrupts you, let them. It is pointless trying to talk when someone else is talking and they are certainly not listening at that time. Wait until they are finished before speaking.

## Maintain a relaxed and confident posture

Leaning forward might be perceived as aggressive, and slouching could be perceived as submissive. Relax and maintain a confident posture.

## Face the person you are addressing

It is important to face the person you are addressing. Be on the same level (avoid physically talking down to people), and maintain eye-contact.

## Speak consciously

Keep it simple and to the point. It's more about the quality than the quantity.

## Eliminate 'Irritators'

Irritators are unconscious words or phrases that have the potential to irritate others. These words or phrases don't add anything to the communication and very often create a barrier. Many people find themselves unconsciously using Irritators as 'fillers' because they are not comfortable with silence. This often undermines their intended communication. For example, as soon as someone says, "*With the greatest respect...*" you can be sure that an insult is about to follow.

Irritators are normal, everyone uses them. Most people won't notice when you use them. But when you consciously eliminate them from your language, you immediately improve the impact of your message, the clarity of your intention, and your Gravitas.

Be aware of the following and any other unconscious words or phrases when you are communicating. Listen to others, ask for feedback, record yourself, and watch how, by eliminating these words and phrases you can have an immediate positive impact.

- *With respect.*
- *Don't take this the wrong way / I don't want to be funny, but....*
- *Obviously* (for example - "Obviously you'd agree).
- *At the end of the day* (it gets dark?).
- *But...* ( as in, "You really approached the project in a positive manner, but...).
- *I understand how you feel.*
- *It goes without saying.*
- *It's not rocket science.*
- *Let me level with you / To be honest / To be perfectly frank.*
- *You know /You know what I mean.*
- *You must understand that...*
- Plus any unnecessary jargon, swearing etc.

## Eliminate unnecessary 'Softeners'

Good communication is clear, concise and to the point. 'Softeners' can reduce the impact of your entire message. Look out for any of these unnecessary words and phrases when you are speaking. For example, "*I'm sorry to bother you but, I think that it would possibly be a little bit better, if you could perhaps, you know, if it's not too much trouble, send it to me directly, if that's okay with you?*" Leaving out the unnecessary softeners would communicate your message clearly and assertively, "*Could you please send it to me directly so that I can work on it right away.*" Typical softeners include:

- *I think* (when you are sure).
- *Sort of.*
- *Kind of.*
- *Perhaps.*
- *Possibly.*

There are situations when it is important to soften your message in order to be sensitive. However, there are many times when it is inappropriate and undermines your assertiveness and credibility. When you project yourself positively and with gravitas, people will respond accordingly.

## Use it to show appreciation

Gravitas is also a wonderful technique to use when addressing positive behaviour. The gravitas communicates the sincerity of your praise. Positive feedback is specific information about what someone is doing well. It is important always to let them know exactly what you think was done well and why you like it. This will ensure that the feedback is seen to be sincere and the specific behaviour is repeated.

## Inspire With Confidence



People with higher levels of gravitas tend to be noticed, listened to, respected, and followed. Gravitas is closely related to assertiveness and charisma, it conveys confidence and authenticity. It enables us to influence and inspire others. It is useful for leading others, coaching, training, selling, presenting, negotiating, and developing all kinds of relationships.