

# Profile of Success: Raleigh Mayer, Gravitas Guru

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*Gravitas Guru Raleigh Mayer tells us the 7 “ups” to moving up, even when you’re hitting a thatched roof. Master these and you’ll be on your way.*

## **Question: What does being a Gravitas Guru actually mean?**

**A:** Gravitas, one of the original Roman virtues, means dignity, seriousness, and importance. It’s become reputation imperative in terms of executive presence. When we say people have gravitas, we are recognizing their power and influence in every aspect of messaging and relationship management.

## **Question: How does your role help women accelerate in financial services?**

**A:** My approach, which I call Executive Elevation (for men or women) is an intensive combination of coaching, skill-building, and strategy, which is designed to enhance communication skills and develop leadership presence. The focus is on a client’s ability to command a room, engage positively with internal and external stakeholders, direct a team, or begin a transition. The engagement typically includes:

- A communication audit—in person, on the phone, and online—to analyze effectiveness of current style
- Image assessment on personal presence and non-verbal behaviors that affect impression
- Training on persuasive presentation and what I call “The Language of Leadership”

## **Question: How does your role at Barnard College prepare women for challenges in the real world?**

**A:** Barnard’s president, Debora Spar, who previously taught at Harvard Business school, wisely recognized that in addition to the academic opportunities that Barnard affords, female students would greatly benefit from professional development programs in communication, negotiation, financial fluency, and other areas that would make graduates more marketable, competitive, and confident. I have presented some of my core programs at Barnard’s Athena Leadership Labs, including “Getting to Gravitas”, “Persuasive Presentation”, and “Natural Networking.”

## **Question: What are some obstacles you were forced to overcome in your career to get where you are today?**

**A:** My previous professional role was head of public affairs and spokesperson for the New York City Marathon. It was a diverse, dynamic, and exciting environment, where I engaged with audiences from the media to members, and corporate sponsors and city agencies (including Mayors Dinkins and Giuliani) but I was limited by several things:

- First, I looked young (I am 5’ 2” on a good day) and it was often assumed that I was

someone's assistant, spouse, or girlfriend.

- Second, the organization was very much a boy's club then in terms of management; I like to joke that it wasn't even a glass ceiling, but more of a thatched roof.
- Third, I was an English major with journalistic experience, but public relations was a new field for me.

In order to succeed, I knew I needed to do three things: Demonstrate confidence and command, even when I was unsure of my approach; build relationships and advocates internally and externally (which included helping an industry colleague to establish a now-thriving organization called WISE, Women in Sports and Events); and, finally, seek help and ask questions of people who could provide resources and information. I was fearless and shameless, and everything I learned led to what I do today.

**Question: You recently led a seminar on The Seven Ups of Successful Leadership. Could you briefly describe these key elements?**

1. **Dress Up:** Remember that 55% of the impressions we make and judgments made about us start with a visual: Make sure your externals match your internals.
2. **Show Up:** You never know whom you will meet or what you will learn, unless you are there. Reliance on social media alone will mean just that: You are alone.
3. **Stand Up:** Demonstrate confidence and competence by claiming space, and moving fluidly. Take and make opportunities to be more visible, and don't wait for permission to do so. Be in the front of the picture.
4. **Speak Up:** Communicate clearly, concisely and compellingly, without prologues or disclaimers. Say what you mean, mean what you say, say it well...and then stop talking.
5. **Listen Up:** Focus on the other person and their words, not your forthcoming argument or "script". Read their mood, pace, and interest, and respond accordingly. Learn to speak in headlines to get attention, rather than asking your audience to follow a lengthy narrative.
6. **Lighten Up:** Keep a sense of perspective and a sense of humor; try not to take things too personally. Remember what Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer says, "Your ideas are not your children."
7. **Follow Up:** Do what you promised. Do it now. Tell them now. Thank them now. And never underestimate the power of praise, personal acknowledgment, or a handwritten thank-you note.

**Question: How has being a member of the FWA benefited you both personally and professionally?**

**A:** I have made friends, gotten business, and, most importantly, have a lot of fun. The FWA is an extraordinary sorority of smart, sophisticated, thoughtful women, who are interesting individuals and consummate professionals. I have found my tribe.