

Freeman almighty

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As God (top) in 2003's "Bruce Almighty" and 2007's "Evan Almighty." As president (bottom right) in 1998's "Deep Impact." and as president again portraying Nelson Mandela (bottom left) in "Invictus," out Friday. *Photo:*

He's played the President, a character simply called "the boss" and dozens of other authority figures. He's even played God. Twice. Audiences know by now that you do not mess with Morgan Freeman, lest you get a lightning bolt up your backside.

No other actor today is better at quietly conveying weight and power than Freeman, and that's probably why he's asked to do it every other week. This Friday finds the 72-year-old stepping into the shoes of another president: Nelson Mandela.

In “Invictus,” directed by Clint Eastwood, a newly elected Mandela urges South Africa’s rugby team (led by Matt Damon) to win the World Cup in order to unite the apartheid-torn nation. The performance earned Freeman a best actor win from the National Board of Review last week.

But what is it exactly about Freeman that makes him so imposing, that makes directors fall all over themselves to cast him for pretty much any role that requires giving orders while remaining coolly detached?

We asked Dianna Booher, an executive coach and author of “The Voice of Authority,” what makes Freeman such a stern character. (Which is great if he’s in your movie; not so great if you’re one of his kids.) As it turns out, the actor shares a lot of traits with successful presidents and CEOs. Here are the secrets to Morgan Freeman’s mojo.

1. He will lull you with his voice

It’s deep, melodious and calming. “It’s the voice of a father,” Booher says. “It has all the things we associate with someone who’s large and in charge.”

2. He will probably tower over you

Freeman is 6-foot-2, and research has shown that tall people are perceived to be more competent. (Tell that to Knicks fans, Patrick Ewing.)

3. He’s calm and collected

His movement and gestures are never jerky or panicked. He walks in a purposeful way. “When someone is composed and collected,” Booher says, “it’s a reassuring, nonverbal way of saying, ‘I know what I’m doing.’”

4. His eyes will stare into your soul

Freeman has a penetrating gaze, and he makes strong eye contact. It’s a look that basically says, “Listen to me or I’ll have Batman deal with you.”

5. His face has character

Standing apart from pretty boys like Brad Pitt (his good looks signal youth and naivety), Freeman’s lined, weathered face conveys authority and experience. His gray hair doesn’t hurt either. Which is probably why he was so good as an older detective to Pitt’s green investigator in “Seven.”