

"*Leadership Presence* reveals what great leaders have always known: that the secret to having a commanding presence isn't about personal power, but about empowering others. Its inspiring stories will speak to anyone who interacts with others."
—Ken Blanchard, coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*®

DRAMATIC
TECHNIQUES
TO REACH OUT,
MOTIVATE,
AND INSPIRE

Leadership Presence



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WITH A FOREWORD BY WARREN BENNIS,
author of *On Becoming a Leader*

Chapter 1: Presence: What Actors Have That Leaders Need

Presence: What Actors Have That Leaders Need

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts....

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, AS YOU LIKE IT

Great actors have it. Great political leaders have it too, as do great business executives. Laurence Olivier. Meryl Streep. Marlon Brando. Katharine Hepburn. Martin Luther King, Jr. Eleanor Roosevelt. John F. Kennedy. Gandhi. Winston Churchill. Alfred P. Sloan. Oprah Winfrey.

But it's not limited to people in mighty positions. Your local pizza guy may have it. Your doctor may have it. Your daughter's piano teacher may have it too.

All these people-well known or not-are compelling individuals who attract your attention almost effortlessly. They have something, a magnetism that pulls others to them.

When they enter the room, the energy level rises. You perk up, stop what you're doing, and focus on them. You expect something interesting to happen. It's as though a spotlight shines on them.

What is it they have?

They have *presence*.

In the eyes of most people, it's the ability to command the attention of others. Peter Brook, the eminent English stage director, expressed it this way:

One actor can stand motionless on the stage and rivet our attention while another does not interest us at all. What's the difference?

What other words, besides presence, come to mind when you think of these people? Here are the words we hear most often when we ask that question in our workshops: *Inspiring. Motivating. Commanding. Energized. Credible. Focused. Confident. Compelling.* Kathy tells this story about working with an aspiring actor:

In the mid-1980s I played Hypatia in a production of George Bernard Shaw's Misalliance at the New Repertory Theatre. A young actor, playing a relatively minor role, had caught my attention in rehearsals but I was completely unprepared for what happened on opening night.

He stepped out on stage and simply seized the room. He was playing the part of the gunner who popped up out of a Turkish bath where he had been hiding. Without saying a word, he was absolutely hilarious. It felt like a full minute before he even opened his mouth and the audience was absolutely riveted by him and when he finally delivered his line there was another twenty-second round of laughter.

*I remember the director, Larry Lane, commenting, “This guy really has what it takes to be a big success.” It turns out Larry was right. The actor’s name was Oliver Platt and he went on to make a name in films like *Working Girl*, *Bulworth*, and *Indecent Proposal*, as well as on television, including an Emmy-nominated role on *The West Wing*.*

Presence doesn’t have to be a billion-watt nuclear reactor. While some people, like Oliver Platt, can “fill” an entire room or auditorium, the presence of others may not be so large. But it’s no less genuine, for these people may be great conversationalists, or they may lead great meetings. Even some actors who have great presence in an intimate medium like movies or television don’t have that ability to fill an auditorium. And some great stage actors have trouble “pulling it back” for television or a movie.

Still, whether their presence is large or more intimate, they have it, and when you look at them, it may be with a pang of envy.

Does everyone want to be a billion-watt reactor? Most of us don’t seek to be center of attention all the time. But when we join a group or enter a room, we want our arrival acknowledged. When we speak, we want others to listen. When we offer an opinion, we want it treated with respect. We want to be taken seriously. We want our existence to have weight and substance for others.

It’s the same thing, just not writ quite so large. We all want presence because no one wants to be ignored.

What is presence?

A moment ago we said most people think of presence as the ability to command the attention of others. But “commanding attention” is only one outcome of presence, not its essence or even its most valuable outcome.

We prefer to think of presence in a different-and deeper-way. For us, presence is the ability to connect authentically with the thoughts and feelings of others. Most people think you are born with presence, or without it, or that circumstances lead you, if you’re lucky, to develop it at an early age. And if the right circumstances never quite align? Well, too bad.

Fortunately, that’s not the case. Presence is the result of certain ongoing choices you make, actions you take or fail to take. In fact, presence is a set of skills, both internal and external, that virtually anyone can develop and improve.

However, when we say anyone can improve his or her presence, we don't mean it's an easy task. It requires you to give up habitual patterns of behavior that you maintain because they make you feel safe. Developing presence will require you to go places and do things that feel uncomfortable, at least initially. Given that hurdle, we're absolutely convinced anyone can develop his or her presence.

The premise of this book is that presence can be developed and you will be a more effective leader when you invest some time and energy toward that goal. Our purpose in writing it is to describe how anyone, including you, can increase your presence.

We know people can develop presence because we have been helping leaders do it for over a decade. Thousands of managers and leaders have gone through our workshops, or worked with us in one-on-one coaching, and improved their ability to connect with others.

More than just skin deep

Let's confront an assumption you may be making.

This is not a book about simply making a better impression. It's not the behavioral counterpart of *Dress for Success*.

Presence includes these things, and anyone working to develop more presence will pay attention to them, because others pay attention to them, but true presence goes far beyond such superficialities.

Just because you've won the lead in a play or a leadership title at work doesn't mean you automatically hold any more sway over your audience or your people. It is your "performance," in both the theatrical and the organizational sense, that will grant you the authority the title or role implies. The presence you bring to your role-how you show up, how you connect, how you speak, listen, act-every move you make on the corporate or real stage, combine to create the impact you have.

Presence comes from within. It begins with an inner state, which leads to a series of external behaviors. Sure, you can put on the behaviors, but by themselves they'll lack something essential. They'll be hollow noise and nothing else. We've all heard politicians say, "I feel your pain," when we know they're simply saying what they think we want to hear. Compare that to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, which obviously sprang from his deeply held beliefs and motivated a generation to overturn four hundred years of assumptions and behaviors.

Presence varies with each individual. In our workshops we never use a cookie-cutter approach; rather, we help each person discover his or her own unique presence in all its richness and variety.

Learning from theater

The second reason we know presence can be developed is that there exists a whole group of people who work diligently and successfully to develop it. That group of people is actors, and their success, even their livelihood, depends on presence. They must excite us when they step onstage, or they will fail. For the actor and performer, presence is not a happy accident of genetics or upbringing; it's the result of training and practice. *We will draw heavily on the acting profession for concrete principles, practices, and stories about the development of presence.*

At this point you may be thinking what can “serious” business leaders or teachers or politicians or government managers hope to learn from actors? Sure, they can learn how to speak better, to project their voices, to stand up straight. But actors play for a living. They pretend to be other people. What could they know about the “real” world that a lawyer or a Fortune 500 CEO doesn’t?

Think about the last time you were really moved by an actor in a live theatrical performance, a movie, or even a television program. We mean really moved to feel something deeply, to understand something more completely, to think about something from a new perspective or even, perhaps, to change your mind about something. Now think about the last time you were truly moved in the same way by a presentation made by a leader in your organization. We’re not saying moved to tears but moved to understand a different point of view, be excited about a new possibility, or be motivated to adapt and grow with changing times.

Of course the goal of the actor or the leader in these instances is the same—to connect with you in some fundamental way. Unfortunately most people will say that this experience is much more rare at the office than it is at the movies.

Which is exactly our point. The skills that actors use to move, convince, inspire, or entertain have direct and powerful applications in the worlds of business, politics, education, and organizations in general. They are not only useful for leadership, they are essential. Great leaders, like great actors, must be confident, energetic, empathetic, inspirational, credible, and authentic.

That leaders and actors share some skills and characteristics should come as no surprise. Actors and leaders face a common challenge. They must form connections, communicate effectively, and work with others as a team. They must be prepared to play different roles, as the situation requires. They must be prepared to influence and move people every day.

Just for the record, though, we need to say the analogy isn’t perfect. If you list the qualities and skills needed by great leaders, there would be many items on the list that actors don’t need, such as the ability to create a great vision of the future, skill in negotiating, the ability to plan and coordinate, and the courage to make decisions that will change peoples’ lives.

All we’re saying is that leaders can learn many things from actors. We’re certainly not suggesting that leaders be actors.

Authenticity

When people hear us define presence as connecting authentically with others, they say something like: “I can understand how leaders might learn some things from actors. But how can we learn to be more authentic from people who lie professionally? After all, isn’t that what acting is really about at the end of the day? An actor steps onto a painted set and pretends to be someone else by performing rehearsed actions and reciting words written by others. What could possibly be more inauthentic?”

There are two answers to that question. Just as actors play a variety of roles, we all play roles, as people and as leaders. How many roles do you play each day of your life? Manager, parent, spouse, engineer (or some other profession), Scout leader, churchgoer, citizen. Do you behave differently in each role? Are you therefore faking it? No, beneath all those roles is the same person: you. The same can be said of actors.

That leads us to the second answer, which has to do with how actors do what they do. A century ago, it was typical for actors to demonstrate emotion through exaggerated, stylized sets of gestures, vocal intonations, and facial expressions. Look at some early silent movies, and note the back of the wrist held to the forehead to indicate distress, or the furrowed brow and clenched fists to portray anger.

Then a pioneering Russian teacher of acting, Konstantin Stanislavsky, taught that a more accurate and engaging approach would be for actors onstage to actually experience the emotions they were portraying. Thus, to portray a character's anger, for example, an actor should find real anger within himself and express that in his performance. In short, he claimed that the emotion needed to be authentic.

Actors worry about the authenticity, the "truth," of a portrayal almost more than anything else. F. Murray Abraham, a well-known stage actor, acting teacher, and winner of an Oscar for his portrayal of Salieri in *Amadeus*, speaks of the actor's search for truth:

What you have to do is find the truth, because that's the essential element that is the middle of all art. It's the middle of acting, whether it's for the camera or on the stage... It's the center of our lives... Once you capture the truth in your own terms, nothing can happen that will bother you.

It's a paradox of the theater that, in order to pretend, the actor must be real. That need requires the actor to delve inside himself, because the only way an emotion can be authentic is if it comes from within the actor. Actors, consequently, are probably more aware of authenticity than anyone else, because they've studied it, and themselves, so carefully. Over the course of this book, we'll examine how actors approach this demanding part of their craft and what leaders can learn from them. It's a crucial part of presence.

Presence and Leadership Presence

Because it's about connections between people, presence is useful for anyone who engages with others. That's virtually every one of us. Connecting authentically with the thoughts and feelings of others can only improve and deepen our relationships. You don't have to be a leader to enjoy the benefits of presence.

But leaders, in particular, need presence, because at its core leadership is about the interaction, the connection, the relationship between a leader and the people she leads. When we talk about leadership, you may think first of those in organizations who have positions of formal authority—the CEO, the director of marketing, the supervisor of customer service, and so on. The people in these positions are leaders by definition. Maybe you're one of them.

What we say about presence for leaders obviously applies to them. But when we talk about leaders, we include anyone who tries to foster achievement and positive change in any group of people. It can be a family, a PTA, a social club, a volunteer organization, a huge government agency, or giant corporation. A leader is anyone who tries to move a group toward obtaining a particular result. You don't need a title to lead.

But with or without a title you do need presence.

Leadership is about results and outcomes, and so leaders want the hearts and minds of others directed toward some purpose, some result desirable for the group or organization. Presence is the fundamental way a leader can engage the full energies and dedication of others to a common end.

This use of presence we call Leadership Presence: the ability to connect authentically with the thoughts and feelings of others, in order to motivate and inspire them toward a desired outcome.

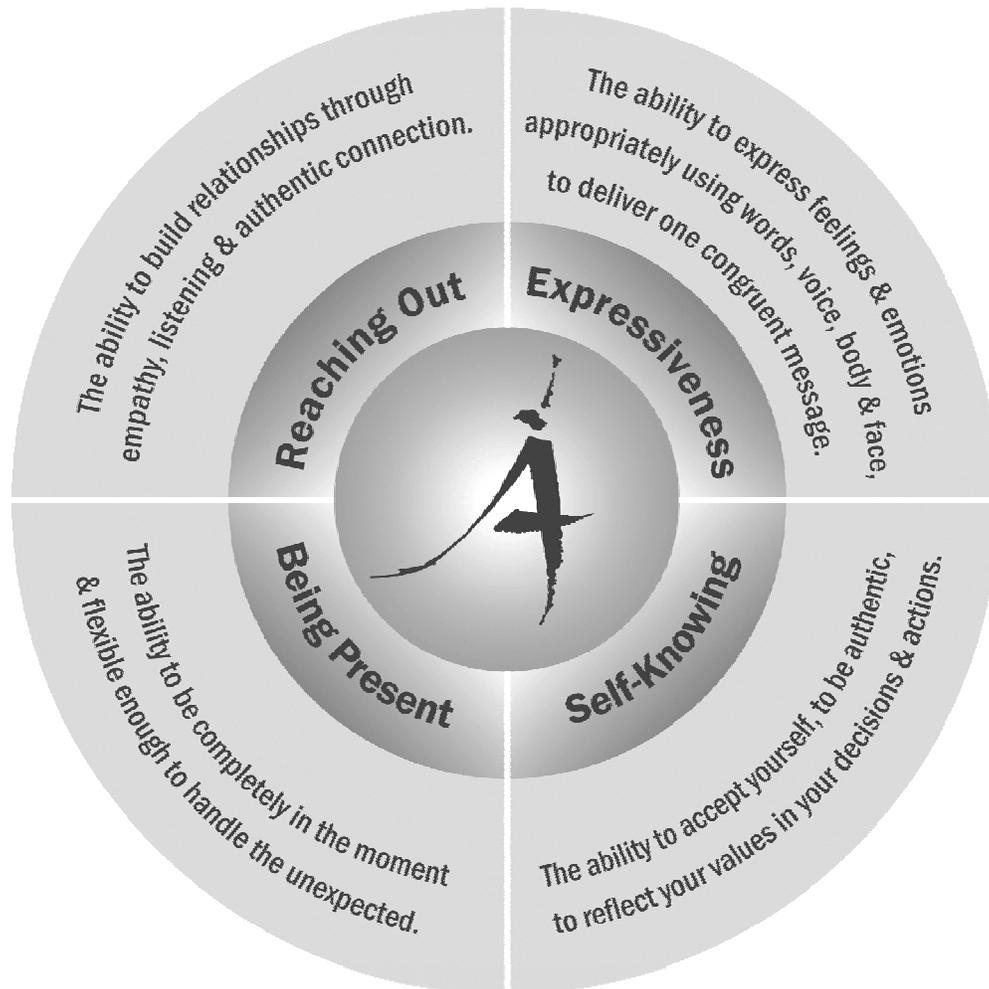
The elements of Leadership Presence

Combining our years of theatrical and performance experience with what we've learned from teaching presence to leaders of all kinds, we've developed a model of Leadership Presence. In that model we break Leadership Presence down into four elements, each of which represents both a state of mind and a way of behaving.

Here are the four elements of Leadership Presence: We call this the PRES model.

The PRES Model of Leadership Presence

- P** stands for being *Present*, the ability to be completely in the moment, and flexible enough to handle the unexpected.
- R** stands for *Reaching out*, the ability to build relationships with others through empathy, listening, and authentic connection.
- E** stands for *Expressiveness*, the ability to express feelings and emotions appropriately by using all available means-words, voice, body, face-to deliver one congruent message.
- S** stands for *Self-knowing*, the ability to accept yourself, to be authentic, and to reflect your values in your decisions and actions.



Leadership Presence is more than the sum of these elements. When we're around someone with Leadership Presence, we feel it and know it as one thing, not the accumulation of four related but disparate skills.

Each element possesses both an interior and an exterior aspect. The interior aspect has to do with the state of mind and heart from which each element springs, while the exterior aspect has to do with the behavior that reflects and reveals the interior aspect. Focusing on the exterior and ignoring the interior is like being courteous without caring. It may work for a short while, but its hollowness soon becomes obvious.

The four elements are a convenient way to teach and learn Leadership Presence because each builds on, and gains power from, the preceding element. They're cumulative. Being Present is the first step. Reaching Out and Expressiveness cannot work in practice unless you are fully present-in-the-moment, focused, completely there. Being Present allows you to effectively reach out to others, to really listen and to see things from their perspective. Expressiveness is certainly possible all by itself. But unless it builds on a foundation of being present and Reaching Out, it will only lead people to think of you as loud or flamboyant. To be Self-knowing, to know where you came from and what you stand for, to be authentic, enables you to integrate all the previous elements of the PRES model in your interactions with others.

The Benefits of Leadership Presence

The applications and benefits of Leadership Presence are widespread. Throughout large and small organizations leaders need to move, influence, inspire, and motivate people to achieve goals. Leadership Presence is a powerful tool for mobilizing and energizing people, sometimes toward great achievement.

We have worked at the senior levels of Fortune 500 companies, in government, in nonprofits, in education, and even in the prison system. The list of ways to apply the skill of Leadership Presence grows with every client. Consider the following list.

- Developing deeper and more trusting relationships with your clients
- Inspiring your teammates to sprint to the finish on an important project
- Persuading a reluctant recruit she has what it takes to charge up that hill
- Convincing your investors to fund your next great idea
- Inspiring a classroom of students to become lifelong learners
- Encouraging your employees to hang in through tough times
- Creating enthusiasm in your organization for a difficult change
- Negotiating a complex contract that benefits all sides
- Nurturing a corporate culture that engenders loyalty and retention

Do any of these tasks look familiar? Are they similar to the challenges that you face? Would your ability to connect authentically with your audience help accomplish these things? In other words, would Leadership Presence help? We think so.

It's not hard to imagine all the relationships and situations where these abilities will be useful in building consensus around common goals, making a work group into a real team, creating long-term relationships with customers, improving collaboration with colleagues, anywhere relationships are critical to accomplishment.

Leadership Presence-More than just charisma

As we write this book, the notion of charisma has fallen into disfavor. Too many companies in recent years have come to wrack and ruin, led by so-called charismatic leaders who have led their organizations over the edge of the cliff, while making barrels of money for themselves in the process.

Charisma itself is not necessarily the villain, but narcissistic charisma is. That's the kind of charisma that allows an individual to sway the masses and stir up followers while maintaining emotional distance or even disdain for those followers. Charisma as an element of true Leadership Presence can be a tool for good, as long as the other elements are also in place.

Leadership Presence combines power with humility. It's about where you and those you lead want to go and what all of you want to accomplish and how all of you can benefit from your work together. It's about relationships and connections between people. To use our PRES model again, Leadership Presence is about:

- Being Present-not pretentious.
- Reaching Out-not looking down.
- being Expressive-not impressive.
- being Self-knowing-not self-absorbed.

We said a moment ago that self-knowing is what integrates the four elements of the PRES model into one thing-Leadership Presence. Self-knowing is what separates Leadership Presence from self-centered charisma. For Self-knowing involves knowing your values and living according to those values. A leader can possess charisma and still have Leadership Presence. But for the narcissistic charismatic leader, the chief value is “me,” and the problem is that followers inevitably discover that value, causing the luster to wear off.

Achieving Leadership Presence is a Four-Act Drama

Because our experience has shown us that Leadership Presence is most easily learned around the four elements, we have organized the rest of this book around them, in four acts. Each act contains two chapters that cover the interior and exterior aspects of the element. The second chapter in each act provides rules and practical advice to help you apply what you learned in the first chapter.

Act I: Being Present

Chapter 2 discusses the value of living in the moment, which is the state of mind that compels or energizes Being Present. Chapter 3 then uses improvisational theater to explore flexibility, the key feature of how you act when you’re fully present.

Act II: Reaching Out

Chapter 4 delves into empathy, the state of mind that drives Reaching Out, followed by Chapter 5 on making connections, which covers all the actions we can take to create a relationship with another person.

Act III: Expressiveness

Chapter 6 talks about expressing emotion and focuses on a concept every actor and leader will recognize-passionate purpose-which influences all the ways we express ourselves. Chapter 7 then describes the way we communicate our passionate purpose by congruently using all means of communication at our disposal.

Act IV: Self-knowing

Chapter 8 explores the heart of Self-knowing for a leader, which is the development of explicit beliefs and values through self-reflection. Chapter 9 discusses authenticity, which is based on accepting yourself and living your values.

Practices and Exercises

At the end of each chapter we include easy-to-use practices and exercises based on our actual work training and coaching executives. These are the reference sections of the book, designed so readers can learn and apply the principles we discuss in each chapter. Some of you may jump into these right after each chapter, others may choose to return to them after digesting the entire book. We encourage you to pick and choose from these sections depending on your personal preferences and needs.

The practices are actions and behaviors that you can apply, on a daily basis, to your everyday life. The exercises are to be done outside of work at a time you have set aside, in the same way you might do physical exercises to stay fit. These activities, which come predominantly from our acting training, are designed to maintain and strengthen your skills of Leadership Presence.

Notes

Chapter One:

(William Shakespeare) As You Like It. Act. II. Scene VII. Lines 139-142

(Peter Brook) Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 232

(F. Murray Abraham) David Black, *The Magic of Theater: Behind the Scenes With Today's Leading Actors* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 228

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