

LEADING WITH PRESENCE

Endorsements

Do you want to get a good grasp of the fundamentals of effective leadership communication? Then I strongly recommend you read this book by three world-leading experts on leadership communication. Drawing on their years of experience teaching executives and MBA students, this well researched and accessible book combines deep insights from academic research with practical exercises and tips on how to alter your presence and voice and become a better communicator yourself in the process. If there is one book that you should read on persuasion and communication in the workplace, then surely this is the one!

Joep Cornelissen, Professor at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, and author of *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (SAGE, 6th edition).

Leading with Presence is a great read for anyone interested in how to better manage themselves and their teams. The book shows how we can use our bodies and our environments to perform up to our potential. It is filled with interesting anecdotes and the latest psychology on learning and performance.

Sian Beilock, PhD, is the author of *Choke* and *How the Body Knows its Mind* and President of Barnard College at Columbia University

Executive presence; we recognize it instantly the moment we are confronted with it...the authors finally succeeded in demystifying the notion of “presence” and nonverbal behaviour in leadership by establishing a unique connection between vast scientific knowledge and practical tools that will enable leaders to further increase their impact...

Ronald de Jong is Distinguished Professor of Practice in Business, Tilburg University, Chairman of the Philips Foundation and a Retired Member of the Executive Committee, Royal Philips.

In this book a triple synergy comes together; science, experience, and practical applicability, like in the training at RSM and several of their trainings. It is inspiring and reflects where you are. Provides valuable insights and is useful regardless your level of professional experience.

Kirsten van Benthem, Commercial Manager, Catalyze – Life Science Consultancy

Leading with Presence is an invaluable guide for anyone who seeks to ensure that their body and voice contribute to their positive impact. Antonie, Milly and Steffen’s collaboration have resulted in a treasure trove of principles, stories and exercises underpinned by thorough scientific evidence that will make you think about and enhance your non-verbal cues in a whole new way.

Nicola Kleyn, Professor of Corporate Marketing and Dean of Executive Education at Rotterdam School of Management

Effective communication is key for successful leadership. Yet respective books and seminars tend to only focus on verbal communication, while reducing non-verbal communication to a side-note. This book is therefore a breath of fresh air. It takes non-verbal communication center-stage by marrying science with practice and presenting concrete exercises and how-to-dos. An accessible read that makes it easy to get better at what matters most as a leader: effective communication.

Professor Dr. Niels Van Quaquebeke, Kühne Logistics University & University of Exeter

*How do you get noticed and how do you connect to your audience? Seemingly two separate questions, the authors of *Leading with Presence* convincingly explain and teach us that these issues are two sides of the same coin. Based on the most recent scientific insights, this book offers a very practical guideline to improve your Presence through tons of helpful exercises. A must have in your business book library.*

Renske Paans-Over, CHRO, Global head of talent, Randstad

LEADING WITH PRESENCE

Fundamental Tools and Insights for
Impactful, Engaging Leadership

By

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Steffen R. Giessner is Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Change at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. He holds an MSc in Psychology from the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, and a PhD in Psychology from the Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena, Germany.

His research is located at the intersection of organizational psychology and management. His primary research topics are nonverbal communication of power, follower's perceptions of leadership, antecedents of leader behavior and change management. He has authored and co-authored papers in the areas of organizational behavior, management and psychology. His research received media coverage in outlets like *Forbes*, the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Harvard Business Manager* and *Wall Street Journal*.

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SETTING THE STAGE

Introduction to Presence; Our Definition, Inspiration, Values and Backgrounds

*The most important thing in communication is to hear what
isn't being said. (Peter Drucker¹)*

*Leadership is about how someone experiences themselves in
your presence. (Joshua Margolis²)*

THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR BOOK

David, a manager at a large company, was by all accounts a terrific guy. Very personable, kind, well-meaning and affable; there was little to dislike about him. However, many found it hard to *listen* to him, in that as you listened to David, after a while your mind tended to drift off to other things. He never could hold anyone's attention for a long time and this was always a source of frustration for him. Jack, a top manager at another company, had all the right words to say. His employees would indicate that what he *said* seemed right and on point, and even was inspiring; however, they complained they never really *felt* it. Stacy, another manager, felt frustrated that her team didn't seem to have confidence in her. They said she barely took up any space and never really seemed to stand for her vision.

Our scientific and practical interest in Presence, and experiences we had with clients such as David, Jack and Stacy during our training programs and business interactions, inspired us to write this book. We want to empower people and have them experience growth in their Presence work. What we strive to achieve in our work with our clients is not only create awareness of one's body language but also share the science that supports the work we do *and* give the practical tools to strengthen their nonverbal communication: their body language and voice.

All these true life examples of Jack, Stacy and David and what we have observed during our workshops and private coaching with many other clients we've worked with often indicate a lack of congruence. If your message is to inspire, instill trust, motivate, etc., the words are not enough. In fact, if those words are not congruent with your body language, most people will believe the latter.^{3,4}

An essence of our communication is the nonverbal part, as it communicates important information across cultures about our emotional state and intentions, which can even be important to our survival. Therefore, paying attention to the information of the body language and voice of others can give you very important clues to what the other is conveying. Listening to only the words falls short of the full message that is communicated. And if you are the one communicating, you'll be much more effective if your nonverbal message is congruent with your verbal message. And actually, if your nonverbal message is *incongruent* with your verbal one, your audience is much more inclined to believe your nonverbal signals. Therefore, if you don't use your body and voice to embody your message, communication can often fail. For example, if you have to go through difficult organizational changes, Presence helps you to achieve your goals. And it can also considerably support and strengthen your leadership and collaboration with others. As you will read in this book, Presence can greatly enhance many facets of communication. It can make whatever message you're communicating more effective and clearer.

Our main goal is to empower you: the reader. Seeing growth happen during our training programs and coaching sessions is very inspiring. We seek to do the same through this book: that you will experience real growth in terms of your Presence.

For example, we urge people who always have put themselves in the background, by using a small voice or taking up very little space, to take the space they rightfully have on earth and that suits their communication needs in the moment. We strive to give people the tools to manage their nerves or emotions

in a more effective and fulfilling way. There is nothing more satisfying than observing someone who has discovered their “true” voice, take up more space than they previously had, have more confidence, able to instill more trust or connect in the way they have always wanted to connect.

WHO WE ARE: OUR VALUES AND HOW IT APPLIES TO PRESENCE

There are certainly many great books out there on leadership Presence. And in our work for this book, we were inspired by colleagues who continue to advocate working on one’s Presence.

We believe this book is unique, in that it covers theory, practice, exercises and research on Presence, and we’ve yet to find a book that combines all those elements. We aim to provide a practical guide as to why – and how – to practice Presence in your everyday interactions. To make you aware of your body language, the signals you send and how you can use this knowledge to feel stronger, more free, open and able to engage with others. Thus, we aim to go further with this book than previous works on Presence. We strive for you to actively increase your Presence through practical tools and exercises.

Because the three authors of this book have such diverse backgrounds, we are able to pool tools, research, exercises and experiences, from our various disciplines. The combination of an actor with a business background, a somatic coach with a dance background and a professor and researcher on body language, leadership and organizational behavior provides a wide pool of resources and experience to draw from. Pooling our knowledge from models and theories on verbal and nonverbal communication, change management, theatrical frameworks, body and voice work, teamwork and leadership allows us to translate Presence in a very practical way.

Our goal is always to make this work as practical as possible and to provide you with easy to use tools you can start applying right away. Every exercise we discuss in this book has a direct link to the daily work you do, and we provide evidence-based theory.

As a trainer of various communication skills, Antonie engages with a large variety of companies, from big multinational corporations, to startups and to small-sized companies, and he is able to view the effects of Presence in a variety of workplace situations. He sees the effects when leaders do not have Presence while addressing their teams. The detrimental outcomes

when leaders do not connect with their colleagues, stakeholders and team members. When they fail to create enthusiasm or instill confidence and trust. Presentations that fall flat and become uninspiring. Most of these effects are often due to a lack of Presence. His workshops focus on strengthening communication skills and Presence of his participants.

Milly in her work on somatic coaching, sees many individuals who get stuck in their work and career, as they experience they cannot express themselves clearly and effectively. Therefore, they feel disempowered and underappreciated. She often finds that their nonverbal communication does not support their intentions and talents, which makes it harder to connect and interact freely with others. In her coaching sessions, she helps her clients to lift barriers that impede their Presence and find their inner inspiration and courage.

As a scientist and practitioner, Steffen teaches and trains about nonverbal behavior and how our body is connected to our thinking and feeling. For him, combining scientific understanding about the body–mind connection with practical experiences is a fundamental approach for learning. Students as well as practitioners have increased their Presence from these insights.

In addition, we not only believe in having practical models and tools to work with, but we also highly believe in experiential learning. Presence work cannot be explained only with models, theory, presentations and a book. You will only truly start to “get” this work by *doing*. Unless you actively and physically work on your Presence, we doubt significant growth will happen in terms of your leadership Presence.

In many leadership and personal development training programs, most of the attention is given to cognitive work and analyzing your personality. Our work is focused on exploring and learning to work with the body-mind connection. As the focus is often on the mind: the thinking, we want to draw your attention to the body as well. As we will discuss more in depth in Chapter 2, the mind and body are connected with each other, so it makes sense to investigate this mutual connection. We strongly believe in adding working through the body to your leadership development, because it is a very helpful way to shift from habitual behavior or reactions to more conscious choices in your responses and actions. This way of working can effectuate real change as opposed to relying only on cognitive comprehension. Working through the body can create true leadership embodiment. Awareness of your posture, facial expressions and voice, for instance, can therefore help you to have more choice over your mood or emotions.

We will provide you with exercises that help you to learn more about your body–mind connection and enable you to grow your Presence. The exercises in this book have a direct link to your workplace situations, even though they might not always seem applicable straight away when you read them or start practicing them. We aim for you to be equipped with practical tools and exercises that have immediate positive effects on your Presence. We also believe in basing our approach and exercises on research findings.

Finally, we believe working on your Presence is a continuous path, and unfortunately that work is never done. After many years of working on Presence ourselves, we still constantly need to remind ourselves to work on our Presence. We have to remain vigilant and aware of our nonverbal communication and maintain a mindful regular practice. The point is: Working on your Presence is never really done.

LEADERSHIP AND WHAT IT MEANS TO US

This book is focused on Presence with a strong link to leadership, because we believe working on Presence is especially helpful for those who manage or lead others. However, Presence work can be applied to – and help with – any communication you have, be it with a client, customer, stakeholder or colleague (and in private life as well!). It can also greatly help facilitators, coaches and trainers by giving them tools to communicate with more Presence. With regard to leadership, working on your Presence can greatly enhance your ability for self-leadership and thus to effectively lead others, and yourself as well. In Chapter 3, we will discuss how emotional intelligence can help self-management.

Leadership can be generally defined as “a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”⁵ Thus, leadership is in essence a process of social influence. Understanding it in this way, it implies that (a) it is not related to a structural position of being a leader or manager and (b) it can be learned or developed. Being in a leadership position certainly requires leadership skills. For instance, as a leader you want to share your or your company’s vision or strategy and then activate people to work toward a certain goal. Mission statements, values and strategies can fall flat if they are not embodied by leaders with Presence. Of course, the coordination, motivation and activation of employees or stakeholders has a language element, backed up

by plans, strategies, statements and a clear organization and understanding of one's tasks and roles. However, we argue, that no matter how clear and well thought-out those elements are, effective coordination and influencing people into action (i.e., leadership) can be greatly strengthened by Presence. When you embody your message, you can strengthen your influence.

In addition, it's important to realize that as a leader you will constantly be watched, whether you like it or not. Your team and others will watch you in the hallway, at the coffee machine or water cooler, how you enter the room, etc. They are often gauging how your mood is and assessing the matter, amount and the way they will interact with you. Often leaders are not aware of this: that the way a leader sits in a meeting, the way a leader holds their body, the way a leader looks at you (or not), the way she/he greets you, all have an effect and impact on their employees and stakeholders.

We remember being at the offices of one of our clients. We would sit in on their meetings, and often noticed that the manager who was the head of a big department within the company, had a tendency during meetings, to angle his body away from others, cross his arms and often look up to the ceiling when talking to, or addressing, his team members. And more importantly, we remember the effects that body language had on his team members. They often did not trust him, felt guarded around him and he failed to connect with his team members. This greatly affected the manager's capacity to lead his team. As we will cover in Chapter 4, connecting is one of the four pillars of our Presence work.

Enacting leadership will therefore be important in every moment of your work. Throughout the years, we have seen what body language, the voice and other aspects of Presence, can do both in positive and negative ways to the message one is trying to communicate. If your actions and deeds don't match what you're saying, people will start to distrust you and disengage; you might be seen as inauthentic. Despite what you might think you're showing, many of us don't align what we *say* with what we *show*, creating mistrust, confusion, frustration, irritation and grievance. Team members could continuously be asking themselves if they can trust their leader, if their leader will come through with what he or she promises and/or if their leader is dependable. And when a leader, for instance, has slumped shoulders, is barely audible, speaks with a monotonous voice and has very little eye contact with team members, no matter how well intentioned a leader's message may be, it can very likely produce an adverse effect:

the way that one organizes oneself bodily will produce assessments from others that will open and close possibilities. The way we shape ourselves will have people move toward us, away from us, against us, or be indifferent to us. (Strozzi-Heckler⁶)

You have made an important step on the path to growth by delving into your presence. Being a great leader takes effort and time. It can be a lengthy and difficult process but can also lead you on a path of strengthening not only your Presence but also your communication with others, your leadership skills and the influence you have on others.

SO WHAT IS PRESENCE?

What is that elusive term *Presence*? It's harder to define than it is to experience.

Its origins are in Latin: Praesense and then Praesentia (being at hand). The Merriam-Webster dictionary⁷ defines it as “the fact or condition of being present” and

a: the bearing, carriage, or air of a person; especially: stately or distinguished bearing

b: a noteworthy quality of poise and effectiveness

But we don't think that says it all. People who experience being with someone who is present, or are present themselves, know exactly what it feels like. Bill Clinton, Jacinda Ardern, the Dalai Lama, Obama and Martin Luther King all are said to have Presence. Is it merely being attractive or famous? Not in our opinion. Physical attraction is fleeting when the person does not have Presence. Being in awe of someone famous does not automatically mean that that person also has Presence.

One knows, sees and feels when someone has Presence. There's certainly an attraction, charm, energy and vibe that goes along when someone is present. But it's more than that. It's when a person gives us a sense that we want to know more about them and interact with them. When someone feels completely in the moment, listening and communicating with their body and mind, giving you the feeling that they're solely with you. In other words, another facet of presence is this being in the moment of people such as Jacinda Ardern.

And this actually strengthens our perceptions of their presence; when we have trusted someone simply because of the way we felt about them, when someone moved or touched us in a powerful way.

A client of ours had been at an event where Bill Clinton was the speaker. In a crowd of more than a thousand people, he felt as if Clinton was speaking directly to him. *That* is our perception of Presence. And conversely, we also feel when someone *doesn't* have Presence. When it seems that even when they're standing right in front of us, they're not really with us, eroding trust and motivation. Thus, Clinton might have had an impact on our client, likely due to the fact that he was physically and mentally fully connected to his audience. This being in the moment aspect of Presence helps to engage the audience and be flexible to react to the actual situation.

When you yourself are present (i.e., being in the moment), you feel nimble, flexible, focused, open, in a flow and completely at ease. And most importantly, Presence is extremely effective in getting people motivated, heard, creating trust and instilling confidence.⁸⁻¹⁰ And that is very powerful. Leaders who have Presence can increase their ability to steer their team or company in the direction they think it needs to go, even when that path for many seems scary, hard and/or wrong. Being empathic, authentic and really connecting with others, being able to improvise and to be in the moment; all of these elements are related to Presence.

Employees who work with leaders who have Presence are motivated to excel and feel the confidence to do so. Those leaders are able to draw the best of people, because people intrinsically feel motivated by leaders who have Presence.

We strongly believe that a very effective and crucial way in working on your Presence is through the body. You could read all the books you want on leadership qualities, but if you don't embody that knowledge, it seldom produces the results you will want. Equipped with the best of intentions, and knowledge gained by reading books on, for example, trust, you will still fall flat in your endeavor to create trust if you have a tendency to slump your shoulders, often look away, or squint your eyes, and speak with a barely audible voice. We believe that people will follow you and become inspired by you, because of your Presence, not just your intellect or capabilities.

HOW OUR BACKGROUND CONNECTS WITH PRESENCE

Antonie has been working on Presence as an actor and trainer for years. Since he was seventeen, he has been active in theater productions, TV and