

Leadership Presence: Do You Have It and How Can You Get It?

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Leadership presence is the ability to do two things very well. The first is to demonstrate value, whether to one person or to hundreds of thousands of people, in an authentic way. The second is to connect well with your stakeholders. It means being authentic, comfortable in your skin, and effectively communicating your message while connecting with those around you. That's leadership presence.

Present in management research circles exists common myths surrounding the concept of leadership presence:

The first is the myth of "you are who you are." Interpreted - - people who have presence are those who are naturally born with it. True be told, having leadership presence is essentially about being adaptable and adapting your style to the current situation. The second myth is the idea that leadership presence has but one look. People ultimately mirror their role model leaders and fake it rather than being authentic.

The last myth is that once you have leadership presence, you don't need to do anything else, that there's only one way of being. While you may have a presence that works well in one situation or in one role, as you move on to other roles you need to adapt your presence to that situation. What makes you successful in one situation is not necessarily what will make you successful in another.

To manifest leadership presence, you need to be aware of your audience, at all times. To be most effective, you must tailor your approach and communication style to appeal to your particular audience. What works in front of your peers would not work in front of a jury or group of corporate shareholders. The most important thing is to be aware of your audience needs.

When you speak, you want others to listen, yes? Whether it's a bet-the-company scenario or one in a long stream of communications (discussing a client matter with a colleague), effectively making your point is likely your objective each time you speak.

How you present yourself, how you communicate, how you listen, how you connect, and how you respond to feedback helps creates leadership presence. Envision your perfect example of a leader (i.e. Ed Rendell, Hilary or Bill Clinton, Jeff Bezos, or John F. Kennedy). Regardless of your politics, each possesses an indefinable "something" that makes magic as soon as he/she steps onto a stage. Leadership presence is the business version of stage presence.

Below are three essential strategies for discovering your leadership presence.

1. Slow down. By using your breath to slow down your thoughts, you will be much more available to the present moment.

This is often the most important step towards developing an effective leadership presence. In our culture of immediacy, everything goes so quickly. Each and every day, we are besieged by urgent demands on our time so that we race from one activity to another, attempting to multitask at every moment. This state of continuous urgency and information overload is amplified by the racing thoughts accompanying the stress and anxiety that arise when we encounter uncomfortable leadership situations.

Presence arises when you take a deep breath, slow down, and pay attention to what is in front of you. By doing so, you establish a rhythm and pace that helps others slow down and become present; and you attract more effective interactions.

2. Embody presence: Bring all of yourself into a meeting/important presentation, not just your brains.

Leaders with real presence are "comfortable in their own skin." Presence is a holistic experience, where our entire being – mind, body and spirit – is engaged, not just our minds alone. At the same time, when a person is fully embodied, she authentically engages with those in her audience, not just their thoughts.

3. The power of the relationship: Place a priority on connecting with your audience rather than your material.

This is paradoxical for most people. When asked to give a presentation or speak up in a meeting, their focus is naturally drawn to the subject matter and how to convey it. But the truth is that effectiveness as speakers and leaders is less about what is said and more about who you are and how well you connect with your audience. People respond to a message because of authenticity, humanity, and ability to connect. If a speaker focuses entirely on himself and the material, he creates an experience of separation and is not available to connect with his audience.

Instead, if you give careful thought to why you are speaking, what you want the audience to leave with, and how you can be helpful to them, you will "invite" the audience to join you. Ironically, when your relationship with the audience becomes the priority rather yourself, you'll be less anxious, your thoughts will quiet down, and your audience will trust you more.

Finally, exceptional leaders recognize that they will not get it right each time and when they don't, they course-correct. This is imperative as it relates to leadership presence and making an impact as a leader.

