

A professional business meeting scene. In the foreground, a man in a light-colored suit jacket and a woman in a grey blazer are shaking hands. The man is smiling and looking towards the woman. In the background, another woman in a white shirt is holding a tablet. The scene is set in a bright, modern office environment with large windows and a green plant.

4 WAYS
TO INCREASE
YOUR
LEADERSHIP
PRESENCE

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WHAT MAKES A GREAT LEADER?

A quick online search will yield dozens of “key” traits: competence, credibility, decision-making ability, trustworthiness, listening skills, confidence, passion, humility, awareness, honesty, integrity... The list goes on and on.

However, it doesn't matter how confident or trustworthy or humble you actually are if you don't come across that way to others. You must **communicate** these traits to inspire a following and move toward your goals.

You need LEADERSHIP PRESENCE.

In this guide, I will take you step by step through the process of understanding and cultivating a Leadership Presence.

We will cover:

- What is Presence?

- Step One: Head Check

- Step Two: Body Awareness

- Step Three: Claim Space

- Step Four: Relate

- Develop a Leadership Presence

Whether you are already in a leadership position, you aspire to be a leader, or you simply want to lead your own life, these skills will help YOU **change your communication and change your life.**

WHAT IS PRESENCE?

You know it when you see it... but how do you define “Presence”?

Presence is how you “show up” in the world. It is how others experience you.

PRESENCE is your NONVERBAL PERSONA.

You already have a presence. So what are you doing with it?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do people notice when I walk into a room? Do I want them to?
- How do I want people feel when they are around me?
- During interactions with others am I fully present?
- Do people feel safe with me or am I arrogant and pushy?
- Am I inviting or do I hide behind an invisible nonverbal wall?
- How big is my Presence? How far do I reach?

Most people nonverbally communicate that they are primarily concerned with their own little world. In other words, they have a small, self-focused presence. Their thoughts revolve around the past or future.

Rarely do we find people who are **grounded**—grounded in themselves and in the present moment.

When we DO see that, we NOTICE.

When a person fully inhabits their **body** and the **space** surrounding them, when they quiet their **mind** in order to connect with **others**, we say that person has “Presence.”

Presence is something we can see and feel. It is the willingness to fully communicate your real self in a way that connects with your audience.

Accessing the power of Presence means you tune in to who you are and the nonverbal signals you send, so that you can be **purposeful** in your communication and your ability to reach others. While everyone naturally has a presence, yours is wasted if you don't **consciously communicate it**.

The first step toward expanding your presence is **AWARENESS**.

That means you have to actually **GET present**—tune in to this present moment.

Once you let go of distractions that take you away from right now, then you can make choices that communicate your presence to others in all four areas:

1. The Mind
2. The Body
3. Space (your surroundings)
4. Others

STEP ONE: HEAD CHECK

Everybody's got **a story**. I don't mean a "history." I mean a made-up paradigm that you operate and **communicate** from.

We interpret what we see based on our stories—and it happens so fast that we don't even realize our brains are involved. We take for granted that our conclusions are based on fact, when they are rarely based on the reality of the present moment.

Let's look at **two** of the many ways our overactive minds can get in the way of Leadership Presence and what to do about it:

THE VOICE

This is the constant stream of judgment and criticism that goes on in the back of your mind.

You know this voice. It's the one that says things like, "What's the matter with you?" and "You can't ever do anything right," and "That idea will never work." This negative, critical, tyrannical voice impedes your ability to see clearly and **communicate with confidence**.

The antidote: Acknowledge the voice and tell it to **shut up**. If you're having a conversation in your head, you aren't fully present with the people you're trying to lead. **You must BE present to HAVE presence**. Refuse to listen to the inner dialog.

ATTACHMENT TO OUTCOMES

The more desperate you are to achieve a specific end, the more you diminish your ability to think **creatively** and **rationally**.

Desperation triggers your fight-or-flight response, which focuses on survival, NOT frontal lobe processes like **analysis**, **creativity**, and **critical thinking**.

The antidote: Label your fears and address them. Write them down. What are all the irrational worries you have? For example: “If this deal doesn’t go through, the company is sunk,” or “If I don’t deliver this presentation well, no one will ever respect me again,” or “If I make the wrong decision, I will be a complete and total failure.”

Are your fears grounded in reality? Usually they aren’t. But because we attach so much of our **identity** to our work, it’s easy to feel like our entire lives and self-worth are riding on how “THIS THING” turns out.

Most of the mental chatter you experience takes you OUT of the present moment and into the past (regret and resentment) or future (worry). **In order to communicate leadership, you must be fully present RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW.** That means shutting off The Voice and letting go of the outcome. Your behavior in the present moment is all you have control over; it is only by being fully present and making mindful choices now that you have any effect on the future.

STEP TWO: BODY AWARENESS

Most of us are painfully unaware of our bodies.

We don't know we're hungry until our blood sugar hits the floor.
We don't know we're full until our stomachs hurt.

We treat our bodies as if they are just the housing for our brains, as opposed to **the means by which we experience and interact with the world.**

By consciously bringing your attention to your body, you increase your ability to be present and mindful. Why?

Your body is ALWAYS in the present moment.

Here are some ideas for cultivating body awareness:

- Body Scan
- Authentic Movement
- Walk



See below
for more
details.

BODY SCAN

Sit or lie in a comfortable position; close your eyes. Focus on your breathing.

From there, turn your attention to your toes. You don't need to touch them or move them, but do fully feel them. Then, turn your attention to the rest of your feet and gradually work your way up your body: lower legs, knees, thighs, behind, abdomen, back, fingers, elbows, arms, shoulders, neck, face, head.

When you are finished, return your attention to your breath.

AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT

Stand in a comfortable position and ground yourself. Take a moment to fully inhabit your body. Take a few deep breaths.

When you are ready, begin to move. Move, move, move. Any way you want. Do not plan your movements or follow any pattern. Bring your attention to how it feels to move.

WALK

It is much easier to become aware of your body and your breathing (as well as your surroundings) when you are outside and moving. As you walk, notice your body, your movements, and what your senses are telling you.

Not only are many of us unaware of our bodies and what they are telling us, we also tend to be unaware of the messages we send with our bodies. **The first step to being purposeful in our nonverbal communication is to simply become aware.**

Of all the skills and techniques I teach, nothing impacts nonverbal communication and Presence more than

BREATHING.

When you breathe shallowly, you communicate that you are in **fight-or-flight mode**: reactive, emotional, irrational, and more concerned with your own survival and welfare than working collaboratively.

You send the signal that you cannot be trusted and others should be on their guard. The atmosphere around you becomes charged with a sense of danger and risk. Morale decreases and people become edgy.

**NO ONE is going to follow you if
you're only looking out for YOURSELF.**

In order to breathe well under stress, **practice good breathing daily**. This will get your mind and body attuned to what good breathing feels like so you can access it at any time.

Here are some suggestions:

A Simple Breathing Exercise

Inhale for a count of six. Hold your breath for a count of four. Exhale for a count of six. Feel your entire chest cavity from diaphragm to collar bone expand and open up as you inhale. Repeat several times. Practice daily.

Work Out

Exercise forces you to breathe. Yoga, Pilates, and Martial Arts can be especially beneficial for learning to become aware of, control, and use your breathing.

Sing

Sing in the shower. Sing along with the radio. Sing your babies to sleep at night. It doesn't matter if you can't carry a tune. Singing is good for you—good for your body, good for your brain, and good for your breathing!

**Your breathing directly affects
your BODY and your BRAIN.**

Since your breathing affects your brain and body, it also affects the **nonverbal messages** you send to others.

Breathing well clears your mind, calms your thoughts, soothes negative emotions, relaxes your body, expands your consciousness, and creates an atmosphere of safety and welcome.

It gets oxygen to the **brain** so you can think clearly and creatively. It gets oxygen to the **muscles** so you can move (i.e., communicate nonverbally) freely and purposefully.

Breathing is the mechanism by which you communicate your Presence.

Breathing well not only benefits you, but those around you.

Breathing patterns are contagious. If you can remain calm and breathe well in difficult situations, others around you are more likely to stay calm, too.

EVERYONE can think better, work better, and get along better when the brain gets the oxygen it needs.

When stakes are high, the most important and constructive thing you can do is BREATHE.

STEP THREE: CLAIM SPACE

As unaware as most of us are of our bodies, we tend to be even more unaware of the **space** around us. We can become so focused on the task at hand or lost in thought that we lose our sense of where we are and who we are with.

Here are **two** simple ways to present yourself as a leader:

First: Claim PHYSICAL Space

As a leader, you must **hold space for yourself**. No one is going to hold it for you or give it to you. You must claim it for yourself and be strong enough to hold it in the face of opposition.

When you claim space, when you send your Presence out from you, you communicate that you are **comfortable** with yourself and assured of your right to be. This takes **confidence and courage**—but guess what!—that confidence and courage gets communicated to those around you.

Not only does claiming space communicate confidence, but it also allows you to **hold space for others**. Your Presence must be big enough to “touch” everyone you hope to lead.

Leaders don't hide. Neither do leaders push, coerce, or bully others into following them. **Leaders invite others to join them by claiming and holding space.**

PRACTICE CLAIMING PHYSICAL SPACE

Here's how:

- **Stand up.**
- **Inhabit** your whole body. Start with your head, and increase your awareness all the way down to your feet. Can you feel the floor beneath you?
- **Move** your arms. Reach out in front of you. Reach up over your head. Reach to the sides. Turn in a circle. Become aware of, and claim, all the space immediately around you.
- **Look** around the room (if you are inside). Imagine your presence filling the entire room. Fill it from corner to corner, from floor to ceiling.
- **Expand** your sense of space beyond the walls. Imagine what is behind each wall, the floor, and the ceiling. Fill up the building, the property, the neighborhood...

This exercise will **instantly** increase your awareness of space. Don't stop there, though. Start considering space when you're driving, shopping, going for a walk, and especially when you're in front of a group.

You can only have a positive Presence in the space within your awareness.

Practice becoming more aware of the space around you. Once you are aware, you can hold space for others—then they will feel **safe** in your Presence.

Second: Claim TEMPORAL Space

Pause. Take some time.

Most of us dread silence. In our culture, we rarely experience silence, to the point that some people cannot sleep at night without a white noise maker or having the TV on in the background.

Silence feels empty, awkward, and uncomfortable. It is naked. It almost FORCES us into the present moment simply due to its rarity. We avoid it at all costs, especially when in front of a group. Yet it is precisely due to its rarity that silence possesses such

POWER.

When you claim the space and time to pause, you nonverbally mark the words that come before and after. This adds **weight** to your message.

In addition, when you can stand in front of a group and comfortably command attention in silence, your **credibility** skyrockets. Most people rush in to fill the verbal gaps with “ums,” or “you knows,” or endless repetition of a statement.

**Nothing says, “Listen up!” better than
a well-executed PAUSE.**

So what makes a “well-executed” pause? Two things:

Breathe.

One reason we pause is so that we can breathe. However, because we are so afraid of silence, we often hold our breath when we pause. This creates the dreaded “awkward silence.” Holding your breath communicates discomfort and makes others uncomfortable, too. Conversely, when you breathe it decreases everyone’s anxiety levels. Breathing also gets more oxygen to your brain, so both you and your audience can think and focus. Be sure that when you pause, you breathe.

Use Your Hands.

Part of our fear of silence is fear of losing the other’s attention. So how do you signal that you aren’t done speaking yet? Use your hand. While you are speaking, gesture. Then FREEZE your hand during the pause. Do not move it again until you have begun speaking. Instead of losing attention, effective pausing with great gestures draws others in.

Leaders take up SPACE.

Leaders are grounded enough in themselves to nonverbally say, “I deserve the space and time I need.”

Practice claiming space—in area and in time—and your leadership presence will increase.

STEP FOUR: RELATE

So far, we've discussed how to **show up** as a leader. When you have your mind, body, and your sense of space lined up, you have the capacity to present your skills, your ideas, and your personality to the world. But then you need... **people**.

You can't have presence by yourself! If you're sitting alone in your living room, can you really say you have "Presence"? No.

Once you're aware of what's going on in your **head**, your **body**, and your **surroundings**, the last step is to increase your awareness of **others**.

It is impossible to **CONNECT**
with others if you aren't **PRESENT** enough
to be **AWARE** of them.

When you are present, you invite others to be present with you. When you confidently and comfortably claim space, you create a place for others to **join you**.

But none of this can happen if you are so focused on yourself that you are unaware of those around you. Leaders are mindful of themselves AND others.

Leaders INSPIRE a following.

Once you have a leadership presence, you need to **relate** to others in order to lead them.

Here are **three practical ways** to relate to others as a leader:

Let go of limiting language.

Instead of hedging your opinions with “I think” or “Maybe” or “This is just a suggestion, but...” be willing to state your ideas unapologetically.

Accept compliments.

Just say, “Thank you.” Don’t deflect, dismiss, or downplay the positive comments you receive. Just say, “Thank you.”

Lose the self-deprecating humor.

We like it when people don’t take themselves too seriously. Yet if you can **ONLY** talk about yourself in negative terms, even couching it in humor, you’re telling others to keep their expectations low.

**If you want people to follow you,
they need to know you’re COMPETENT.**

These simple shifts will help you **feel** and **look** more competent.

Good leaders, though, don't focus on themselves.

Good leaders create SAFETY for others.

They do this partly by demonstrating competence, and partly by **showing that they care** about their followers.

One of the key ways to create safety for others is by **listening**.

And I don't just mean the trite "active listening skills" that you've read about, such as

- smiling and nodding,
- making eye contact,
- verbal encouragement ("Yes, uh-huh..."),
- or paraphrasing what you've heard.

There is a time and place for those skills, but they must be used judiciously. Otherwise, they fall into the category of manipulative

"Let me pretend I care so you'll give me what I want" GIMMICKS.

YUCK.

That's **not leadership**.

Truly excellent listening skills require HOLDING SPACE for others.

To hold space:

- Claim a big enough **space** to include you and the other person.
- Let go of The Voice and your agenda. Stop the **mental chatter**.
- Allow for **silence**. Wait while the other thinks and speaks.

You cannot listen when trying to influence and persuade. You cannot listen when you're thinking of what you're going to say next. You cannot listen if your mind is a million miles away.

Give others your full attention, and they'll give you their loyalty.

Your Presence is a GIFT.

It's a **present**, you might say, that you give to others.

By giving people your attention, listening, and by simply being with them, you give others a gift and, in the process, increase your own Presence.

Who can you be present for today?

DEVELOP A LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

In order to be a leader, you need three things:

- 1) A destination
- 2) Followers
- 3) Movement

Leadership implies CHANGE.

If you aren't going anywhere, you don't need anyone to lead the way.

You don't need a leader when you're with your friends, sitting around the fire pit in the summer, drinking wine and yakking. No one is going anywhere. No one wants to go anywhere. You're all happy where you are.

It's when you need to MOVE that you need a leader to guide the way.

If you want to be a leader, you need to know your **destination**.

It may be a physical change (like moving your office to a new location), a behavioral change (like adopting a new protocol), or a cognitive shift (such as an attitude adjustment). Whatever kind of change it is, you must have a clear vision of where you're going.

Leadership also implies FOLLOWERS.

You may have a clear vision of where you want to go, what you want to change, or a mindset you want others to adopt, but if no one is joining your cause, you aren't a leader. You're a visionary or a pioneer. That's great! We need those, too. But that's not the same as being a leader.

On the other hand, you may be winning popularity contests left and right and surrounded by adoring audiences, but if you aren't going anywhere, you aren't a leader either.

True leadership requires a destination AND a following.

Leaders go FIRST.

You aren't a leader if you're pushing others to move, but aren't moving yourself. Model the change you want to see.

Commit to your goal. Take the first step.

Leaders inspire MOVEMENT
and CHANGE—first in THEMSELVES,
then in OTHERS.

When you can clearly articulate and demonstrate, through powerful **nonverbals**, your goals and your ability to achieve them, others who want the same thing join in. **Leaders take people where they always wanted to go.** Because they trust your **vision**, your **direction**, and your **ability** to take steps forward, they follow willingly and eagerly.

Being a leader isn't about being imbued with power from on high or having the right title.

Leadership is a DECISION.

Once you have a vision, communicate it clearly, and demonstrate your competence nonverbally, others follow voluntarily.

OUR WORLD NEEDS LEADERS.

We need leaders in our homes, our businesses, our communities, and we need to lead our own lives. We don't need titles or positions. Instead, **communicate your vision and values with authority, confidence, and power.**

Change your communication,
change your life.