

The Power of Presence in Leadership

By Kate Edmonds, Master Coach and Founder of Inner Leader Ltd

Are great leaders born or can they be developed? What distinguishes them from the rest? In my experience, it's a quality I call Presence. And I believe that with intention and attention, Presence can be developed by anyone who desires it.

What is Presence?

To me, presence is a quality of being totally here, now, in the moment, connected to those you're speaking or working with, at once creating and inviting them into a space of openness, of non-judgment, of possibility, of creation, of learning, of "not knowing", ready to see what wants to unfold; knowing that there's an effect when you create this space where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts and new forms can be imagined.

These new forms might be products or services, systems or solutions but they could also be new beliefs and ways of thinking or behaving, or new ways of relating or doing business.

By being present in this way of being, one's "presence" is perceived as powerful, compelling, authentic, extraordinary, and also very human, trustworthy, and approachable; you feel a sense of freedom to express yourself fully and of being both strongly grounded and yet in contact with something "higher", and of course this inspires the same in others.

How can we nurture or develop Presence?

I believe true presence requires an acceptance of oneself, warts and all; the choice to let go of old roles and masks and being prepared to show up fully, integrated and authentic, and yet open and "empty" ready to create yourself in the moment from all that you are, knowing that that is enough; choosing to believe that more is possible with "not knowing", with opening oneself in this way, than with already having all the answers and recycling old ways and old knowledge (of course all our experience and wisdom is important but it usually isn't the most powerful means to create new possibilities).

Presence requires a readiness to take the risk of seeming different for the sake of engaging people's hearts as well as their minds and of releasing their and your full potential. At first, Presence seems to require a leap of trust that you already have everything you need to take the risk of letting go ... for me, I sense that when I open to this, something divine is channelled through me. I once read "leap and the net will appear" and that is how it can feel – actually very safe. You have to try it to find out, of course!

Meditation practices greatly accelerate the shift toward experiencing Presence as one's usual state. Bodywork (eg yoga, t'ai chi, aikido) also support it. And it's probably not reasonable to expect ever to be present 100% of the time. Yet we can all become aware from time to time that we're not present - and then we are!

What hampers Presence?

We get in the way of our true presence when we focus on what others may think of us, asking "How'm I doing?" while we're doing it; self-focus of any kind, fear of what might happen if.... distractions, lack of awareness....all take us away from what is, in the moment, and therefore from Presence.

My work as a coach leads me to believe that our common longing for a better life, which prompts us to want to be more successful, to be a better leader, find a better job, earn more, live in a nicer house etc, can never be fully satisfied merely by fulfilling those wants. I believe it reflects a deeper, spiritual need for something more meaningful. Living with Presence takes us a step in this direction. It is also a powerful force for bringing out the best in ourselves and in others.

To close, a couple of potent calls for Presence in the development of others:

"Unconditional presence is the most powerful transmuting force" John Welwood.

“The success of any intervention depends entirely upon the inner condition of the intervener” Joseph Jaworski.

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