



*INSPIRE AND INFLUENCE*

*WITH THE POWER OF PRESENCE*

*KRISTI HEDGES*

# *LYING INSIDE YOU, UNTAPPED, IS AN INSPIRATIONAL FORCE.*

Guided by passion and steered by your influence, you can build momentum for yourself, others or a greater cause.

Hearts are full, and ideas are many.

You might want to start a business. Land a “change everything” job. Get respect.

Break the glass ceiling. Shatter your own ceiling. Own the room. Motivate a team to greatness.

Change your entire career. Leave a legacy. Or fight for an issue you lose sleep over.

You can do it, no question. But it takes more than heart. It requires the game changing power of leadership presence.

And most people have no idea how to get it.

# Presence: The Business “It” Factor

If you could be a fly on the wall in any company, chances are you’ll hear the terms executive presence or leadership presence discussed. CEOs require it, managers have to show it, high-potentials want it, and young professionals need to develop it. It’s directly linked to your ability to get noticed, forge trusting relationships, and get others on board with your potential and your vision.

*“ Guided by passion and steered by your influence, you can build momentum for yourself, others or a greater cause.*

Presence has become a core competency in companies, with a prominent place on performance reviews and recruiting check lists. A partner at a global recruiting firm recently shared that presence is #2 on their candidate evaluation.

*Personal presence is the differentiating factor in a person’s career success.* It makes sense. In a world where we have all become free agents who must constantly maintain our personal brand, differentiation is what it’s all about. Years of experience and service won’t prevent you from being downsized. Good performance alone won’t get you the promotion you want.

Tried and true sales tactics feel stale when prospects can go online for any information they seek to make their buying decisions. Markets change on the whim of a college kid's competitive idea, and leaders must adjust themselves and their people just as quickly. And if the most recent market downturn has taught job seekers anything, you need more than a great resume to land a great job.

But a stronger presence can benefit anyone. It will make you stand out and be the kind of person with whom others clamor to work and invest in.

It will build followership behind your ideas...and you.

## The Secret Life of Struggling Communicators

We're all presence voyeurs. We see it immediately in others.

However, few can articulate what it really means. It's an amorphous concept with a huge impact on our lives. Though many people struggle with their presence, it's embarrassing to even admit when it's expected to come with our job title. For business owners, it hits particularly close to home, as their personal presence is equated with their company's entire brand.

In her [career column](#) in the August 12, 2011 Wall Street Journal, Joann Lublin wrote about the heightened trend of companies hiring experts to cultivate presence in their executives. The article posited that “presence plays an increasingly important role as companies grapple with a weak recovery and fewer management layers.”

Developing an influential presence is a near universal struggle, with a chorus of unhelpful, ineffective guidance to address it. We’ve done a poor job defining presence and even worse, coaching it in others. In my work with leaders on this issue, I see not just bad advice—but the wrong conversation entirely.

Presence is generally considered too simply, with a focus on stylistic traits or unattainable (much less sustainable) attributes. Presence is not about unabashed confidence, power postures, or innate charisma.

Rather, presence is the ability to connect with others and to inspire them.

With the right approach, developing presence is straightforward. Presence is cultivated from the inside out (rather than the reverse, as most advice goes). Everyone has the ability to build it—introverts and extroverts, job seekers, small business owners and corporate CEOs—by focusing on three core aspects, which I call I-Presence.™

The I-Presence Model to Inspire and Motivate Others:

**Intention:** Understanding and managing your presence of mind.

Your beliefs shape every aspect of your presence, from body language to the actions you choose to undertake. Therefore it's critical to get your head around what type of presence you want to demonstrate, the values you want to convey, and how that matches up (or doesn't) with how others currently perceive you.

**Individual:** Forming deep individual connections that drive business, loyalty, and career success.

Much energy goes into trying to be a perfect A-game player, but perfection is alienating. Leaders need to create an aura that draws others to them, and makes them knowable and approachable. People remember not what you said, but how you made them feel. Instead of trying to be the best; focus on getting the best out of others by cultivating empathy and trust. Best of all, this doesn't require being someone you're not, but more of your authentic self.

*“Personal presence is the differentiating factor in a person's career success.”*

**Inspirational:** Communicating to any audience in a way that builds and motivates followership.

Meeting rooms are filled with boring talk that's quickly forgotten. A leader's job is not to inform, but to inspire. Leaders need to move others to action, and it's necessary to play on a larger stage. Every day there are platforms—meetings, presentations, one-on-one conversations—where you can use inspirational language, vision-filled declarations and persuasive communications to encourage change and innovation. Every conversation a leader has where they aren't inspiring others is a wasted opportunity.

## Five Ways to Improve Your Presence from the Inside Out

Aren't people born with presence? I get that question a lot.

If you're in that camp, step right out of it. Despite the research around first impressions and height, attractiveness, extroversion, charisma, or all the other innate-seeming qualities, there's limited relevance to presence. First, presence is more than first impressions—it's impressions formed over time. How often have your thoughts about someone changed the more you got to know them?

Secondly, consider those who've inspired you in your work life. Did they have a magnetic charisma? Probably not. I'm going to bet that most were trustworthy, empathetic, competent individuals who reached out and connected with you. They created a light in you, and you worked harder and better for them.

Anyone can develop presence. And best of all, it doesn't require an extensive 20-point plan to execute perfectly. Because presence has such great resonance in our lives, you can choose just a few simple ideas that feel authentic to you, and see big returns. Here are five lessons to get you started.

**Lesson #1: You Are What You Think, Even When You're Not Paying Attention.**

Any discussion of presence has to start with your thoughts and internal conversations. Even when you're not paying attention, there's an unconscious narrative running through your head. We process everything through language; spoken or unspoken.

Neuroscience research shows that frequent thoughts become mental short cuts creating a literal path of least resistance in the brain. This has a major impact on presence, since:

THOUGHTS → BEHAVIORS → PATTERNS

Many of us walk around with destructive thoughts concerning our presence—often for years or decades! Consider these common ones:

- I can't speak in public.
- I'm not a people person.
- I'll appear self-promoting.
- I'm an introvert and hate to network.
- I don't have what it takes to play office politics.
- I never get the respect and credit I deserve.

These thoughts “show up” in various ways—through body language, facial expressions, tone, even the actions we take surrounding an event. For example, if you feel you can't present well, you'll avoid all opportunities to put yourself in front of groups which can be career limiting at best.

To have a compelling presence, first start by taking control of the narrative. You can do this by setting a Personal Presence Brand that's aligned with your values. To determine your personal presence brand and keep it top of mind, do the following:

- 1.** Write down a list of values you want to convey with your presence. (For inspiration, it may help to list qualities you admire in others.)
- 2.** Look at your list of chosen values, and condense or rank them into a top 5 list.
- 3.** Reflect on your list. What do these qualities have in common? Try to create a sound bite, acronym or archetype for these qualities. Abbreviate as much as possible. For example, “Credible and Compelling; Visionary and Vocal—C2V2” or “Steve Jobs of the education industry.” It can be anything you can keep in your thoughts—all that matters is that it has meaning and resonance for you.

Your personal presence brand shows your core values and beliefs. It reflects your personality. Forward-looking and far-reaching, it’s how you aspire to present yourself at work, and potentially in the rest of your life as well. Your personal presence brand is backed by your actions. Just as with any brand, your personal presence intention doesn’t change on a whim. It’s relatively static, building over time. Ideally, it’s an internal touchstone, a reminder of how to present the best version of you.

When you “hear” your thoughts going in an unhelpful direction, go directly to your personal presence brand instead. Start creating a new path of least resistance.

## **Lesson #2: Your Actions are Speaking So Loudly I Can Hardly Hear What You're Saying.**

Your thoughts show up in your body language and actions. The result is that others are reading them at all times—and they read them accurately and quickly. Dr. Paul Ekman, a psychologist and researcher made famous in Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*, discovered that humans can make—and process—10,000 facial expressions, most unconsciously. In fact, what he deems micro-expressions, are so minute that the conscious mind can't even detect them, but we interpret them all the same.

In high pressure situations, this is detrimental to the message you're trying to communicate. That's where situational intentions come in.

*“Your thoughts show up in your body language and actions. The result is that others are reading them at all times—and they read them accurately and quickly.”*

You have your personal presence brand, and the intentions that drive it. But you are constantly calibrating your situational intentions depending on the circumstance at hand. And while situational intentions should build and never detract from your personal presence brand, different occasions require different actions. A leader's personal presence brand may be “inspirational

visionary” but that’s going to be applied differently in a sales pitch than in a corporate meeting to announce a restructuring.

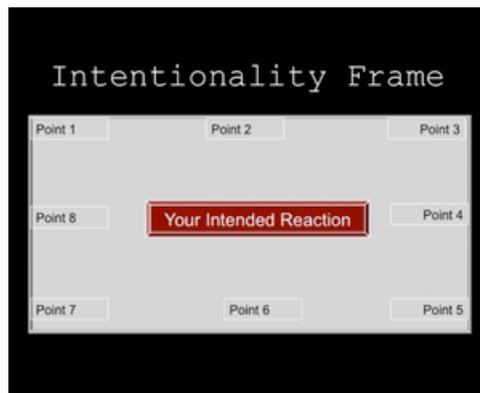
Your situational intention is about creating a desired impact. Rarely is it a one-size-fits-all scenario. People process in emotional terms, and often this is a good place to focus your situational intention. Consider what emotion you want to invoke in your audience and you’re generally close, if not spot on, to what your intention should be.

To craft a situational intention, before your next communications event, answer these questions:

1. How do you want your audience to feel about this exchange?
2. What emotion do you need to embody?

The answers to #1 and #2 outline your situational intention. (Note: Because you need to embody what you want to impart, the answers are generally the same.)

You can also use this tool, I call the Intentionality Frame, to prepare your talking points. Generally, when we plan what we want to say, we do so in a list. We can quickly get away



from our intention. Instead, put your situational intention in the middle, and develop your points along the frame. (You can then use them to populate your PowerPoint or other format.) It's a visual trick to stay close to your intention.

**Lesson #3: Go Ahead, Trip Over Your Own Perfectionism.** In our lives, we spend an inordinate amount of energy trying to cultivate an “A-game” where we exhibit a perfect presence with unfailing competence. The irony however, is that perfectionism is alienating. Rather than bringing people closer to us and supporting our ideas, it actually creates distance. And without connection you will lack presence. You may have perfect oratory skills, deliver impeccable work and have the focus of a laser, but if you aren't someone that others relate to on a human level, you will at best be admired but never fully trusted.

To have presence you must have individual connections with others—even those you never meet in person. This requires you to balance competency with vulnerability. Balance is the operative word here. Too much competency can be intimidating.. Too much vulnerability can read as weak and ineffective. So by no means am I saying that you should tell your deepest secrets at work or start office group hugs. But when we show our power alongside our humanity, others will connect to us.

Here are ways to apply this concept:

- Cultivate a personal posture of openness. Ask for feedback often and from all levels.
- Share personal stories that show your own struggles and achievements. Incorporate them to underscore important concepts and to set an example.
- Commit to being a good listener. Ask How and What questions rather than Why questions. When talking, don't prioritize phones and email over live people in front of you.
- Acknowledge other viewpoints, even divergent ones. Remember, acknowledgement does not equal agreement.
- Show integrity and speak the truth, even when it's hard.

**Lesson #4: Create Strategic Shock Value and Uncover Shining Moments.** Part of communicating a strong presence means that you have to be visible. This can be a tough pill for many to swallow because it smacks of self-promotion. If you're a leader currently, you're already in the spotlight. If you're not a leader, you need to find a spotlight opportunity. Luckily, there are ample times in an average person's day to become more visible.

Visibility creates a platform that allows your message to be heard by others, and for them to be inspired by it. It also helps you to reach a broader audience.

You're regularly in settings where you can inspire others. Consider meetings, networking events, client presentations, strategy sessions and speaking engagements, to name a few. If you think about your necessity to motivate others through communications, it's actually hard to find a time when you should not be inspiring.

Here's some good news. Part of being inspiring is simply being interesting. Having an impassioned point of view or a bold take on a situation is far better than the alternative—being taciturn and forgettable. A leader who plays it safe and stays under the radar inspires no one. There are times when shock is an effective strategy.

Consider one of the most common and reviled parts of work life: meetings. Instead of routine drudgery, make them a platform for your presence.

## Run the Un-Hated Meeting

Study after study shows that workers feel they spend too much time in meetings (on average 5-6 hours a week), and most meetings are considered unproductive. We don't need a research firm to tell us this—no one goes to work on a day packed with meetings and says, "Yippee, I can't wait to sit in meetings all day today!"

We deplore meetings because most are poorly run, organized around the wrong objectives, take too much time, and lack accountable outcomes.

Meeting dysfunction creates a wide open opportunity for someone to take a different approach. If you're running the meeting, commit to exceptional ones. Meetings display numerous leadership capabilities: accountability, facilitation, managing divergent viewpoints, building consensus, and follow-through.

If you run stellar meetings, word will get around fast.

- **Have a situational intention going in.** Before you go into a meeting, ask yourself, “What emotion do I want people to walk away with?” Here’s a clue: “To be informed” isn’t an emotion.
- **Live the tone you want to set.** The mood of the meeting leader establishes the tone of the meeting. If you want an energetic meeting, enter the room exhibiting energy, smiling and tell some lighthearted stories to kick it off.
- **Send out clear agendas ahead of time** with decision points to be made. Ask everyone to come prepared.
- **Use the time together to discuss real issues,** not for updating routine matters or reporting, all of which can be emailed ahead of time.

- **Change up the format,** and consider ways to make them lively versus routine. Every couple of months, ask for feedback for how to improve them.
- **Establish ground rules,** such as no piling on or cutting others off, share the air, and no phones.
- **Begin on time and end on time.** Set meetings to end on the :45 so people have enough time to make it to their next meeting. If you need to go over, set up another meeting or ask (don't assume) the group if they can extend for a few minutes.
- **End with accountabilities.** Have everyone verbalize what they've committed to doing.

*“ If you're running the meeting, commit to exceptional ones.*

If you're not the one running the meeting, you can still do your part by coming prepared with your best ideas and suggestions developed ahead of time. You can also suggest some of these enhancements to your meeting, and show some leadership chops in the process.

**Lesson #5: Conduct Your Own Presence Audit.** Ultimately, those with presence have an alignment between their intentions and how they are perceived. You can't figure out how you're doing on the latter without some sort of feedback, formal or otherwise. Finding out the effect you have on others gives you a helpful framework for focusing on your own presence.

If you have a formal feedback process in your work, that can be helpful. But chances are, it will be focused on functional expertise rather than presence. And frankly, which is more valuable to your career—learning that your spreadsheets need improving or that people tune out when you talk?

I suggest conducting your own quick presence audit to learn how you're really perceived. It doesn't take long, but it may cause some resistance within you. It may make you feel embarrassed or vulnerable. It may seem self-absorbed or soft. Press on. This transformative feedback is a gift that most don't receive.

# The Five-Step, One Hour or Less Presence Audit

**Step 1: Pick five of the right people.** Select five people who you know and trust to be part of your feedback circle. Choose people who are accustomed to seeing you in the kinds of situations where you're looking for feedback. If they know you in more than one aspect of your life (e.g., a work colleague on your softball team; a person you've worked with more than once) even better. While it's important that you trust the people and find them credible, make sure you don't just choose people that you like. You want to ask for feedback from people who will give you their unedited opinion.

**Step 2: Ask for participation.** No question, this is the hardest part. The feedback process will be most effective if you frame it correctly. You want your feedback circle candidates to know that you're sincere, that you won't hold a grudge and that you're doing this for your own personal development.

The rest is up to you. You can choose to do it casually over coffee or a beer. Or you can make a formal appointment and have the discussion over a desk. Pick the venue that fits your style and comfort level.

**Step 3: Ask two simple yet powerful questions.** You don't need a complicated set of questions to get good feedback. Presence is the way we move through the world; so ask direct questions that get to the heart of how you're perceived.

1. What's the general perception of me?
2. What could I do differently that would have the greatest impact on my success?

Depending on the person, you'll get answers that range in quality from brilliantly incisive to opaque. You may get overly specific answers because they are safer responses. Often they are too functionally related, such as, "you're great at financial analysis." If that's the case, give one clarifier such as: *What I mean is, what's the general perception of me as a leader/colleague/person?*

**Step 4: Manage your own reaction.** You'll get information that's as good as your ability to receive it. Your interviewees will be looking to see what effect their feedback has on you in real time. Every cell in your body will want to explain and defend. You may be avoiding eye contact, even wincing.

Your sole job is to listen. Don't interrupt. Don't offer explanations or make excuses. If you ask questions, they should be only to clarify: "Can you give me some more description around that?" or "What are some examples of that behavior that you've seen?"

After you receive the feedback, invite your colleague to share any ideas that may come up later. Then smile and express sincere gratitude for the gift you've just been given.

## The Case for Presence: A Burning Need for Inspiration

Cultivating a strong leadership presence reaps big rewards for you, your ideas, and your career.

But there's another reason I'm personally so passionate about this topic.

As a society, we're dying for inspiration. True inspirational leadership that creates cohesion and togetherness is hard to come by.

Inspirational leaders ignite a light in others, both a call to action and a breath of optimism. We need it in government, our community, and in business.

In January 2012, the *Washington Post* reported that trust in our institutions is at an alarmingly low level. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed believe that America is in decline. Seventy-nine percent have less trust in big business and major corporations than they did 10 years ago. Seventy-eight percent have less trust in government. Compare this with Gallup research from

the 1970s—yes, the Watergate, Vietnam, me-decade—when 70 percent of Americans had “trust and confidence” in government’s problem-solving abilities.

Inspirational leadership creates connection, which we covet more than ever.

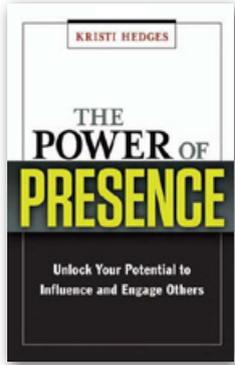
In 2011, Chally Group Worldwide and Right Management surveyed 1,400 global CEOs and human resource professionals to learn what gets in the way of leadership success. The #1 reason, at 40%, that leaders don’t succeed is a “failure to build relationships and a team environment.” By comparison, an inability to deliver results was only cited at 25%.

Especially in times of uncertainty, we need authenticity and passionate competence. You can’t phone in inspiration. To inspire a feeling in others you must have it first. The only way you inspire, influence and engage in an enduring way is through the power of presence.

We can start by working on our own. It’s a pay it forward proposition. Those with presence inspire others, creating momentum that carries on indefinitely.

**Who knows where the power of *your* presence ends? Only that it starts with you. 📍**

# Info



**BUY THE BOOK** | Get more details or buy a copy of [Power of Presence](#).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Kristi Hedges runs her own coaching practice, [The Hedges Company](#), and is a founding partner in the leadership development firm, [Element North](#). A chronic entrepreneur, she founded and ran one of the first technology PR firms in Washington, D.C. area for a decade. She spent the early part of her career in campaign politics, and now enjoys giving political advice to candidates by screaming at the TV. Kristi writes about leadership for Forbes.com. She shares her musings on leadership at [@kristihedges](#) or on her blog, [Communicate Leadership](#).

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on March 21, 2012 and is based on the best information available at that time.

The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Veer](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

# About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

## *800ceoread*

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).



Explore your knowledge further with [KnowledgeBlocks](#), a new project from 800-CEO-READ that lets you turn what you know into knowledge you can use.