

Speaking Presence Toolkit



by

Carla Kimball

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SpeakingPresenceSM Toolkit

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Introduction to Presence



Leadership presence. Lately, I've noticed that it's become a buzzword in business. Organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of presence for leaders at all levels. It is a tangible experience that touches us, inspires us, and transports us. We can easily identify people who have presence. They are confident, natural, relaxed. People seem to gravitate toward them and listen to what they have to say. And, businesses want more of this kind of leadership.

What exactly is presence? Who has it? How can we "get" it? We all know when a speaker has presence. But presence is not just for the fortunate few. We all have it. The problem is that our natural presence is often hidden beneath layers of self-consciousness, self-criticism and fear. Presence is a strong ally in difficult situations. But, we can lose it so easily when we become anxious, frightened or stressed.

Elements of Presence

Presence is the Opposite of Absence

Once I had the privilege of watching a lovely young woman at her high school graduation party as she performed a modern dance she had choreographed for her senior project. The living room had been cleared and we were all sitting and standing within five feet of her “stage.” Not an easy place to perform because the scrutiny of the audience was so close!

She was quite remarkable and maintained a strong connection with her movement, the music and the emotional tone of the dance, and she communicated all of that to her audience. Only occasionally did I notice that she became self-conscious and in those brief moments I saw a young woman feeling a bit awkward and no longer connected to us. Her presence, which was so strong when she was conscious of herself, her movement and her audience, disappeared when she became self-conscious. In her self-consciousness the beauty of her essence was absent.

This was fascinating for me because it so clearly marked the distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness-of-self and the difference between absence and presence. When we are self-conscious, we often feel awkward, clumsy and alone, with a sense of separation from the outside world. When we are really present, we are quite aware of ourselves in a balanced way as we fully engage in the activity of the moment and we connect to those around us so that we no longer feel separate, alone, afraid.

This is especially true when we speak in public. When we are anxious, we become self-absorbed and fearful about looking inept, making mistakes or forgetting what we planned to say. If, instead, we stay aware of ourselves as we focus our attention outward, placing a priority on the people in our audience, becoming open to receiving them, being genuinely curious about them, and thinking about how we can be of service to them, we lose that self-consciousness, we are in-the-moment, and we can then drop into a shared, collective place with our audience. This is presence!

In my workshops, as a way to help people recognize this quality of presence, I always begin with the following questions:

- ❖ Think of a person you've experienced as having a great deal of presence, someone who has had a significant impact on you. Who would that be?
- ❖ Now ask yourself, what qualities does this person have that convey that presence?

As we list these qualities, we begin to define the intangible, and often ineffable, experience of presence. Some qualities often mentioned in my workshops include:

- Authentic
- Connected
- Natural
- Calm
- Engaged
- Good story teller
- Trustworthy
- Passionate
- Peaceful
- Alive
- Humble
- Confident
- Relaxed
- Easy going
- Compelling
- Humorous
- Grounded
- Spoke directly to me
- Comfortable in their own skin
- Open-hearted

These are just a few of the qualities that show up time and time again when I ask these two questions. And, as people begin to understand that presence isn't really about being polished and perfect but much more about being present and human, they begin to relax and realize that perhaps they too might possibly be able to speak and act with presence. They begin to see that **presence** is really about being **present** through their **essence**.