

FILLING THE LEADERSHIP GAP



8 Strategies For Creating
Dynamic Leadership Presence

LESLIE A. RUBIN

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When Leadership Presence Matters Most

*Leadership requires different approaches as you go up the ladder.
I'm my authentic self, but sometimes, your authentic self can use some help.*

CONDOLEEZZA RICE, STANFORD UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND
FORMER US SECRETARY OF STATE

*Presence is not an object you can possess or a role you can play;
it's an authentic way of being that inspires and influences others.*

AMY CUDDY, AUTHOR AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST

The catalyst for this book came from my experience in working with one of the industry's greatest tech CEOs, John Chambers. I recall the day I realized I was going to work for Cisco and John. I was sitting in my office in Philadelphia working for the software company SAP. CNBC was on in the background, and I remember seeing an earnings call interview with then-chair and CEO John Chambers.

I literally said to myself, *I'm going to work for that man one day*. When you see someone who is confident, inspirational, and genuine, you just want to be around that energy.

Fast forward ten years, and I'm sitting across the desk from John, interviewing for a role to lead his executive communications team. (Spoiler alert: I got the job.)

What I learned in the years of working with John and the executive leadership team at Cisco and managing the hundreds of leaders, dignitaries, and employee events has enabled me to help other C-suite executives and leaders confidently become more authentic, inspire their employees, get the attention of the investment community, and make people want to take action.

So, what is it about someone like John Chambers, Oprah Winfrey, or Winston Churchill? While we can't quite put our finger on it, it's their leadership presence. They have the ability to confidently take command of a room, engage and effectively communicate to a variety of audiences, share their thinking and opinion with confidence, and know when to strike the balance between talking and listening.

Leadership presence is often formed in a first impression. When leaders project confidence, competence, and authenticity, they make a positive initial impact on their team members, peers, and superiors. A strong presence will also gain the trust and respect of their employees. People are naturally inclined to follow individuals who inspire confidence and who they believe have their best interests at heart.

Through this book, I've provided fundamental differentiators that highlight the importance of leadership presence in your career and give you the strategies to succeed in your unique leadership journey.

As an expert in communications, I believe leadership presence, is built and develops over time; effective communication will build your confidence to want and do more.

Time and time again, I've seen how leadership presence can inspire and motivate teams, even whole companies. When leaders lead with conviction and passion, they inspire their team members to share their vision and work toward common goals. Leaders who exude presence are better at conveying their ideas, making their messages more compelling, and motivating their teams to act.

I've outlined eight leadership strategies that I've seen make for a dynamic leadership presence.

What Is The Leadership Gap?

Let me first start by discussing the leadership gap. During performance reviews, leadership presence is the quality or skill most often highlighted as missing. But what exactly is meant by “you need to work on your presence?”

By my definition, the leadership gap is the disparity between the demand for effective leadership and an individual who possesses the necessary leadership skills and qualities. Leadership occurs at all levels. Filling the gap is your ability as a manager or

leader to balance the ability to collaborate and influence—up, down, across the organization with confidence and authenticity.

I recall facilitating a leadership training session for a biotech company, and a gal in the room told me she was attending because she was on a performance plan. Funny enough, my first impression of her was how much I liked her and how confident she was, but what I quickly realized is that confidence could be perceived as arrogance and become a weakness vs. a strength—her greatest strength.

By my definition, the leadership gap is the disparity between the demand for effective leadership and an individual who possesses the necessary leadership skills and qualities.

Why Leadership Presence Matters

Leadership presence matters as it is the underpinning of traits that are the very essence of leadership itself. It influences how leaders are perceived, how they command a room, communicate with confidence, and, ultimately, how they lead their teams toward success. And, like you, it is made up of many facets.

Leadership presence is what makes a person awe-inspiring. It is the balance of combination of style and substance, a mixture of confidence, positive attitude, and communication skills, and the ability to take everyone along the journey while feeling they are going in the right direction.

When I sat down to write this book, I thought of traits of leaders whom I admired: those who I thought, “When I grow up, I want to be like them.” Better yet, how did they learn to be charismatic, confident, or inspiring? I also gave thought to those leaders who had obvious areas that needed improvement, but I could tell, for whatever reason, were going to be someone who just wouldn’t change—even with feedback.

I have two stories about when I personally realized that leadership presence matters. Early in my career, I was gunning for a promotion, and my manager sat me down and gave me two points of feedback: I needed to be more strategic in my thinking and more approachable (less guarded) because I would be managing a team and they needed to know they could come to me, but also, that I would be their voice upwards within the company.

This same manager mentioned a female executive in the company and asked if I had paid attention to how she “maneuvered” in the company. Had I observed how she navigated the room—boardroom, meetings, company events—and spoke confidently, always came off as well prepared, and generally inspired employees. Her skills weren’t all hard skills; most were soft skills—the emotional intelligence side of leadership. I was able to get one-on-one time with this executive, we connected immediately, and she soon became my mentor. To this day, she is still someone I consider a close friend and valued role model.

In the many conversations that followed with this mentor, she disclosed she was an introvert by nature, had to prepare significantly before she spoke, and knew that being more

extroverted in practice would help her in her career. I was shocked by this disclosure and know that many reading this book are more introverted or ambiverted.¹

My mentor told me that for long-term success, she had to consistently demonstrate presence and maintain effectiveness over time. Be the most prepared person in the room, and be ready for anything.

I realized those who display a strong leadership presence are more likely to be considered for leadership roles and given opportunities to lead significant projects.

Initially taking “baby steps,” I’d ask for an opportunity to speak in a meeting with the executive leadership team, challenge myself, and take a stretch assignment in a different department. I began to get feedback and made changes based on that insight. Being intentional in developing a stronger leadership presence also helped build my confidence. As I began to feel more capable and self-assured, I was more willing to take on challenges and stretch beyond my comfort zone.

While the initial feedback wasn’t something I loved hearing, at the end of the day my skills were solid, but my lack of a strong leadership presence was a key factor impeding my own career advancement.

The second story. At a conference early in my career, there was a keynote speaker who caught my attention. I saw how people responded to him, the confidence that he exuded, and

how he effectively communicated to inspire an arena of people. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I wanted what this person *had*.

What I learned about his background, and what I since learned from so many who I have helped with building their personal brand and presence, is that there is no big secret to this. Many leaders weren't born with charisma, swagger, gravitas—they weren't born with presence. It becomes a learned skill, that eventually, becomes part of who they are.

It takes practice, coaching, trusted advisors, self-reflection, and, above all else, a desire to be better leaders and spokespeople; those who were consciously cultivated a leadership presence wanted to be better all-around leaders.

I bet that someone has paid you a compliment on more than one occasion, “You're so confident,” “I love your decisiveness,” or “You are truly yourself and authentic.” Thank them, but also give some thought as to how you want to be known. Is there something you've seen in another leader—empathy, consistency, integrity, and you want people to know you that way?

I know as you go through this book, you'll gain new perspective and insights to help you get to the next level or refresh in your current leadership skills.