

The Importance of Being Present

The PRES Model of Leadership Presence is a great way to remember how to be present in our leadership situations:

"P stands for Being Present, the ability to be completely in the moment, and flexible enough to handle the unexpected.

R stands for Reaching Out, the ability to build relationships with others through empathy, listening, and authentic connection.

E stands for Expressiveness, the ability to express feelings and emotions appropriately by using all available means - words, voice, body, face - to deliver one congruent message.

S stands for Self-knowing, the ability to accept yourself, to be authentic, and to reflect your values in your decisions and actions (Halpern & Lubar, 2003, p. 9)."

Reference: Halpern, B.L., & Lubar, K. (2003). Leadership presence: dramatic techniques to reach out, motivate, and inspire. New York: Gotham Books.

How many of us have ever attended, or lead, a meeting when our hearts or our heads were elsewhere? Presence is a key component in leadership and so it's incredibly important to know how to be present. Let's look more deeply at the tenants of the PRES Model by Halpern and Lubar (2003) and how they might apply to us, in our own leadership situations.

P is being present. But what does being completely in the moment really mean? I once attended a meeting where the facilitator lead small groups and before we got started put a small bandana in the middle of the group on the floor. She told us to think of something on our person at that moment that meant a great deal to us as individuals; something that if taken from us, we wouldn't leave the room without getting it back. Then she asked us to commit to being completely in the moment by putting whatever the item was in the bandana. After everyone had placed an item on the floor (which for some you could tell was purely a product of peer pressure because they looked reticent to give up their item), she tied the bandana up and placed it on a nail at the front of the room. She said that by placing our item in the bandana pouch, we committed ourselves to being in the moment. By giving our item over with the knowledge that we weren't getting it back until the day was over and our tasks complete, we were forcing ourselves to be present and stay on track. Now, I wouldn't ask every group with whom we work to do that kind of exercise. But for a moment think about the situation. Your prized possession is being held hostage, and to get it back you have to commit yourself to the task at hand by being present. Sounds easy enough, but we all know that with all of the different elements of our lives pulling us in different directions, it's harder than it appears. As leaders, we must create for ourselves a mental "commitment pouch". And in doing so, we force ourselves to drop at the door all of the external pulls, and for the time that we've allotted for our daily tasks, we commit ourselves to fully focusing on each element and honoring our teams by giving of ourselves, fully.

R is reaching out. Perhaps as leaders, this may be the easiest of the four tasks. After all, how many individuals identify themselves as leaders and would also identify themselves as a “people” person? In reaching out with true empathy, really listening to people, and developing a solid connection to people, we formulate a foundation for the teams in which we work that will withstand the natural conflicts and challenges that inevitably come along the way. How can we make these authentic connections? As leaders we contribute to these connections by allowing team members the opportunity to participate fully in the decision making process, build trust by committing to what we say we will do and following through, and maintaining a positive attitude. Actively listening, putting into practice by first being fully present in the moment and keeping an open mind to what we’ll hear, is another way that we can reach out to our team members. Hearing and validating what people need to say is an exceptionally easy way to demonstrate your commitment as a team leader.

E stands for Expressiveness. As leaders we can “walk the walk” by expressing our feelings and emotions, using words, voice, body, and face to deliver one congruent message. How many times have we wondered to ourselves if the person talking was actually living in concert with the message they were delivering? In a world where corporations crumble because of unethical decision making, *walking the walk* may feel like a rare occurrence. As leaders, our unspoken communication is as important as the spoken. Looking people in the eye, holding ourselves upright and forward, and smiling demonstrate we’re interested in what people are saying and doing. This also says we care about the speaker not just as teammates, but as a person. These are all little ways that we deliver a positive message to those around us.

S stands for Self-knowing. As leaders, we can only lead to our fullest potential if we have the ability to accept ourselves, to be authentic people, and to reflect our values in our decisions and actions. Dewey says that a key component of learning is reflection. This holds true not just for Math or English, but for gaining knowledge about ourselves. How often do we make time during our day, or even throughout our week, to stop and reflect? In a world that moves so quickly, it’s probably pretty hard to find the time. But self knowledge is so important to leadership, and true knowledge can only come through reflection. Find time during each day to take five to ten minutes that you can sit and reflect on the day. Jot down a few notes if that would help you. Think about a particular question that may be relevant to your own development as a leader, maybe “How might I have handled situation X differently if I could redo it?” In maintaining a consistent reflection time, you not only are able to have a few moments of quiet in an otherwise hectic day, but you are also creating a blueprint of your own development; an invaluable tool as a leader.

Are you present in your own leadership situation? How can you take these steps and make yourself more present each day?