

Leadership Presence – Substance Powers Style

Karl D. Speak

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“Style is just the outside of content, and content the inside of style, like the outside and the inside of the human body—both go together, they can’t be separated.”

-Jean-Luc Godard

A highly admired leader walks into a room full of people. Instantly their presence establishes them as someone who will make a difference, it differentiates them from others in the room. This is leadership presence personified. Power, Charisma. Respect.

Leadership presence is an intangible factor that amplifies a leader’s effectiveness.

Leadership presence is *earned authority* and is comprised of two parts. There is presence that is *shown*, emphasizing a leader's style when interacting with others. The other component is the presence that is *felt*, the expectation that the leader will make a difference based upon their track record of success.

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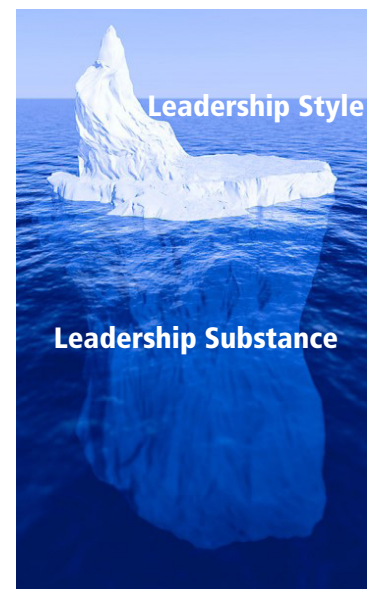
The conventional definition of leadership presence focuses on a leader's style, i.e., how they show up. Presence in this traditional perspective describes a leader acting decisively and confidently; having strong communication skills, especially in front of groups; and consistently showing up with a respectable appearance.

Showcasing these style qualities can be an important element in a leader's growth and a significant gate in being rewarded with more responsible roles. Projecting an image as a strong leader is important and according to some research may account for up to 26% of what it takes to accelerate a leader's career.

However, showing up and acting like a leader is only part of what it takes to be respected as a leader with presence. Presence that is felt has a disproportionately larger impact on a leader's effectiveness and value to an organization. The way a leader's presence is felt is often referred to as the “substance” of their presence. The substance of a leader's presence is like the keel of an iceberg, whereas the style of a leader is akin to the tip of the iceberg.

Both components of leadership presence, substance and style, are important and together and in proportion, improve a leader's effectiveness. Projecting the image of a leader that is not supported with a strong undergirding of achievement will appear contrived and soon fade. Leadership presence that is earned through achievement, but not burnished with a leadership style will lack traction and underserve the leader.

Learning how to show up like a leader is rather straight forward and can be mastered by emulating the behaviors of successful, admired leaders. Fostering and nurturing the substance of a leader's presence requires a process that leverages the authentic qualities of an individual leader.



The Substance of Leadership Presence: Differentiated, Perceived, Relevant

Any and every leader will greatly benefit by focusing on the substance component of their leadership presence. Getting credit for the substance that anchors a leader's presence begins by understanding three practical principles of leadership presence that are often overlooked.

“ A leader's presence is more a brand than a commodity.”

Leadership presence is not generic. A leader's presence is more a brand than a commodity. The attributes that define a leader's brand set an expectation of how a leader will make a difference, i.e., how their presence will be felt. The substance of a respected leader's presence is known by a set of distinctive qualities, e.g., customer-focused, risk-taker, intelligent, tenacious, that differentiates them and gives credence to their achievements. Leaders with a strong presence have a leadership brand that differentiates them from other leaders.

Projection is not perception. Presence is qualitative by nature and is based upon the perceptions of others. Perception management and enhancing leadership presence go hand-in-hand. Most leaders, to a greater or lesser degree, pay attention to projecting an image that positions them as effective and professional. Projection is not always perception and in fact clinical studies prove that, on average, in more than 50% of the cases the nature of a leader's presence is misperceived by others. Without intent and focus, perceptions are created haphazardly and without purpose and practice the authentic qualities of a leader's presence are likely to be unnoticed, misunderstood or under-appreciated.

It is easy for almost anyone to recognize that a leader makes a difference, whether it's in a meeting, managing a team or running a business line that delivers exceptional results. However, it is much more difficult to identify and articulate the specific qualities, e.g., the leader's strong analytical skills, that differentiates an individual as an outstanding leader. When a leader's outstanding qualities are accurately perceived by others, confidence in the leader's abilities grow.

Although every leader will concede that perceptions are important, it is only the minority that have taken the time and effort to elevate their perception management abilities. Perceptions are the currency of every leader's presence. Developing a perception management competency is necessary for a leader to build and maintain a strong, authentic presence. Creating a specific set of perceptions on a consistent basis is difficult and can be hit or miss but

narrowing the gap between what is projected and what is perceived is very important for every leader to bolster their presence.

All leadership presence is not equally valued. Being perceived as having leadership presence is one thing, however being recognized as having the “right” leadership presence can be a different matter, all together. Since leaders are the face of an organization, the nature of their presence matters.

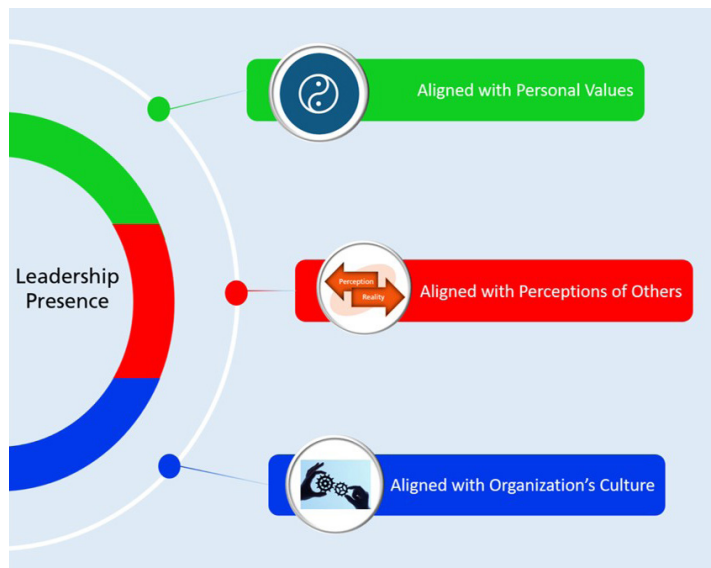
“ Perceptions are the currency of every leader’s presence.

A leader’s presence sends a strong signal to employees about an organization’s values. It’s no secret that the strength and uniqueness of an organization’s cultural values are key to its short and long-term competitive advantage. Therefore, a leader’s presence that amplifies the ethos of an organization’s character is highly preferred and valued.

Putting these three insights into everyday practice is not difficult and is more practical than you might imagine.

Expand Your Leadership Presence

For more than 20 years, I have worked with thousands of leaders implementing a three-part process to strengthen the substance component of their leadership presence.



An overview of this three-part process follows.

Part One: Aligning Your Leadership Brand with Your Personal Values

The strength of your leadership presence correlates with the distinctiveness of your personal brand. The more conviction and confidence you display in your leadership brand, the stronger your presence. Consistently displaying a distinctive presence comes from the clarity of knowing your brand of leadership. Naming it, is knowing it.

“*The more conviction and confidence you display in your leadership brand, the stronger your presence.*”

To be powerful and effective, your leadership presence must be authentic and grounded in your personal values. Developing a strong leadership presence begins with you clearly identifying the attributes of your leadership brand (see sidebar). Clearly and

carefully defining the attributes of your authentic leadership brand will provide a framework for behaving consistently—a hallmark of a trusted, respected leader.

Simply stated, the attributes of your leadership brand describe the behaviors in working and interacting with others. This framework will help you consistently display the style and substance of your leadership presence. The attributes of your leadership brand will create a guide for the perceptions that you want to create, that in turn represent your authentic leadership presence. The attributes of your leadership brand must be in alignment with your personal values to ensure a consistent and credible leadership presence.

Taking Action

Defining Your Leadership Brand

1. Determine your five most important personal values. Now highlight the one value that you are most passionate about and is at the core of who you are. This is your leadership brand ethos.
 2. Define the attributes of your leadership brand. Begin by writing down the 5 outstanding leadership brand standards, the attributes that describe how you behave as a leader, e.g., asks insightful questions, tenacious, fact-driven decision maker. Now write down your leadership brand style, the outstanding attributes of the way you interact with others, e.g., approachable, to-the-point, humble.
 3. Create your leadership brand promise, a 3-8-word statement, using your leadership brand ethos, that declares how you will make a difference for others, e.g., *Living and Cultivating Excellence.*
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Part Two: Aligning Your Leadership Brand with How You Are Perceived by Others

The second principle of strengthening your presence is to make sure that others have a consistent, realistic perception of your leadership brand. It is important that you hold yourself accountable for ensuring there is alignment between how you are perceived by others and the leadership brand you have defined for yourself. It is impossible to control how others perceive you, but there are things you can do to impact it.

For more than 15 years we have helped thousands of leaders use a process we call “Managing Your Perceived Presence” as a practical way to manage perceptions. This data-driven process provides leaders with more confidence their leadership presence is more accurately and consistently perceived by others.

Based upon our research, a very large segment of leaders believe the substance of their leadership presence is not accurately perceived by others. They were convinced that others didn’t understand the leadership qualities that differentiated them as successful leaders or there was a lack of consistency of how they were perceived by others. We canvassed more than 500 leaders to understand what they believe are the obstacles preventing them from being perceived accurately. By far the most common response was the leader did not have a top-of-mind understanding of the most important leadership qualities that differentiated them and therefore were inconsistent in trying to create “accurate” perceptions.



Leaders who had defined their Leadership Brand felt much more confident their presence would be accurately perceived. Managing perceptions begins with the self-knowledge of your Leadership Brand and being skilled at creating perceptions that accurately reflect it.

The second step in the process is to gain a data-driven understanding of how you are perceived by others. A leader must engage in a large sample, statistically reliable study to gain a true understanding of how they are perceived by others. Our meta-analysis of leaders' individual perception studies reveals two key findings; most leaders find a wide dispersion of perceptions and lack of distinction in how others describe their leadership presence.

When you clearly understand how you are perceived by others (see sidebar), you can begin the process of managing a the "perception gap," the difference between the presence you want to project (as defined by your Leadership Brand), and how you are perceived by others. Allowing a "perceptual gap" to languish is like leaving leadership presence money on the table.

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The final step in the closed loop system is applying the principles of perception management to overcome any misperceptions or reinforce certain attributes of your leadership brand that are important to

differentiate you as a leader – narrowing the perception gap. Some people take managing perceptions for granted. Others feel they have little control over how others perceive them and fall short of making the effort to manage how they are perceived. The over-confident and the avoiders are both missing opportunities to take advantage of the power of perceptions. There are a set of essential principles of perception management and every leader will benefit from understanding and learning to apply them in various scenarios.

All leaders have perceptual gaps to one degree or another, at some time or with certain people. Narrowing the gap will pay handsome dividends in establishing your authentic leadership presence.

Taking Action

Understanding Your Leadership Perception Gap

1. Find out how your leadership brand is perceived by others. Ask others to provide you with the 3 words that come to mind when they think of you as a leader. Ask at least 10 people for their perceptions. Remember, you are looking for an honest assessment.
 2. Over a two-week time-frame take notes of the words others use when giving you a compliment or criticism in meetings and other interactions. Combine the data from steps 1 & 2 and make a list of the top 5-7 common perceptions that were reported.
 3. Compare the data you collected with the attributes of your leadership brand. Determine where there are gaps between how you are perceived and how you want to be perceived, described by your leadership brand.
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Part Three: Aligning Your Leadership Brand with the “Organization’s Way”

For thriving organizations, leadership presence is not generic. Thriving organizations place extremely high value on the presence of their leaders, for many it’s at the heart of their human-capital strategy.

The world’s most successful companies have an inherent, unshakable belief that the distinctive qualities of its culture are its source of true competitive advantage. The most admired companies place the highest priority on sustaining the ethos of its culture (e.g., “the Google Way,” “the Amazon Way” or “the UPS Way.”). High-performing organizations characterize their culture as their internal brand, emphasizing its strategic importance, just as it does its marketplace brands.

The third principle maintains the most valued leadership presence reinforces the key values of an organization’s internal brand. Your leadership presence must be established in the context of the organizational culture within which you work. A leader, after all, is the face of the organization, not a lone wolf.

“Leveraging the alignment between your leadership brand and the organization’s internal brand will develop benefits for you and your employer.”

Collectively, the presence of each leader is the leading edge of an organization’s internal brand and therefore the value of leadership presence cannot be overstated in sustaining the success of the business. The alignment of a leader’s brand attributes and the attributes of an organization’s internal brand form a tightly knit fabric that is highly valued by all within an organization (and by external stakeholders, as well).

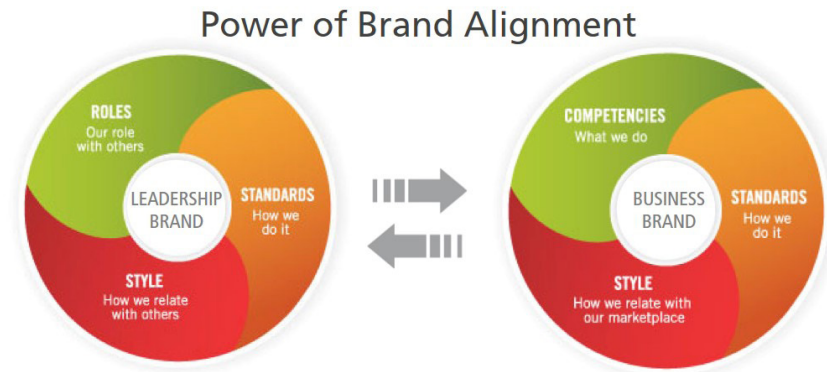
The more alignment you find between your leadership brand and your employer’s internal brand, the more your leadership presence will be admired and valued. Also, the more alignment between these two brands, the more you will feel your leadership is natural and authentic.

Taking Action

Understanding the alignment between your leadership brand and the “organization’s way.”

1. Some organizations have a very well understood “way,” and the attributes are easy to describe. If that is not the case in your organization, start with reviewing the core values of the organization. Next, review the history of the company and take note of how key historical leaders are described. It is also productive to talk with individuals in the company, especially those with a long tenure, about how they describe the “company way.”
 2. Based upon your research write down the 5 key attributes that describe the outstanding qualities of the company’s way. Now define the 3 internal brand style attributes. Determine these by observing how the organization’s key leaders interact with others in meetings.
 3. Determine the alignment between your leadership brand and the organization’s way (its internal brand). Don’t expect exact alignment, you’re looking for the points of alignment that you can leverage to enhance your leadership presence.
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Leveraging the alignment between your leadership brand and the organization's internal brand will develop benefits for you and your employer. Maximizing the benefits for you and the organization begins with you clearly understanding where the two brands align.



Strong alignment between your leadership brand and your employer's internal brand will accelerate your development and success. The more your leadership brand is in alignment, the more likely you will:

- Have greater impact on your employer's success.
- Gain the trust of team members, peers and other employees. This leads to faster, more confident decision making.
- Experience less stress and often perform with greater "flow."
- Have increasingly greater opportunities to expand the latitude of your leadership brand through new roles and assignments.

Your Stronger Authentic Leadership Presence is Waiting

Strengthening your leadership presence is not complicated, it's a matter of making a conscious, consistent development effort. By addressing each of these three principles, any and every leader can build a strong, authentic presence, the kind of presence that is shown and felt throughout an organization.

Karl's insights into the power of leadership presence came about as a by-product of his pioneering work in corporate brand, personal brand and internal brand building over the past 25+ years. His disruptive work in internal brand building has centered around several innovations focused on personally engaging and aligning leadership teams. His best selling book, *Be Your Own Brand*, has been translated into 12 languages and has sold over 100,000 copies. Karl is also an author of *Leading Authorities On Business, Winning Strategies from the Greatest Minds in Business Today*.

Understanding the essential role of leadership in brand building, Karl led the development of Broadview Leadership Development, a powerful new leadership development curriculum based upon his innovative Power of Brand



Alignment framework. The workshops and development tools have been used by tens of thousands of leaders in 23 different countries. In addition to innovative workshops on leadership development and team alignment, the workshop, *Women – Accelerate! Why Hesitate?* provides women leaders with a breakthrough learning experience that leverages their natural abilities as leaders. The popular digital app *Broadview Personal*

Brand Discovery Tool has been used by business professionals around the world.

Karl has implemented his innovative approach to internal brand building, through his work at *Brand Tool Box*, a firm he started in 1984. Karl has worked with many of the most well-known brands, such as 3M, *LeadingAge*, American Express, AT&T, BASF, BMW, Cabela's, Cargill, CenterPoint energy, Consumers Energy, FedEx, Honeywell, IBM, ING, Mosaic, Motorola, Proctor & Gamble, Securian, Skandia, Sony Corporation, St. Jude Medical, Stanford University Medical Center, Syngenta, Target, The Scotts Company, The Wall Street Journal, Toro, and Walgreens have benefited from Karl's consulting and internal brand building programs.

As a respected thought leader, Karl's perspective has been reported in many different media outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, Men'sHealth, BrandChannel, NPR, NBC, CBS, ABC, The New York Times, StarTribune. *Leadership Excellence*, *La Gaceta*, *Irish Times*, *Lavanguardia* among many other publications. Karl also serves as an "expert witness" in legal cases involving matters relating to brand.

Karl holds a Masters Degree in Economics from the University of Minnesota. He has taught in the MBA programs at University of Minnesota, Saint Thomas University, and has been guest lecturer at University of Westminster in London, Capella University, ESADE University in Madrid, among others.



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