

Developing and Branding Our “Leadership Presence!”

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Joe came to me for coaching because he received feedback that he needed to build his leadership presence.

Unfortunately, he didn’t know what that meant. His boss wanted him to build his confidence around his own abilities and have others see him ready to move into a key role in his growing company. His boss wanted people to experience Joe’s “leadership presence.” Joe needed some clarity on what his boss was really looking for. Also, he was unsure of how others really saw him as a leader.

So, the first questions Joe and I needed to explore, were “What is your brand?” and “What do you want your brand to be?” Then, “How can we develop a strong leadership presence into your brand and into your current role in the company?”

Developing a leadership presence is essential for our success as leaders. And yet, it can be difficult for us to determine what it really is. Like Joe, we must be mindful of how others are experiencing us. We need to ask some critical questions: “What are people saying about our style?” How do others perceive our value to the profitability and success of the organization?” Then, we need to ask ourselves, “How do we want them to experience us? How can we create a personal leadership brand that demonstrates “leadership presence” - remaining authentic and true to our own values while demonstrating to others that we are fully committed and accountable to their needs?”

These are important questions to address. But first let’s start by further defining “leadership presence.”

Definition of Leadership Presence

John Baldoni, in his book, *Lead Your Boss, The Subtle Art of Managing Up*, defines leadership presence as “earned authority.” He explains that first a leader must earn the respect and trust of coworkers. *Leadership Presence* is a fundamental competence and is essential for inspiring and motivating others. It is more than just charisma. Charisma can add to presence, but leadership presence is developed over time, when people feel deeply connected and engaged with the leader.

Then, Muriel Maignan Wilkins and Amy Jen Su in their book, *Own the Room*, use the definition – “the ability to consistently

and clearly articulate your value proposition while influencing and connecting with others.”

To me, leadership presence is truly about articulating your value proposition and influencing and connecting with others. Also, it is “earned,” but is more than a competence . . . it is a state of being. It is a state of being which demonstrates three things:

- An energetic connection with others,
- Authentic self-expression, and
- The ability to inspire and motivate

Understand Leadership Branding

We all have a leadership brand, or identity and reputation, which represents people’s perceptions and experience of us. Our brand is either positive or not so positive in the minds and hearts of everyone we come in contact with. As Jerry McLaughlin in his Forbes article says, “Your brand name exists objectively; people can see it. It’s fixed. But your brand exists only in someone’s mind.”

Our brand is determined by our intentions and mindsets, our energy, our abilities, and our behaviors. It can impact how we communicate with others, influence, collaborate, etc. It impacts all aspects of leadership. Having a strong leadership presence is one part of our brand and an extremely important one. People say they feel trust and respect and want to engage, interact with us. They are willing and motivated to let us lead!

What is our Brand Relative to Leadership Presence?

The process of developing our leadership presence starts with understanding our leadership brand. First of all, what are our own values, standards, and personal mission for our leadership? What is our core energy? How do we align with that energy? What are our intentions and expectations of others? Next, we need to ask, what is our impact with all of that on others? What are people’s perceptions of us as leaders? How do they experience our energy? How do they see us communicating and engaging others in / through change? What level of trust and motivation do they experience when they are in our presence? Regardless of our own intentions, it is the perceptions and experience of others which can help us determine our true leadership brand.

One of the biggest benefits of conducting 360 assessments for leaders is that they discover the reality of their own brand. First, they must define their stakeholders – all of those people who are most vested and impacted by their leadership. Then, they discover how their stakeholders perceive them and what they want / need from them. They learn if their intentions are aligned with the reality of their brand. If not, it raises the question, “How can we create a leadership brand that is authentic and true to our own values while demonstrating to others that we are fully committed and accountable to their needs?”

How do We Develop Leadership Presence?

Below are some clear steps we can take:



1. 360 Feedback Assessment

As mentioned above, the first step in developing our leadership presence is to be mindful and self-aware of how we “show up” to others around us. The best way to learn others perceptions, wants and needs is to ask them! We can do this through one-on-one conversations, third party interviews, or conducting a formal 360 assessment process. It is important that the 360 tool is based on quantitative data that measures the person’s leadership competencies in comparison to a significant data base of successful leaders. It is also important that the 360 instrument measures a person’s energetic connection to others, their empathy, their passion, their ability to inspire, and their ability for authentic self-expression. As we

discussed, these are the qualities that define leadership presence. Also, there must be opportunity for feedback providers to offer qualitative data – open-ended questions that allow stakeholders to offer suggestions. Everyone involved in the process must have the understanding that the final report is kept totally confidential and will be used only for development purposes. It should be administered and debriefed by a neutral third party in a nonjudgmental, safe coaching environment.

2. Listening to Learn

Once we have the opportunity to understand how we are perceived, we need to go back to our stakeholders to elicit more information. We need to “listen to learn” by staying open and deferring judgment when we don’t agree with what is being said. The important information we need to glean from our stakeholders is found in the following questions:

- Which leadership behaviors are well received and which are unproductive?
- What do my stakeholders want and need from me?
- How can I communicate more authentically with them?
- What do they need to feel motivated and inspired?
- How can I connect energetically with them?

3. Envisioning / Establishing a Leadership Presence Brand

When we are clear on the current reality of our brand, and we understand the needs of our stakeholders; the next step is to envision how we want to be perceived! How do we want to “show up” to others? Working with an internal or external thought-partner, we can become clear on what *leadership presence* might actually look like for us. This *leadership brand* should be articulated in writing, so we are very clear how we want to “be” as leader. It needs to incorporate three important areas of being:

- *Energy* – What “energy” am I projecting? What impact do I want to make energetically on others?
- *Mindsets* – What are my beliefs about myself, others, and the world? What assumptions might I be making? What are my intentions? How do I want others to experience my attitudes?

- *Competencies* – What knowledge, skills, and behaviors do I need to connect, motivate, and inspire others?

4. Creating an Action / Learning Plan

From the clear articulation of our leadership brand and how we want to project it, we create an action, learning plan. The plan should be clear on:

- *What are 2-3 goals for creating my brand?*
- *What steps might I take to make those happen?*
- *What impact with this action make on my stakeholders?*
- *When will the specific action steps be complete?*

5. Practicing New Mindsets

Once we are mindful and aware about our own mindsets, and we understand our perceptions, beliefs, assumptions, we can make a *conscious choice* to change them. The next step is to practice, practice, practice. Some examples of important mindsets for creating a leadership presence are:

- *The Responsibility Mindset* – I am responsible for my thoughts, feelings, and actions. No person, place, or situation is the cause of my experience.
- *Conscious Choice Mindset* – I get to “choose” how I want to experience a given situation. I am empowered to act from that place of choice.
- *Positive View of Others* – I trust / assume that everyone is simply doing their best. I may not agree with their choices and actions, but I choose to trust that their intentions are to do their best in the given situation.

6. Practicing New Behaviors

From the 360 assessment, we can determine which leadership behaviors are productive and which have a negative impact on our stakeholders. Once we scope out how we can demonstrate new

behaviors in certain situations . . . the next step, once again, is to practice, practice, practice. Some examples of important leadership behaviors are:

- *Use of inquiry* – Instead of the “tell and sell” approach to leadership, we use more inquiry to elicit stakeholder input.
- *Empathy* – The ability to connect with others and check in with them to learn what is important to them at any given moment.
- *Listen to learn* – Using “active listening” to ensure we heard what people are really saying. What are the thoughts and feelings behind their words?
- *Mutual problem solving* – Instead of being “the expert” or the one who has to have all the answers, we believe others can offer valuable ideas and solutions to problems. We use the question, “In what ways might we resolve this . . .?” to allow stakeholders to participate in the planning and problem solving process for win-win solutions and mutual alignment on goals.
- *Passion* – Demonstrating a good deal of energy, intensity, and authentic expression to keep others engaged and enthused.

Summary

Our leadership brand is how we are seen / experienced by the world. We have an opportunity to determine and shape our brand to demonstrate our strong leadership presence. We do so by first understanding how our stakeholders perceive us. From that information, we listen and learn what is working and what is not. We learn what our stakeholders need from us to be motivated and inspired. Then, we envision what we want our brand to be. What mindsets and behaviors will help us develop a personal brand that demonstrates?

- An energetic connection with others,
- Authentic self-expression, and
- The ability to inspire and motivate

From there, we develop an action / learning plan to make it happen. Of course, we need to continually be mindful and self-aware of what we are doing and how we are perceived. We do that by revisiting a 360 assessment process and having an ongoing, open feedback loop with our stakeholders. By

taking these steps, we ensure that our leadership presence is not only how we are perceived by others, but who they really know us to be!

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