

Sheila Wherry

THE PINNACLE OF PRESENCE

How great leaders
connect, instil trust
& get the right results

Sheila is a coach and consultant with a 'secret weapon'
– the ability to use emotional intelligence to get to the
heart of people-performance.

Joshua Freedman, CEO of Six Seconds EQ Network

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OF
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This book uses a composite of client stories to highlight key points. Names & details have been anonymised to protect individual privacy.

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TESTIMONIALS

Sheila's genuine passion for her chosen field is almost infectious. She is thought-provoking and insightful – coaching and challenging as required.

Through warmth, humour, perception and expertise, Sheila encouraged me to view work situations through multiple lenses and helped me build tools to respond. She remains a silent supportive voice urging me forward. I value the insights Sheila helped me develop on various occasions over the years, and highly recommend her as a professional advocate and coach for individuals and teams alike.

Aideen O'Donovan, Head of Finance and Decision Support

Sheila is a consummate professional and highly regarded coach. She has consistently received outstanding feedback and results for clients, and is strongly committed to her own continuous professional development. I would have no hesitation in recommending Sheila's coaching services.

Dr Crissa Sumner, Head of Employee Experience Solution Strategy

Sheila is an empathetic and highly skilled coach, who will help you to unlock and realise your full potential; on both a professional and personal level. Through working with Sheila as my executive coach, I have been able to fine tune my self-awareness and reconnect with my creativity as a professional, and an artist. I am now painting fearlessly again.

Beverley Farrell, Category Manager, IT Strategic Sourcing

Sheila's guidance, although sometimes confronting, was always incredibly insightful. She is an inspirational coach who lives what she teaches, and I still reflect on many of the lessons she provided me.

Julie Bown, General Manager Mission Solutions

In the time that Sheila managed our coach team, she showed herself to be a highly capable leadership and executive coach and commercially-minded manager, with a unique ability to collaborate across multi-functional teams and build connections with colleagues and client alike. She is well known within our team for her empathetic, supportive, and performance-minded approach. Sheila also consistently received strong feedback from her coaching clients, and demonstrated a clear and unwavering passion for high quality coaching and client focus.

Lorraine Smith, (Associate) Director, Talent Management
NSW and ACT

I have had the great privilege of being coached by Sheila for over 12 months. At the beginning, it was confronting, but now I am so grateful, Sheila has helped me grow professionally and personally. I feel I am a better leader and a more resilient and happier person as a result. Highly recommended!

Julie Collins, Head of Compliance

Sheila is an inspiring and innovative coach in both individual and team situations. Her innate ability to quickly recognise and work with a team dynamic holds her in good stead, to bring out the best in each participant in a team workshop environment. This results in high performing individuals moving into a space of psychological safety, where they can work together to become a high performing team.

My personal experience and the feedback from my team regarding Sheila's workshops and coaching, has been tremendous. I have witnessed improvements in resilience and optimism. In addition to increased ability to strategise and problem solve in a fast-paced environment.

Amalie Smith, Head of Network Delivery

This book is dedicated to my tribe:

*My family, we've come so far, and I'm so thankful
for your love, individually and as a family.*

*My close friends. My life is richer with you in it.
Kylie, my partner in life and my haven.*

*And Connor, my greatest gift and a presence maestro. I'm
so proud of all that you are.*

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine working with a team that was open, curious and safe enough to talk and think through problems together, to find innovative solutions, without the risk of negative consequences or interpersonal fear.

Imagine feeling like you no longer have to keep working harder and pedalling faster to succeed in this complex, fast-paced, hyper-connected world – and that you no longer have to come up with all the solutions yourself.

Imagine starting each work day feeling grounded and invigorated, confident in how you are leading yourself and others, clear you are making the right choices. Life may be hectic, but you feel a sense of ease and calm. You have a clear direction. You are present.

Fantasy or possibility?

If you read this book and put in some reflective work, it's a definite possibility.

For many years I have had the privilege of supporting smart, brave and dedicated leaders to improve their ability to work effectively with others to produce results.

They have moved from being stuck or overwhelmed, to being empowered to release their own potential, and the potential of their teams. Witnessing these transformations has galvanised me to put down the steps that I have seen work again and again.

There is no cookie cutter solution of course, and no two leaders are the same. The approach I offer is a framework, and it starts with trust and connection.

The central piece of work these leaders do is to build their capacity to connect – with themselves and with others. This is an essential starting point because:

- connection is the key to cultivating relationships
- relationships are the key to collaboration
- collaboration is fundamental if you want successful results.

You can't bypass relationships to get to results. Not in the long term. Not sustainably.

Simple? Yes. Easy? No. Or at least it takes some practice. And it takes a process.

My process is The Pinnacle of Presence framework and incorporates three distinct domains — Inner Presence, Leadership Presence and Team Presence.

You may have heard and read about presence. It's a nebulous term that means different things to different

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people. The main thing that people agree on is that leaders need *it*, (whatever *it* is).

Let's simplify it for a moment and say that presence is bringing your best self to the role of leadership. To bring your best self to the role of leadership you need to understand yourself – your inner drivers, your behaviours, your strengths and weaknesses – and you need to understand the effect these have on others. This is why I have expanded the concept of presence to the three domains:

- **Inner Presence** – Being self-empowered to fully accept and believe in yourself, confident to show others the real you.
- **Leadership Presence** – Projecting your Inner Presence outwards, signalling that you have what it takes to lead others.
- **Team Presence** – Cultivating an environment that empowers teams to collaborate, learn and innovate.

Or to put it more simply:

- Inner Presence – why you do it
- Leadership Presence – how you do it
- Team Presence – doing it together

The presence you bring to yourself and your teams can be the greatest gift to yourself and those you lead. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the relentless demands of your work, presence will help you feel calm and confident. If you are feeling frustrated by your working relationships or by missing out on promotion opportunities, it will help you generate connection and credibility. If your teams are fragmented and underperforming, it will help you cultivate collaboration and creativity.

This book shows you how.

I will show you practical ways to set aside the individual, leadership and team habits and behaviours that aren't working for you. In their place, I've provided a roadmap to a new way of living and leading – more thoughtfully, more intentionally – using human connection as the key.

I will take you through a process to support your own self-reflection and learning. We will work together, as I do with my clients, to discover your inner resources and find new ways to manage the challenges of modern leadership.

PART 1

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN LEADERSHIP

Increasingly, the sources of competitive advantage will come from the capacity to build cooperative partnerships across various ecosystems. That will bring to the centre stage the capacity to create cultures of cooperation, trust and inclusion.

LYNDA GRATTON,
PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICE,
LONDON BUSINESS SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1

RELATIONSHIPS TO RESULTS

The door opens and my new client walks in. Let's call her 'Ash'. Ash's face is taut. Her brow is drawn together and her forehead furrowed. Unconsciously, as we start to chat, she clenches her hands tightly together. With a few gentle questions, her words start to flow, then gain momentum. Ash explains that she is overwhelmed. Frustrated. Drained. Her problems are multiplying, and she doesn't know how to manage them. She can't understand it. She's a professional and, until recently, confident in her abilities. Now she's not so sure. She just can't see a path forward.

Nearly every leader I work with, no matter what challenges or opportunities they face, has a common story. They have worked hard to get to where they are, and now they have hit a snag and are struggling to produce their best results.

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It could be that they:

- have lost their zest for leading
- are missing out on promotion opportunities
- feel overwhelmed, or burnt out, or are on the cusp of burnout
- are frustrated by those around them – their manager, their peers, their stakeholders – and the relationship has frayed
- feel confused about whether the choices they are making are the right ones
- are receiving feedback that their behaviour is being portrayed in a negative light
- feel their team are disengaged or demotivated.

They know they have reached a stumbling block but they don't know what's causing it or how to untangle themselves from it.

Add to this that they are expected to be on and available 24/7 in this fast-paced, hyper-connected world of work, and they feel they have to pedal harder, faster and longer to keep ahead of the curve. This can leave them

feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, unclear about what to prioritise to turn their ship around, and how to navigate the waters ahead. Does this sound familiar?

There's a central theme to these problems: their management strategies are no longer working. They are more focussed on results than relationships, which is a leadership style that is no longer effective in the complex times in which we are living and working. Why not? Because relationships are the building blocks of effective teams, and in today's complex world working in teams is no longer optional, it's imperative. The problems we are facing are so complex that teamwork and collective thinking are essential to providing innovative solutions, creative problem solving and getting work done.

This is an argument supported by global accounting firm Ernst & Young in their 2013 report entitled 'The Power of Many'. In this report, they showed the results of a survey of 821 senior executives. An overwhelming majority believed that the ability to develop and manage teams was essential for future competitiveness. These executives felt they spent over 50% of their time on team activities. This really brings the ability of leaders to effectively manage and work with their teams into sharp focus. The report states that, 'Leadership in a team setting is much less about command and control, and more about getting the most out of a diverse and experienced group of individuals.'

Until recently, leaders used rational cause-and-effect

strategies to come up with solutions. Certainty and predictability meant you could use your expertise, rational mind and a more commanding or hierarchical style of leadership. In fact, you were paid to use your expertise and come up with the answers.

But that certainty and predictability is no longer there. Our world of work has shifted unrecognisably and will continue to do so. We no longer work nine to five, remain with one company for decades, or switch off like we used to when leaving the office. We don't sit at our desk in one location, and many of us don't sit together with our teams each day. Virtual meetings have replaced face-to-face meetings and teams have become more geographically dispersed and diverse. Changes will continue. They are hurtling towards us at speed and we can't plan for what's next. We don't know what 'next' is.

In this new world of work, leaders today are like racing car drivers, but they are on a new and different racetrack.

In the past, drivers pulled into the pits when their tyres needed changing. The pit stop team practiced and, through their coordinated effort, could change all four tyres in under two seconds! Astonishing. The driver then raced back out onto the course. It was a level playing field; all drivers needed to make these pit stops. But the driver with the competitive edge was the one with the team who worked well together and honed their art.

Not anymore.

The ‘racing-car driving’ leaders of today need more than speed and consistency from their teams if they want their business to maintain a competitive edge.

As a leader, you used to drive around the racetrack before the event to plan, prepare and visualise tactics. Now the track ahead is shifting and reshaping before your very eyes. You can’t see what is around the next bend. Your tyre requirements keep changing based on the unpredictable new track. Your team must calculate what tyres you need at any given moment. More pit stops, less time, and harder choices.

As the driver, what do you do in this situation? Be clear on your purpose: to win the race. Absolutely. Be clear on operational aspects, such as making sure your team is highly skilled and motivated. Of course.

Yet so much remains unknown.

To remain agile and thrive, you must shift your thinking and ask: what does this team and our stakeholders need? And your team and all other stakeholders must do the same.

As a client recently shared, ‘My senior leadership team, and the wider team generally, talk of change fatigue. I get it. But it isn’t going to change. Our business, as it currently stands, won’t exist in five years. Our purpose will be the same but how we achieve success will be totally unrecognisable from any strategy we are employing now’.

You can no longer be expected to have all the answers.

Now more than ever you need the brains trust of your whole team.

Thinking about this racing car scenario, the key for your team to maintain competitive advantage and produce effective outcomes is their ability to rapidly, effectively and intentionally **talk and think together, with agility**. It is essential that the leader and their crew are openly discussing issues, making suggestions, owning mistakes, coming up with potential solutions together: tweaking and nudging, and all this must be done at speed. It takes a team that feels safe enough to do this together. One that understands the necessity of speaking up, giving feedback, and challenging ideas and each other. Respectfully. One that can do this within their team, but also across teams: a network of teams talking and thinking together.

Leaders today are not necessarily driving the car either. Their role may be best served in the pits, creating the right environment for their team to keep navigating the changing path ahead.

As a client shared, 'I work hard to empower my senior leaders. I say: You are my leadership team. The best experience for me is if you can come to a common view before coming to me. I don't want to be the conduit for decision making. Make decisions. I will always back you, as long as you aren't shooting from the hip. You can't turn the car if you aren't moving'.

This leader is explicitly encouraging her team to

question, challenge, have hard conversations and keep driving forward. Collectively. Interdependently.

Yet it doesn't stop there. There is a need for end-to-end accountability across the business, and an avoidance of siloed thinking. There's a need to draw out connections *between* teams, as well as within teams.

My client demonstrates this as she explains, 'I work exceptionally hard to build trust with *all* my stakeholders. I seek to connect in order to understand their needs'.

My client understands the fundamental need to focus on cultivating **relationships** to get to the **results**.

And to do this she starts with trust.