

## CHAPTER 2

# TRUST. CONNECT. COLLABORATE.

*It turns out that trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.*

BRENÉ BROWN

*DARE TO LEAD*

The traditional idea of leaders as strong and forceful people who lack warmth is outdated. We now know that great leaders start by gaining trust, listening, and developing empathy and emotional intelligence. Whether you're talking about leadership, friendship, parenting or any human relationship, people need to know that you care, that you have good intentions and that they can trust you. Without this vital element they will not get behind you or the relationship.

People only value a leader when they trust them – abilities come second, argues Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist, author and speaker. She also underlines the value of being a good listener as it is an excellent way to gain trust. I agree.

Great leaders know how to balance warmth and strength. And they invariably lead with warmth.

At the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern found a perfect balance of strength and warmth.

She held a press conference on 23 March 2020 in which she announced the decision to act quickly and firmly in an attempt to get ahead of the pandemic. She outlined unprecedented measures, aware of the huge instability and disruption they would cause. She asked the nation to get behind her. She acknowledged that it was going to be difficult but was firm in her convictions. She did not waiver. She was clear, unapologetic and strong. At the same time, she showed she cared. She finished her speech asking the New Zealand people to, 'Be kind and strong'. She offered strength and warmth, and she asked for the same in return.

Nearly two months later she polled as New Zealand's most popular prime minister in a century.

Leaders who choose to focus on strength and credentials, and less on trust and warmth, risk triggering fear and dysfunctional behaviours in the workplace.

This is the point made by Amy Cuddy, Matthew

Kohut and John Neffinger in the *Harvard Business Review* article ‘Connect Then Lead’. These authors explain the need to avoid fear because it limits the cognitive potential of your people, their creativity and their ability to problem solve, all key qualities needed in our knowledge economy. Fear is also a major cause of employee disengagement.

A 2018 study cited in the *Harvard Business Review* article, ‘Does Your Leadership Style Scare Your Employees?’, explains that managing employees with pressure tactics results in more than a 90% increase in the predicted turnover of employees. Using more inspirational tactics translated roughly to a 68% decrease in likely turnover.

Let’s face it, we all know when our manager isn’t in a great mood, and these feelings can spread across the team. This is called emotional contagion.

Joshua Freedman is the CEO of Six Seconds, an author and an expert in emotional intelligence. His book *At The Heart of Leadership* explores how emotional contagion flows from the group leader to their team. He cites a study published in the *Journal of Organisational and Leadership Design*, entitled ‘Quitting the Boss? The Role of Manager Influence Tactics and Employee Emotional Engagement in Voluntary Turnover’ which found, ‘the positive mood of the leader positively influenced group members at both the individual and collective level, with the opposite happening for a

leader's negative mood. The leader's positive mood also had a subsequent influence on group coordination and effort'. This study concludes that, 'managers who inspire rather than pressure their employees are better able to retain talent, in part, because they create an emotional connection between their employees and their work'.

Some of my clients have embarked on a coaching program with me because their people have started to disengage or, worse still, they are creating fear and anger in the people they work with and/or lead. Others have become so focused on results and short-term outcomes that they've lost awareness of the impact they're having on those around them. They are on autopilot, responding to the rapid nature of their workload and overwhelming demands.

Let's return to Ash from Chapter 1.

Ash is a senior leader in a global corporation. She has a team of 235, with five direct reports. As we start our initial coaching session, Ash appears a little more relaxed than the previous time we met. When I enquire about this, she explains the relief she feels at having a coach – someone to partner with, to work through her challenges and find a way forward. We start by exploring her context: the role itself, what she enjoys about it, her strengths and areas she's looking to develop. She smiles as she shares. She is technically strong,

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and she builds rapport easily with others. She has created a solid team and they know she cares about them. She pauses, sighs and continues. In recent times, however, she has received feedback from her direct manager that she is upsetting stakeholders in the business. It has also been noticed that she is allowing her frustration to show in the team. She stops. Unsure on where to go from here.

Ash is smart. She's navigated her way into a senior leadership position. She's dedicated. She's driven. She has a family and a close circle of friends. By all accounts she is succeeding in life. Yet something isn't working and she needs to find a solution for herself, fast. Her actions and behaviours are getting noticed by those around her: the senior leadership team, her stakeholders, peers and direct reports.

I reassure her. We will work together to map out a path back to clarity, confidence and ease. She takes a breath and smiles.

As part of Ash's coaching program, I gather feedback from a selection of direct reports, peers, senior leaders and her manager. Key themes emerge. Everyone respects Ash. They all value her

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input and want her to continue to speak up with expertise. Yet they have noticed that in recent times she has become more direct, blunt and frustrated. Her stakeholders are starting to resent the way she pushes her solutions onto them, rather than asking for their input and getting their buy-in. Her team have watched as she rolls her eyes when referring to other stakeholders, and they are starting to take on her negative feelings. This is impacting team performance and engagement. Some peers are reluctant to approach her.

Ash's story is a common one. Leaders I work with are often highly educated, technically strong, and have successfully climbed the corporate ladder, yet they need to find new ways to lead. In Ash's case, as in many cases, the reality is that relationships have eroded, or have not been developed well in the first place.

Ash had lost focus on the need to connect – both with herself and with others. She was no longer present.

What steps did Ash take to return to success and fulfilment? She started by accepting that she needed to understand how and why her behaviour was contributing to the problem. To do this she carved out space to build a self-reflective habit. She took the time to understand her emotions and patterns of behaviour: why she reacted as opposed to consciously respond in high stake situations. And the more she reflected, the more

she understood herself and was able to self-regulate. She connected to self.

She came to understand that this wasn't a tick box solution, this was an ongoing self-reflective practice. Yet the more she developed her emotional literacy, the more grounded she became. She had jumped off the emotional rollercoaster; she had the tools to self-manage.

She found a place of calm even in high stake situations.

From here, she looked inwards and realised she had choices. And by doing the work of Inner Presence, she learnt to make them. She developed a strong sense of self, got clear on what gave her life meaning, and she created a vision of what she aspires to be. She felt grounded, and her inner confidence and self-worth flourished.

This is the first domain, Inner Presence, which I define as: Being self-empowered to fully accept and believe in yourself, confident to show others the real you.

Ash built on this foundational level of presence and started to look outwards. She reflected on how she was behaving with others and the impact this was having on those around her. To produce results, she realised, not only did she need to bring her best self to the role, she needed to adopt leadership behaviours that built trust and connection, as well as demonstrate strength and warmth.

This is the second domain, Leadership Presence: Projecting your Inner Presence outwards, signalling that

you have what it takes to lead others.

Finally, she turned her attention to how to produce results with others. How to navigate team dynamics, adopt intentional communication and learn to foster a team environment that generates collective problem solving, innovative solutions and ongoing learning – not only within Ash’s team, but across teams. A team of teams.

This is the final domain, Team Presence: Creating an environment that empowers teams to collaborate, learn and innovate.

By walking through the three domains of presence, Ash had greater insight into what she needed to bring to any conversation or context to keep it moving forward productively. She cultivated the capacity to generate respectful and robust relationships – relationships that produced results.

Ash walked confidently into our final session. She smiled broadly; her face was relaxed. She said she felt she was doing a good job and she recognised the hard work she had put in to develop her newfound sense of confidence and ease. This had taken conscious practice. She realised she had always had the answers and the capability, it was really about carving out time to pause and reflect, and to have the support and structure to ensure she kept her aspirations front of mind.



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She shared her delight at having a stronger sense of self, while knowing how to adapt as necessary to lead others and to be perceived in the way she intended. The pace remains relentless, she shared, but she was more relaxed, knowing she had the tools to navigate her way forward, and she was doing this alongside others. She had also come to see this was a dynamic process. She couldn't tick the boxes and say she had worked on her 'presence'. It was a constantly evolving practice.

We finished her sessions by reflecting on what she remains challenged by, and what the next steps were for her. She said there was still work to be done in fostering a team dynamic that promoted ongoing high performance and engagement, but she and the team were making progress, and they were committed to this. They were all familiar with the concept of psychological safety. They had talked about key behaviours that were accepted by the team, to drive such an environment (for instance active listening and giving feedback in the moment), as well as those that weren't (such as gossiping and blaming others); together they decided what they would tolerate and what they would call out. They had a language and framework, and Ash was working

hard to respond positively when others demonstrated these behaviours; aware that it was important to be a role model for such behaviour.

These domains – Inner Presence, Leadership Presence and Team Presence – are not distinct concepts. While I have separated them out to give you a simple and accessible framework to follow, they are interrelated. I provide you with this framework as scaffolding to support your thinking and reflection.

Please bear in mind that this is a framework, not a prescription. I don't know your particular circumstances, so I don't pretend to have all the answers for you. What I can do is support you by offering signposts and suggestions for new approaches, as I do with my clients.

No two clients are the same. We all approach our challenges differently with unique ways of seeing the world. As an executive coach, I need to be agile and attentive to my clients' needs. It would not be productive if I simply rolled out a framework and went through it in a linear fashion. I follow many theories and models – but I hold them lightly. I refer to them as needed. They hold me to account, ensuring I am following a structure; they are part of my toolkit. At the same time, it is important that I work with what emerges in each session, and that I respond to what my client needs. I call this macro and micro tracking. Tracking the big picture of where my client wants to get to, while at the same time

noticing the subtle nuances along the way, addressing what emerges and what needs attending to.

I ask you to do the same as you work through this book. It is a guide, it is not 'the' answer.

I'm a trekker and each year I do a multi-day trek with my son. When we set off into nature we take a map. This helps us move from point to point, but it does not provide the answers to all situations we may face along the way. If we wander off course, the map offers a reference point and a visual guide to support us as we think and discuss the best route forward.

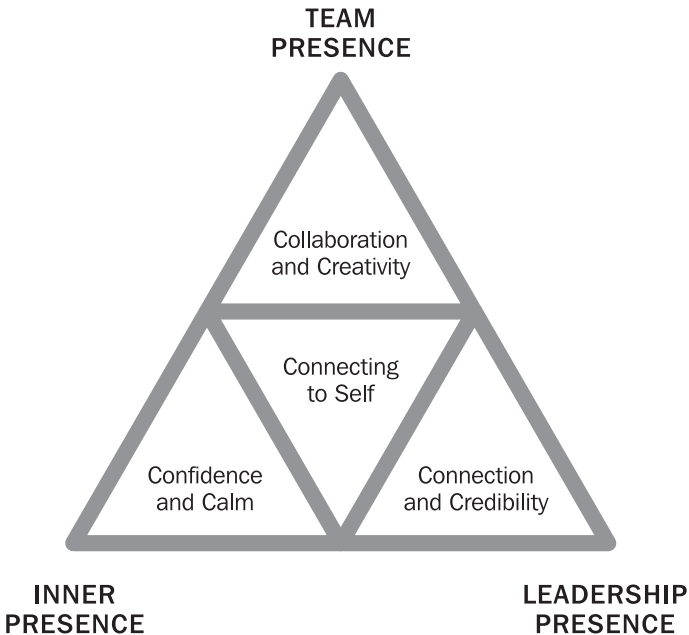
So, with that, I ask you to pick up the map – The Pinnacle of Presence – and let's trek together.

## PART 2

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# THE PINNACLE OF PRESENCE

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Do you feel you have to keep working harder and pedalling faster to succeed as a leader?

Are you frustrated by fragmented teams that are pulling in different directions?

Is it always you coming up with the solutions?



KYLIE ROBERTS PHOTOGRAPHER

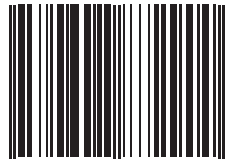
This is a common scenario for leaders in today's fast-paced, hyper-connected world. But it doesn't have to be this way. You have the silver bullet. YOU!

You may not be able to change the relentless demands of leadership, but you can change what you bring to them and how you deal with them. The secret? Presence. Your ability to bring your best self to the role of leadership.

Sheila Wherry specialises in coaching executives to build trust, connectedness and direction within themselves, their teams and across organisations. By sharing her framework, *The Pinnacle of Presence*, she shows you how to be your own coach.

**THE PRESENCE YOU BRING TO YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAMS CAN BE THE GREATEST GIFT TO YOURSELF AND THOSE YOU LEAD.**

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