

Leadership Presence

Dramatic Techniques
to Reach Out,
Motivate, and Inspire

Belle Linda Halpern *and* Kathy Lubar
Cofounders of The Ariel Group



G O T H A M B O O K S

Praise for *Leadership Presence*

“An entertaining twist on the typical interpersonal skills book.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

“Read *Leadership Presence* and give the gift of presence to all those you touch. Halpern and Lubar take a fresh approach to leadership by providing the tools to authentically express yourself as you genuinely create value with others.”

—Kevin Cashman, CEO, LeaderSource; author of *Leadership from the Inside Out* and *Awakening the Leader Within*

“As a leader, you are always in the spotlight. *Leadership Presence* teaches how to be masterful under that bright light . . . connecting more profoundly to those you lead and to yourself. A thought-provoking and highly practical guide to realizing your leadership potential.”

—Jay Conger, professor, London Business School;
author of *Building Leaders*

“The foundation of success in business (and in life) is the ability to authentically engage and connect with others. Using the profession of acting as the perfect metaphor, this book is a masterful guide for achieving true leadership success. I loved the mix of personal stories from clients and well-known actors and found *Leadership Presence* to be a powerful teaching tool. This book isn’t just for business leaders, it’s for anyone who wants to bring more passion, empathy, and presence to all their relationships. I highly recommend it!”

—Cheryl Richardson, author of *Take Time for Your Life* and *Stand Up for Your Life*

“Finally there is a book where the insights of theatre, transformation, and organizational learning have been brought together. Leaders of organizations have much to learn from those who have spent their lives understanding the nature of performance, keeping the beat going, and the power of truly showing up. In the end, productive and humane institutions depend on the integration of art and commerce. This book is a great beginning.”

—Peter Block, author of *The Answer to How Is Yes*, *Stewardship*, *Flawless Consulting*, and *Empowered Manager*

“It is relatively easy to describe what makes a leader, it’s teaching people how to communicate the qualities of leadership that is difficult. *Leadership Presence* does just that. It doesn’t just tell you what to do, it tells you how to do it.”

—Mark C. Mazzarella, coauthor of *Reading People* and *Put Your Best Foot Forward*

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AUTHORS' NOTE

To protect the privacy of our clients, most of the client stories herein have been disguised by changing names and industries. Some are several cases merged into one to illustrate a particular insight. They are all based on actual Ariel engagements. Occasionally we have used real names with permission from our clients and colleagues.

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*To our parents, Merrill Halpern, Phyllis Miriam,
and Gary and Lorraine Lubar*

and

To The Ariel Group Ensemble

2003

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We're sure there is someone we've overlooked. Thank you all, the missing and the mentioned, for the many gifts you have given us.

Foreword

Georges Braque famously said, “The only thing that matters in art is the part that cannot be explained.” You could also say that about leadership. There *is* something missing in leadership studies: those parts that resist explanation. *Leadership Presence* does identify one of those important things that *do* matter, the natural and obvious—but eerily overlooked—connection between leading and acting. They are unavoidably yoked together, these two, by a common social purpose: *the creation of mutuality, of transforming feeling into shared meaning.*

Like great actors, great leaders create and sell us on an alternative vision of the world—a better world of which we are an essential part. They suspend us, to paraphrase Max Weber, in webs of significance. Churchill idealized his countrymen with such intensity that in the end they approached his ideal. Gandhi, it has been said, made India proud of herself. Washington and the other founding fathers also had that great leader’s gift of making people believe they could be part—that they *were* part—of a great nation. Martin Luther King Jr., a rhetorician of rare power, had that same genius. When you consider such towering and theatrical leaders, you come to realize that leadership is not just a performing art, it may be the greatest performing art of all—the only one that creates institutions of lasting value, institutions that can endure long after the stars who envisioned them have left the theater.

Over the years I’ve been pondering this convergence of leadership and performance, occasioned by everything from movies and plays I’ve seen, conversations with insightful friends—including my actor daughter, Kate—and other entertainment industry professionals. In this book, the cofounders of The Ariel Group, Belle Linda Halpern and Kathy Lubar illustrate, reify, explain, and show

what this convergence is all about. If there is such a thing as “principled envy”—and I hope there is—that’s how I felt when I finished this engaging book.

The authors tell us in a variety of ways that leadership is a role, a part that a person plays. And so I’m not surprised that the writer who seems to have known the most about leadership, as indeed he knew the most about everything, was also a man of the theater. William Shakespeare was acutely aware of the leader as actor. He understood that there was nothing like a play about power—its achievement, its use and misuse, its loss, and the way it changes the person who has it—to hypnotize his audience, be they groundlings or nobility. One way or another, all of Shakespeare’s tragedies, all his history plays, and even a number of his comedies are about the rise and fall of leaders. Indeed, the link between leadership and drama was recognized long before the highly theatrical Age of Elizabeth. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and other ancient playwrights knew intuitively that audiences would be riveted by plays about legitimacy, succession, and other leadership matters—perhaps because the playwrights understood that the power leaders have over the rest of us means that their lives are inextricably bound up with our own. Some men may, in fact, be islands, but no leader ever is.

Palpable in Ancient Greece and Elizabethan England, the link between leadership and performance is even more obvious today in a nation where at least one president—Ronald Reagan—was previously both a member and a leader of the Screen Actors Guild. This reminds me of an anecdote about an encounter between Orson Welles and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The first time FDR met Welles, the president graciously said to the fabled young actor, “You know, Mr. Welles, you are the greatest actor in America.” “Oh, no, Mr. President,” Welles replied, “you are.”

The star power that FDR and Welles had is an example of what is sometimes called “charismatic leadership,” a fuzzy but apparently irresistible term. Halpern and Lubar incisively hone in on this and rescue the term from its meaningless charm by teaching us how leaders cause us to care deeply about them, how they induce in us a response that normally requires the presence of pow-

erful pheromones. W. H. Auden expressed it well: “A great actor can break your heart at fifty feet.” It goes back to the second word in this book’s title, *presence*.

Shakespeare, of course, has something to say on this point. In *Henry IV*, Part I, we encounter the Welsh seer, Glendower, boasting to Hotspur. “I can call the spirits from the vasty deep.” And Hotspur, in a hilarious outbreak of candor replies, “Why, so can I, or so can any man, but will they come when you do call for them?” Genuine leadership, as this book shows, requires more than putting on the trappings of power. It requires the ability to find that magnetic core that will draw together a fragmented audience—not just to call the spirits, but to make them come when they are called. Former President Clinton did this brilliantly in his speech accepting his party’s first nomination when he spoke so movingly of there being “no ‘them,’ only ‘us.’” In essence, the leader is able to create community.

Halpern and Lubar know this; they understand community. Listen to their definitive words on the subject: “A world where people authentically engage with one another and unlock their most generous selves.” That’s their wish for the readers of this volume. I think you’ll find it hard to resist that invitation.

—Warren Bennis
Santa Monica, California

Prologue

Executive presence is so important to our success as consultants. I believed if our consultants could speak with clarity and confidence—if they could find their voice—then they would show up as credible advisors, capable of assisting our clients with their most challenging problems. Your impact went much deeper than that. With your guidance, we worked on our connections to each other, on making vulnerability safe, and most of all, on being authentic in whatever roles we played—as consultants and leaders. We moved from playing our roles to being those roles.

Judi Rosen, then Managing Director, CSC Index Eastern Region
1993

WE FOUNDED THE ARIEL GROUP IN 1993, AND IF YOU'D ASKED US then what we were doing, we'd have said we were teaching leaders to be better communicators. We thought the skills and techniques we'd learned as professional actors and performers would be helpful.

They were, and The Ariel Group prospered. But as we worked with more companies and more leaders, we began to realize that something beyond better communication was going on. The use of dramatic skills and techniques was leading to something richer in the lives of people we worked with.

Two women attending one of our corporate programs for a giant financial services firm had been struggling for months to complete a budget. They couldn't resolve the issues that kept them apart. In our program they did a listening exercise together over lunch. That evening, fueled by their newfound understanding of each other, they put the budget together in less than two hours and sent it off to their boss in London, who happily approved it without change.

Better listening skills? Certainly. But their newfound ability to collaborate went beyond listening.

We worked with the executive team of a software company. They were preparing to present an important new strategy in a town meeting for all employees, and they wanted to do it in a way that broke the mold of previous presentations. Rather than the old PowerPoint slide show, they wanted to model a collaborative and cohesive spirit among the executive team, to communicate how the strategy needed to be implemented throughout the company. Not only was the presentation more powerful and creative but, as a result of our work, they told us afterward they had “never before been this cohesive, except during two crises—9/11 when we had a large contingent of people in New York and during a major workforce reduction.” Better presentation skills? Of course. But their teamwork inspired the organization too.

We deliver our work as volunteers in a Boston-area program for prison inmates called Houses of Healing. One of the inmates in the program was a man whose street name was Nitro. When he was asked in an exercise to illustrate his life story, he drew a chain of railroad cars climbing a steep mountain. Each car was another event from his life. As he began to describe each car, he dissolved into tears. By the end of the program he’d changed his street name from Nitro to Patience, as he understood, for the first time, that he had the power to create a life for himself beyond drugs and violence.

Greater self-confidence? Yes. But personal transformation too.

As we saw these moments of change, and countless others like them, we began to understand the power of the concepts we were bringing from the theater.

It wasn’t just communication. It was about authentic connections between people. The two women making a budget found a way to connect with each other. The executive team making the strategy presentation found ways to connect with company employees in a new way. Nitro found a way to connect with himself and in the process became Patience.

We’ve found these kinds of transformation everywhere as we’ve worked with a diversity of private and public organizations. From