Presence-Based Coaching

Presence-Based Coaching is a powerful guide for those who believe that presence has moved to the forefront as one of the most important qualities that leaders need. This book is a must-read for anyone doing the work of developing themselves and others.

—ALFRED L. COOKE, director, Center for Organizational Performance, Federal Executive Institute

Presence-Based Coaching offers coaches a hands-on resource for developing the capacities and skills needed to be reliably present in all situations, and shows how to let go of habitual—and often ineffective—ways of responding. Doug Silsbee explains, once a coach has mastered the inner moves of directing their own attention, they can work to develop the same capability in their clients. The ability of a coach to facilitate lasting, sustainable development in leaders rests on the presence a coach offers to the coach-client relationship.

This groundbreaking and practical book shows coaches specifically how to develop the quality of presence within themselves and how to enhance their coaching by cultivating it in others. Silsbee examines presence as an essential element in human learning and development and maps out a comprehensive approach to accelerating and deepening the development process. Step by step, he provides concrete and practical tools for building presence, and includes the tools for accessing and using presence in order to coach leaders to become whole, authentic, and self-generative.

Filled with illustrative examples and tested practices organized around mind, body, and heart, Presence-Based Coaching helps to cultivate the capacity to be fully alive, resourceful, and connected to ourselves, our people, and our environment.

PRESENCE-BASED COACHING

Effective coaches, like effective leaders, must have the ability to navigate others, grasp complex issues, act with purpose, and provide a compass for others to follow. What is the essential quality that makes coaches and leaders more resilient, resourceful, and authentic?

Presence-Based Coaching offers coaches a hands-on resource for developing the capacities and skills needed to be reliably present in all situations, and shows how to let go of habitual—and often ineffective—ways of responding. As author and leadership expert Doug Silsbee explains, once a coach has mastered the inner moves of directing their own attention, they can work to develop the same capability in their clients. The ability of a coach to facilitate lasting, sustainable development in leaders rests on the presence a coach offers to the coach-client relationship.
“Doug Silsbee maps the territory of presence-based coaching and leadership with extraordinary rigor and nuance. Business educators will be intrigued by these insights into learning and practice, acquired in the crucible of the coach-client relationship.”

—Elizabeth A. Powell, associate professor, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia

“This book breaks important new ground for coaches, leaders, facilitators, and consultants. Doug goes far beyond basics to generously share the wisdom and techniques that built his reputation as a leading coach with over twenty years of success in helping his clients achieve and sustain results.”

—Anne S. Davidson, associate, Roger Schwarz and Associates, and coauthor, Facilitative Coaching

“Doug gets to the heart of the elusive yet foundational leadership quality of presence. This practical guidebook is clear and cogent. The liberal sprinkling of examples and exercises make it truly pragmatic.”

—Ann Fisher, managing director, Integral Coaching International, Shanghai, China

“I dare you to experience this book! I am amazed at what is happening—ease, stronger partnering, and joy with my team at work and my husband at home. This book delivers big on how to be present in important relationships!”

—Connie Maltbie-Shulas, manager, V-22 Training Program, The Boeing Company

“Presence-Based Coaching is uplifting and practical. It is an essential read for coaches and for leaders wanting to be professionally effective while living a balanced life. This book radiates presence while offering pragmatic business examples.”

—Diana Whitney, president, Corporation for Positive Change, and coauthor, The Power of Appreciative Inquiry

“Finally, a truly great book that develops the being of a coach. Nothing else offers such clear and practical tools. A must-read for professional coaches and leaders using a coaching approach.”

—Henry Kimsey-House, cofounder, The Coaches Training Institute, and coauthor, Co-Active Coaching

“If intention and authenticity in relationships is of interest, this is for you. Doug offers a supportive and challenging invitation to explore growth and change in ourselves and others.”

—Nancy Light, senior associate director of philanthropy, The Nature Conservancy in Maine
“Presence is essential for the accomplishment of any critical task. Complete focus, totally connected—no less is required of coaches and leaders. Doug is a great teacher, using presence as a theme to probe deeply into human consciousness, the only place real transformation can occur.”

—Harrison Owen, author, *Open Space Technology*

“Doug Silsbee nails it, giving us a doorway to experience the power of presence, and to bring it to bear on the development of authentic, purpose-driven leaders. This book is a sensible, grounded must-read!”

—Richard J. Leider, founder, The Inventure Group, and author, *The Power of Purpose*

“Silsbee moves incisively into the core challenges of development. Rigorous methodology and practices show how to develop the authentic, resilient leaders we so need. Silsbee is the master he writes about, knowing the possibilities that await those willing to engage in the rigorous demands of accelerated development.”

—Rod Napier, coauthor, *The Courage to Act*

“Presence-Based Coaching reminds us that our first step is the work we do on ourselves. This book invites us to expand beyond skill and technique to offer our presence—augmenting possibilities and choices for ourselves and clients.”

—Sharon King, editor, Center for Creative Leadership *Handbook of Coaching*

“Doug Silsbee helps coaches and leaders wake up and develop beyond their current level of effectiveness. He presents a compelling picture of the power of bringing presence to clients.”

—Mary Beth O’Neill, founder, MBO Consulting, and author, *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*

“Doug delivers frameworks for developing real-world leadership skills, while expanding awareness of what’s possible, even essential. Authentic and thought-provoking, I highly recommend this important new work.”

—Kelly Durkan Bean, assistant dean of executive education, UCLA Anderson School of Management

“Presence is the most important yet least understood coaching competency. Here is a path to effectiveness, life-long professional development, and joy for coach and leader.”

—Marcia Reynolds, author, *Outsmart Your Brain*, and former president, International Coach Federation
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AT FIRST GLANCE, DOUG SILSBEE’S NEW BOOK, Presence-Based Coaching: Cultivating Self-Generative Leaders Through Mind, Body, and Heart is a book for coaches. The book clearly describes how to develop the quality of presence and then how to offer that presence to the coach’s work with leaders. Silsbee’s book delivers for coaches who want to hold significantly deeper and more powerful coaching conversations with their leader clients. In addition, leaders in business, nonprofits, and education will benefit greatly from what is offered here.

However, this is more, much more, than a book for coaches or leaders. Essentially this is a book about waking up. At its core, everything presented here has application to all humans interested in their evolution and transformation. This is critically important in this historical time of accelerated change. As we face the environmental destruction of our planet, unmitigated violence worldwide, and the immoral plague of disenfranchisement, it is of utmost importance that we wake up and respond with skillful and compassionate action. This is a book for not only leaders and coaches, but for anyone else who hears the call to wake up and be a larger contribution to the world.

The profession of coaching is maturing. Government institutions, business, and the nonprofit sector regularly use coaches to assist their managers and executives and to improve team performance. There are a number of international organizations that certify coaches, hundreds of coach training programs, and countless coaching specialties.
As in any discourse, there are pretenders and opportunists and significant gaps in the training, but we can safely say that coaching is here to stay, and it shows promise in providing lifelong learning and transformation. Yet something is missing in the training of coaches.

As the profession moves into its next stage of maturation, there’s a critical need to expand the coach’s learning so that it goes beyond technique and skill acquisition and completing courses. The time has arrived in the coach’s education to also emphasize the cultivation of the self. Clearly it’s important what the coach can do, but it’s more important how he or she is being. This requires the development of an embodied presence that is self-generating, self-healing, and self-educating. Presence-Based Coaching directly meets this need. This book will unquestionably advance how coaching is practiced and taught; it will also distinguish coaching as a far greater offer than it is now currently being presented. This is not a “how-to” book or a primer for beginning coaches. (For this, I recommend Doug’s first book, The Mindful Coach, which sets a solid foundation for coaching.) In this new book, Doug goes directly to the heart of developing the purpose, presence, and awareness necessary for a masterful coach.

Presence-Based Coaching is the result of Doug Silsbee’s many years of coaching leaders and teaching other coaches, combined with his ongoing commitment to his own personal evolution. What you will find in this book is the authentic voice of a person who has traveled the path that he teaches. Doug is not simply a highly refined intellect. He’s learned from the varied terrain that he has traveled, and has integrated this learning into his life and work as a coach and teacher. He embodies and lives the distinctions that he offers; his writing voice is accessible without sacrificing depth. There’s an intimacy in this book that makes the learning personal and very relevant. Doug has done, and is doing, the hard personal work of becoming a whole person that is necessary to be a master coach. He combines the scope of this journey with his powers of perception to create a pragmatic and poetically moving book. Presence-Based Coaching is a key contribution to the greening of the coaching profession.

This is an important book for two central reasons. One is that Doug brings forward the importance of the coach’s self-organization as a unity of mind, body, and heart in order to be more effective in coaching. He doesn’t do this by telling you what to do, but by
inviting you into a state of reflection through questions and somatic practices. If you sincerely engage in these awareness and reflection practices, you will learn the moves and techniques of a coach; more important, you will generate the energy that fuels your own transformation. Very soon the reader begins to see that this book is full of gems that point to a way of being that includes the coaching discipline and then goes far beyond it. Most coaching books tell you what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. This is often useful for beginners as long as they realize that it’s only a starting point. This is a prescriptive method, not an organic approach to the unfolding of a person’s process. It has its place in the beginning stages of learning, but fundamentally omits how the living presence of the coach affects the outcome of the coaching engagement. In a very clear and grounded manner, Doug outlines how coaches can self-organize in a way that will improve not only their technical skills but open a new dimension of being and presence that will powerfully and positively affect the leaders being coached. Silsbee points out that when coaches fully embody who they are in an authentic and genuine manner, they will draw more deeply on their intuition, awareness, and energy field to be more effective in their coaching practice. This state of being he calls presence. This is a state of expanded awareness that brings one fully into a living relationship with a larger reality and is a deeply felt experience of timelessness. He grounds all this through the body so these are not simply good ideas or a rehashing of the perennial philosophies, but pragmatic and highly actionable distinctions. Doug does this skillfully and artfully by drawing on his rich personal experiences, offering practices the reader can engage in, metaphors that bring a living reality to his ideas, and models for how readers can increase their presence as a coach.

The other central point is the possibility that we all can be self-generating leaders. Through living deeply in our mind, body, and heart, we are led to a place of increased choice, a larger context in which to view our life, new possibilities for action, longer moments of awakening, and increased fulfillment that we can extend to others. The business, education, and nonprofit environments we work in provide each of us an opportunity to contribute positively to shifting the consciousness of individuals, teams, and communities. This book will open the way for a new generation of coaching and leadership.
Foreword

More than that, it points the way to a state of being in which we can live our full potential.

Take this journey with Doug. Reflect on your purpose, commit to the practices, and embody a new way of being in order to benefit all.

Richard Strozzi-Heckler
Author of *The Leadership Dojo* and *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*
Strozzi Institute
Acknowledgments

No ray of sunshine is ever lost. But the green which it awakens into existence needs time to sprout, and it is not always granted for the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.

Albert Schweitzer

This book reflects the labors and contributions of many people; truly, this has been a team effort.

I am deeply appreciative of the people who read part or all of the manuscript and who gave me feedback that both challenged and affirmed my thinking along the way. It was enormously restorative to have such thoughtful encouragement and perspective. You were the air under my wings. Thank you, Beth Davis, Elaine Floyd, Julie Harris, Robyn McCullough, Rod Napier, Walker Silsbee, Carey Smith, Richard Strozzi-Heckler, and Kathe Sweeney.

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The legacies of countless teachers, living and ancient, are manifest in this work. I am acutely aware of the influence of some who have taught me directly: Rod Napier, Richard Moss, Darya Funches, Nancy Spence, James Flaherty, Sarita Chawla, Irmansyah Effendi, and Richard Strozzi-Heckler, among others. May you feel, in some small way, my deep appreciation for doing your own work with such commitment and rigor for the sake of becoming—and for sharing of yourself generously that those of us who follow might benefit. You, and your teachers before you, are each present in me. The legacy stretches back over millennia.

Thank you, too, readers of this book, the many clients I have worked with over the years, and participants in my retreats, from whom I have learned much, and all of whom I hope have benefited in some way from what I offer. Such is the nature of lineage.

My parents, of course, have been wonderful teachers for me. My mother, Ann, bequeathed me creativity and passion and self-examination. From you, Bob, I learned to marvel at the world, to be infinitely curious, to be gentle and kind, and to be a teacher in the absolute best sense of the word. I have deep gratitude to my three grown children: Alisia, Megan, and Nathan. You have each taught me, and continue to teach me, more than you ever can know about love and about letting go. And to Miles, my first grandchild, born the day after my initial manuscript deadline. You are simultaneously teaching me about unconditional love and providing an intimate view of the miraculous process of human development.

Thank you, Walker, for once again giving me the support to do what is mine to do. You are a committed, wonderful, and rigorous partner in the dance of life, and I’m so grateful to be hitched to the ever shining star that is you. Thanks for being my wife!

And, last but not least, thank you, True Source, for all the countless blessings of this life.
DOUG SILSBEE IS A LEADER IN THE FIELD OF presence-based leadership development. He is an executive coach, retreat leader, speaker, and author in Asheville, North Carolina. He specializes in coaching self-generative leaders in major corporations, small business, and education. His presence-based coaching encourages clients to enter into strong commitments and to take meaningful and skillful action to produce results they care about. Along the way, clients cultivate leadership presence, resilience, and aliveness.

A master teacher, Silsbee has worked with leaders in eleven countries on four continents, and he owns a mountain retreat center in North Carolina. He has studied with some of the pioneers in the coaching field, including James Flaherty and Richard Strozzi-Heckler, is certified as a Master Somatic Coach by Strozzi Institute, and is accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). He serves as adjunct faculty at the Federal Executive Institute and is an affiliate of Pyramid Resource Group.

Silsbee is also the author of The Mindful Coach (2004). He has been a frequent and well-received presenter at ICF conferences, as well as conferences for the International Association of Facilitators, Association for Experiential Education, and OD Network.

More information on Silsbee’s work can be found at http://dougsilsbee.com.
Introduction

We work on ourselves in order to help others, and also
we help others in order to work on ourselves.

Pema Chödrön

Many years ago, I faced a significant professional challenge. I was about to fly overseas to teach a ten-day seminar to a group of Latin American professors at a prestigious business school. It was early in my career, and I was terrified. I was positive that the participants in the seminar would be smarter than me, more knowledgeable about the subject matter, skeptical, resistant, and questioning of my competence.

I spoke with my mentor the day before I left. He saw capacities in me that I was not yet able to see in myself. He calmly reminded me of indisputable evidence about my competence, ability to design, and capacity to respond creatively to the unexpected. Remembering this evidence (which, in my panic, I’d conveniently forgotten) was reassuring. More important, an intangible quality in his voice—call it confidence, authority, or presence—invited me to relax, lean into my knowledge and instincts, and step openly and calmly into this unknown territory.

During this conversation, I experienced my mentor’s presence through these particular qualities. At the end of the call, I was, in a
subtle but real way, a different person. I had discovered a resourceful place within me that had lain undiscovered before the call. And I was then able to call on that resource later, when I needed it most.

In Costa Rica two days later, I learned, five minutes into the program, that two of the participants spoke no English. I would have to teach the entire ten-day seminar in Spanish. My first opportunity for creativity had arisen a bit too quickly! Drawing from my previous conversation, I accessed an immediate sense of myself as able to respond creatively and calmly. The potential disaster became an opportunity for flexibility and responsiveness. I switched languages on the spot and went on to have a wonderful and highly successful program with this open, sophisticated, and intelligent group of leaders. In that moment, I had experienced presence.

If I had been more observant at the time of this example, I might have wondered: What is the nature of the presence I experienced? How do I recognize it in him? In myself? How was this sense passed from my mentor to me? What is it about his presence that produced a different sense of me, and the capacity for new action? How can I cultivate my own presence? And how can I intentionally bring it to bear in my own work with others?

Since that time, I’ve become curious about presence. I have seen it in powerful leaders that commands the attention of an audience and evokes their commitment to something greater. I’ve seen it in sports figures at the peak of their game. I’ve experienced it in the gifted mentors, coaches, and teachers whom I’ve had the honor to work with in my own development. I’ve experimented extensively in the laboratory of myself and learned much about how to cultivate my own presence. And I’ve seen that presence has been central to my own efficacy in coaching executives and leaders through significant and sustainable change.

In fact, our ability to facilitate lasting, sustainable development in others absolutely rests on the presence that we offer to the relationship. Coaching requires that we first do our inner work; in fact, developing presence is the most important work we can do as a human being. Then, and only then, can we coach in a way that comes close to delivering what coaching often promises.

While coaching is the practice field and the focus for this book, what is offered is actually much deeper and broader. Presence is the
key to more fulfilling family relationships, your own happiness and success, and a lifetime of purposeful action.

**Core Assertions**

This book is based on several assertions of paramount concern to leaders in business, nonprofits, education, and government. These core assertions are the basis for everything that follows:

- There are three doorways into presence: mind, body, and heart. When we do practices associated with each of these areas, we become increasingly masterful over our inner state, and the experience of presence is more accessible.

- As leaders and as practitioners in any endeavor focused on human development, our quality of presence is central to our professional efficacy.

- Presence engenders creativity, agility, resilience, and authenticity, all key requirements of great leaders. When we are present, we are maximally resourceful and responsive to what our circumstances require of us.

- Living in a commitment to discover and cultivate this quality of presence greatly accelerates our capacity to learn and develop in any domain we choose. In fact, presence is central to our capacity to be self-generative—to choose, in each living moment, who we are and how we respond to life.

- Presence is a state available to all of us at any moment. While acquired habits and tendencies greatly constrain our experience of presence, our access to it can be intentionally and systematically cultivated.

*Presence-Based Coaching* explores these assertions in depth. I synthesize ideas from a number of important and influential streams into a clear and unprecedented statement of what presence is, why it is important, and how to develop and use presence to evoke change in others as well as in yourself. Importantly, this work is grounded in concrete business examples and in real-world application.
Presence-Based Coaching is not a basic how-to-coach book. (My first book, The Mindful Coach, offers a pragmatic, question-based coaching model, based on coach self-awareness. It is a good introduction to coaching, and to integrating mindfulness for more advanced practitioners.1) Presence-Based Coaching assumes some level of previous experience; it will not give you everything you need to start coaching from scratch. And it assumes a healthy appetite for your own learning and growth.

Given these two elements, whether you see coaching as part of your leadership role or you are a professional coach of individuals, the book invites you to take your work to the next level. While hard-driving business professionals may find it challenging at first to access presence, it is absolutely what is needed to get better results through efficacy and authenticity.

This material is broadly relevant to the fields of leadership, management, human resources, education, facilitation, consulting, and mediation. Having said this, the book is primarily written for people who coach and develop leaders in business settings. The microcosm of coaching illuminates distinctions that are easily extrapolated to other settings where human development is central.

In this book, the word coach applies to whoever is in that role, no matter their job description. The coach can be an outside professional, a boss, or an internal coach, among many others. (Some caveats apply to coaching one’s own team members; this territory is tricky, and the boss’s own agenda and concerns often make it difficult to provide the neutrality and trust that are essential to the coaching process.) Similarly, the word client is used generically to apply to the person being developed, no matter what the nature of the relationship is to the coach.

The book balances and integrates two threads. First, we explore presence as an essential element of human learning and development. I provide a comprehensive map of how presence supports, and in fact renders inevitable, this miraculous unfolding, and the concrete and practical tools to cultivate your own presence. This thread, which runs through the book, invites you into a lifelong process of self-development.

Second, we explore practical application in the domain of leadership development, and specifically coaching. In this second stream,
I offer clear distinctions for how presence evokes change in others and specific tools for accessing and using presence in relationships organized around the development of whole and effective leaders.

I have integrated a well-organized exposition of concepts with exercises and practical tools for developing and using coaching presence. My extensive experience as an executive coach, a teacher and mentor of coaches, and a lifelong learner ground the material and provide plenty of permission for the reader to be a work in progress.

The three chapters in Part One lay the groundwork for the rest of the book. Chapter One explores the nature of presence itself and the resourcefulness, connectedness, and joy that it produces. Chapter Two lays out the assumptions about human development and self-generation on which this coaching methodology rests. I also describe the process of self-generation and offer an illustrative business example. Chapter Three integrates all of this into a description of how presence-based coaching can provide the necessary structures and support for a greatly accelerated development process, grounded in a solid understanding of how we grow and change in the first place.

Part Two steps into the methodology of presence-based coaching and focuses on the inner moves that we can make as coaches to bring ourselves to the coaching conversation as the most useful possible resource. It will become clear in this part that inner mastery is a requirement for being fully present in the coaching relationship.

Part Three offers practical guidance about developing a coaching presence. The three chapters are organized around mind, body, and heart. Each offers an explanation of this particular doorway into presence and a set of practices. Doing the practices with some consistency over time will greatly increase your access to the state of presence and your ability to offer this to others.

Part Four integrates everything into a wide range of conversational moves that tremendously increase the pace, depth, and sustainability of our clients’ development. On one level, this is presented as a tool kit. However, as a busy professional, if you decide to skip ahead to Part Four so that you can try out all these new techniques on your clients, guess what will happen? Yes, that’s right. You will (correctly!) produce in your clients the impression that you are simply trying out new techniques.

I offer these moves with the caveat that unless you use them from a grounded presence within yourself (which can be developed only
through practice), techniques just won’t work very well. They’ll fall flat or appear manipulative. In presence-based coaching, the work really begins with you. And it begins now.

A word about the exercises. In order for Presence-Based Coaching to provide not a grand tour of a conceptual realm, but rather an experience that moves you in new and perhaps unpredictable ways, I’ve offered lots of activities designed to provide fresh inner experiences and to stimulate inquiry. Some are cognitive in nature; others invite you to experience your own mind, body, and heart in new ways. Exercises are generally done once or twice in order to reveal something interesting. Practices, on the other hand, are to be entered into as a repeated, ongoing activity, much as we might commit to a workout program. Collectively, these experiences are central to fulfilling the promise of the book.

I strongly recommend doing at least some of the activities in every chapter. While it is not strictly necessary to do every one in sequence, you will fundamentally miss the point of the book if you don’t dedicate some time to the inner work to which the activities provide a practical guide. Too, you will not be able to apply the coaching moves presented later in the book without having them grounded in your own way of being.

Simply put, we can’t get the benefits of what is offered here without paying the ante of doing our own work. Our inner work gets us into the game.

My Promise

Presence-Based Coaching offers a practical map to the territory of working with presence, both within yourself as a necessary and prerequisite step and in service to your coaching and developing of others. (Helpful templates, additional practices, and other resources can be found on the Presence-Based Coaching website at http://dougsilsbee.com/books/pbc.)

So here are my promises to you. If you read all of this book, use some of the Part Three practices with some diligence over time, and work with the moves described in Parts Two and Four, you will:

- Shift into the state of presence more easily and readily
- Increase your capacity to establish and hold a field of presence with others
• Increase your capacity to enroll and influence others through your authentic presence
• Understand how presence facilitates self-generation and accelerates development
• Apply a set of coaching moves that enable others to shift how they see themselves in relation to their challenges and to take new and creative actions
• Design unique practices for yourself and others that foster the capacity for presence
• Be experienced by yourself and others as more present, authentic, and alive

Presence is constitutional to being human. It is a birthright, a natural state of being. Presence-Based Coaching will help you rediscover your own capacity for presence, using inner (reflection and practices) and outer work (leading, coaching, holding skillful conversations) as the means.

**Reading as Experience**

I want reading Presence-Based Coaching to be an experience. Throughout the book, I frequently invite you to experience presence in the act of reading. For example, at times, I introduce a presence pause. These are places where I anticipate that something I am saying may confront your belief system or open a new way of seeing.

It is easy, when reading, to gloss over these moments. However, these moments are the essence of the book. The moments when the experience of reading the book stretches you provide the greatest potential for real embodied learning. Moving quickly past these moments is an excellent way to protect what you already know.

In addition, pausing, sensing, and feeling what is being offered can open up something new. So I invite you to pause, sense, and feel anytime you are struggling with a claim I make. I invite you to notice your reactions. When you feel an internal tightening, resistance, or argument, be curious about it. You don’t have to agree with anything; in fact, I ask you to take nothing on faith. Rather, I request that you allow the possibility of a claim’s truth to permeate you, to work in you.
Let’s try it. I’m going to make a claim. After you read it, take a break. Put the book down for a couple of minutes. Let the claim roll around in you. Open to it. Notice what your mind says about it, how your body reacts. See what might become possible if the statement were actually true. Then, let that sit. Be present with it.

So, here’s the claim: If you read this book and try the suggested practices with an open mind, you will become a different person. This book will change you, loosen the grip of old habits, and support you in becoming more present, available, and resourceful in any situation that you face.

PRESENCE PAUSE

Now, what happened? Did anything open? Any arguments or skepticism take shape in your mind? Any new actions become possible as a result?

That’s how I invite you to read. Notice your reactions. Be curious. When you see a presence pause, take it. And anytime you notice yourself with impatience, increasing energy, or judgment, then take your own presence pause to explore it. I want Presence-Based Coaching to evoke an experience for you, not just provide a pat set of ideas.

The book is designed to be eminently practical and invites you to validate every claim for yourself through experimentation. “Test this for yourself” is a recurrent theme. You have explicit permission to take this on, to experiment, validate, or refute every claim I make, and change anything you wish in order to make it work better for you.

Most of my readers have been deeply trained into a Western, Newtonian, reductionistic way of interpreting the world. As you read this book, you may be seeking mastery through a way of looking at coaching that supports the understanding you already have. If this is the case, you may well be disappointed.

Rather, I present some big claims and potentially disruptive practices intended to challenge what you believe you know. I invite you to let go of the understandable but limiting approach to reading in which you seek a new stasis, fixed and foundational, on which to base your coaching. I invite you to a new level of confusion and openness and, no matter your experience, to be willing to be a beginner. If you do
so, your view will change. You may be less comfortable, but you will also be more generative, more creative, and more resourceful.

I have experienced some temptation to make this a rather academic book, a grand synthesis of all the literature on leadership development, coaching, presence, developmental psychology, and neuroscience. However, I’m a practitioner, not an academic. It was liberating to recognize that I’m not the person to write the treatise I originally had in mind.

I’ve had great teachers who contributed much to my learning and development over many years. My opportunity is to write from my heart, to share what I’ve learned in a way that’s authentic, direct, and passionate, and to hold the possibility that it will touch open something new for you. That’s a much smaller (and more achievable) premise.

I offer this as a working model. Although it is well grounded in research and in practice, it is also a work in progress. Rather than examining every aspect of the book to see how it fits with your current understanding, I invite you to try it on, validating or refuting elements in what I’m saying through your own experience.

Presence becomes possible through uncertainty and openness. Part of what makes presence so powerful in coaching is the openness of the team member or client to the possibility that things aren’t what we thought, that greater things are possible. This book will have the greatest benefit for you if you approach it in the same way that you’d ask your clients to approach coaching: open, willing to try on new assumptions. What we have held as true becomes looser.

I’m aware that I don’t live everything in this book. I can at times feel hypocritical in writing a book that so clearly advocates for the power of presence when much of the time, I’m not present myself! In my own efforts to be worthy of a book on presence, I’ve been reminded again and again that I’m a work in progress. The book offers a radical possibility. Through the writing, I’m living into that possibility more and more. I invite you to join me in being a work in progress yourself. Play. Experiment. Try on these ideas, and see what happens. Laugh at yourself along the way.

So who’s the person reading this? Are you open and receptive?
I’m learning to simply take pleasure in the good fortune I have to be able to sit here and write about something I have passion about. I enjoy the feel of my little cabin at our retreat center in the North Carolina mountains. The sun is shining in the window and on the rhododendrons by the creek. My dog, Lyra, is lying on the floor next to me. While there are times of struggle and effort, at this moment, right now, I’m genuinely happy doing what I’m doing.

I hope you are enjoying reading as much as I’m enjoying writing.

Are you?

PRESENCE PAUSE

PRESENCE-BASED COACHING