



SPEECH & PRESENCE

Presence, Impact and Influence in Virtual Communication

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Further Learning Notes
for



by **Mark Downey**



The Three Circles of Energy™¹

First Circle:

First Circle leaders are often outstanding in their field as far as knowledge, strategy and technical ability goes. They are often fantastically interesting, but this is never shared with all around them. In first circle you take energy without giving it. Below are some of the habitual traits that can mask our greatness and diminish our authority to lead.

Physically: Slumped, broken or depressed posture. Shuffle, scuff while walking. Fidgeting while still. Head droop. Shoulders rounded, upper chest depressed, and spine collapsed. Feet together. Knees locked. Weight back on heels.

Breath: The breath is shallow, held when listening and laboured when under pressure

Voice: Not audible, strained or whispered, falling off in energy at the ends of phrases. It sounds monotone, pessimistic, tired or bored.

Speech: Unstructured, perhaps seems ill prepared, even when this is not the case. Over detailed. Sometimes misses the point when in meetings as over reflective. Seems like they are speaking to themselves.

Attention: You are unable to listen accurately as you are in a bubble of self-consciousness. The attention is internal, and the energy is reflective.

Connection: You break eye contact a lot, speaking to the floor or ceiling or some vague place as if speaking to yourself. You do not seem curious about the environment or the people around you.

Appearance: you appear hidden or absent, disinterested or bored, weak or unsure. It says: “I do not want to be here. I don’t believe what I am saying... I’m not interested in you... I don’t care about what I am speaking about.”

Leadership style: Denial of having power to influence. Cannot create a safe environment for teams to thrive as no leadership offered.

¹ Rodenburg, Patsy (2009) *Power Presentation: Formal Speech in an Informal World*. Penguin



Third Circle:

In third circle, we are giving a lot of energy out, but are not taking any in. It is a one-way street. We tend to speak at people, not to them and we don't listen well as we lack curiosity. We are very certain of our point of view and can't take criticism well. As a result of this we are not fully aware of ourselves, our surroundings or the subtle nuances of communication.

Physically: Chest lifted, and shoulders pulled back. Chin pulled up. Head thrust forward. Jaw clenched with anticipation. Feet too far apart. Walk too firm and noisy. Invade people's space by not yielding. Third circle energy is a physical shield which desensitizes one to others.

Breath: Sharp but shallow, often noisy intake of air

Voice: Pushed, forced and often too loud

Speech: Often jagged, spurts of sentences, overwhelming and inconsiderate, unstructured. Speak at you not to you. Enjoy the sound of their own voices.

Attention: Rarely listen well unless they are listening to themselves. Will stop listening once they know what they want to say. Often interrupts or shout down others. Shields, desensitized to others, lacks self-awareness and curiosity about others.

Appearance: It may appear as energized and confident, often quite arrogant, mocking and aggressive. Overwhelming and intimidating.

Leadership style: Command and control, force, sometimes bullying. Rarely inspires and moves people. Fosters an environment of mistrust and cynicism, where louder and more aggressive individuals thrive but unsafe for everyone else.



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Second Circle:

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Physically: Energized, yet open. The body is relaxed yet in a state of readiness. Knees relaxed. Feet grounded but energy forward on ball of foot back. Feet hip width apart. Head sitting on shoulders. Walk has a natural swing, connected and energised but not loud or scuffed.

Breath: Deep in the body, relaxed and measured. Fuels their speaking and their listening.

Voice: Open, clear, expressive and resonant. Powerful without being loud or forced.

Speech: You will feel spoken “to” not “at”. They are clear, energetic and passionate and it seems effortless. They tend to mean what they say as they are saying it. They structure their thoughts organically and seek to bring us along with them. They are listening while they are speaking.

Attention: The second circle leader has their energy focused on you and fixed pints outside themselves. The energy is a returning energy, they are sending and receiving energy. They are curious about people and environment.

Appearance: They seem authentic and you see their humanity. They seem to embody authority and gravitas naturally. They are approachable and formidable.

Leadership Style: They use their power well, fostering equality, presence and engagement by inspiring and moving people to bring their higher selves to the game. They create a safe environment that calls out bad practices immediately and raises the benchmark of communication to one of effective, efficient and humanity driven reason.



Second Circle™ Posture, Breath and Presence Exercises

Shoulder Release

Shoulder tension will trigger nervousness, tighten our breath and voices and ultimately diminish our presence

Let the arm swing on a 180-degree axis as if you are gently throwing a ball, the key word being 'let'. Do not try too hard. When your arm is swinging on its own momentum, allow the arm to rotate 360 degrees forward or backward.

Continue this rotation a dozen or so times being aware to release the shoulder by letting the arm swing and fall with its own weight. Once you have done this allow the arm to go fluidly back to the pendulum in a 180-degree swing and let it swing to a stop, being careful not to try to stop it or put any tension into the shoulder. When finished, let the arm hang despite any feeling of wanting to put it back in place. Repeat the same exercise on the other arm.

Head Alignment

We want our head sitting on our spine, keeping the trachea and larynx open to allow us to breathe and have our voices resonate freely.

Swing the arms, breathing in on back swing and releasing the breath on the forward movement. Swing the arms, hands and your head up as if you are catching a ball above you. The face should be looking up.

Keep the stretch in the arms and keep breathing a low breath. Now, as the arms open laterally in a slow movement, your head comes down at the same pace, until your head comes to eye-line.

When in the Leonardo DaVinci balanced man position come to a stop with the arms outstretched to the side, on a breath gently release the shoulders without dropping head, neck or spine to let the arms fall to rest by your side. Now walk around and try to hold onto that open, vulnerable yet powerful posture.

You can also do this exercise to align yourself while seated.



Adjusting seated posture

Whatever we do the most becomes our habit which becomes our comfort zone. Let's try and shift our seated posture so that we are in our most powerfully and physically ergonomic place in the many hours a day we spend seated. This will translate into all seated interactions where our most present and powerful place also becomes our most comfortable seated posture.

To overcome certain habits related to our often-inefficient seated position, we can to relearn to sit as designed. Because of our sedentary existence, these postural habits develop. Your body already knows how to access this optimal frame and would do so in a split second when it really matters that we 'sit up and take notice'.

If you needed to be up and out of your seat quickly and smoothly, where would you need to be in terms of your posture? The most effective way to answer this question is through action and to feel the response. Once you have moved out of your seat a few times in this manner, sit and be ready to be up and out at a moment's notice if necessary.

Now relax, without dropping your spine, imagining that you may be called to be up and out of your seat at any time. Ensure that your feet are very grounded with the energy focused on the ball of the foot for readiness. Note that when you need to be up and out of your seat the energy must be in the forward part of the foot

Deep Diaphragmatic Breath

Habitual shallow breath will influence the posture voice and once again stimulate the central nervous system to adversely impact our state of mind, voice and presence. The breath is the powerhouse of the body, voice and our presence

Don't forget when seated to move forward, in the seat so that you may feel the readiness we alluded to.

Jaw Tension

Tension in the jaw can affect the breath, speech and can send tension elsewhere in the body. Reminding oneself to relax and release the jaw simply by opening the mouth slightly, imagining that you have a cherry tomato in your mouth will help develop a new awareness of when tension is creeping in and reverse the habit so that the locked mouth feels uncomfortable.



Roll down and breathe

Allow the torso and head to hang over your knees in a seated position. Breathe into the lower back (silently and effortlessly) 3 or 4 times and let the arms drop. Continue effortlessly breathing into the back. Page | 7

Gently roll yourself back up using allowing the vertebrae roll out one by one and breathing deeply to maintain this deep, effortless breath. There should not be any sound on the inhale.

Please remember, we are simply allowing the stomach to relax and trusting that enough breath will come in to lift the voice effortlessly.

We keep the energy in the sound or word to all the way to the end.

We are sending the words to specific fixed points making sure that the last word lands at that specific point.

Try pushing into the wall with your shoulders relaxed and the energy of the push coming from the hips. Feel the breath deep in the body and feet grounded.

Learning Tip: Posture, Jaw, Breath, Place post it notes on the objects you encounter most often in your day: your computer, reminding you to take this relaxed and deep breath and adjust your seated position to be in a state of relaxed readiness. Over time this will help to build muscle memory and make this breathing organic to you in your daily lie. It is the breath you need to take when you are a little bit thrown or if you need to steel yourself to respond to adversity.

Synching breath and voice

One will notice with the leader who truly embodies presence, that they will not speak until they are ready, however when ready they will not hesitate in speaking

Breath and Connection

In Second Circle, we are sending and taking our energy, attention and breath to and from a specific point. We are listening as we speak, as we seek to make an intimate connection with our listeners, other speakers and environment. To habituate ourselves to this “give and take”, we can practice by sending our breath and voice to specific points in our environment. We heighten our curiosity to take in the object or person of our attention by breathing them in, effortlessly. We allow them in. We then send our breath directly to them.



Breath into Sound

Also, assuring that when the breath is settled that you immediately let the sound come out. Now on the sound of a *hum* repeat the same exercise (please consult the video for the appropriate pitch). Allow the jaw to relax imagining that you have a little cherry tomato inside your mouth. Ensure that the lips are forward, and you feel the hum on the lips and the front part of the mouth.

Placing the voice

On the sound of an *ooh* repeat the same exercise. Think French pout as in the lips forward. Allow the ooh to open into an ahh after around 4 seconds. The ahh is opening out without force. Allow the sound to be gentle but assure that it is reaching the fixed points you have set for yourself.

Now try the ooh ahh or counting at one tone over 6 seconds and immediately go into speech. Remember that we want to hitch the words onto the ‘train’ of sound created by the ooh ahh or counting so please ensure that you do not pause in between.

Sound into Speech

We count intoning (ie. Speaking on the same note, a mixture of singing and speaking) initially and then move from the ooh ahh into the intoning into more natural speech. *Please see recording*

Vowels and consonants

Sound makes sense, it is a deep and ancient meaning that can only be released if we meet the words fully. The open vowels tend to carry emotional energy while the closed consonants tend to contain that emotion and drive reason and logic. We unleash the connotative meaning in speaking the word fully, however corporate words lingo tends to be denotative only and lacking energy. We will now look at learning to “mint each word like it is a new coin” (Patsy Rodenburg)

Mouthing the words



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Using Sonnet 94, one line at a time, you silently mouth the words using all the muscles of the mouth and lips to make the shape of every vowel and close every consonant, paying attention to finish each word. Now say the line aloud allowing your mouth to move as much as you just did with the exercise.

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Building the thought

Now building the thought of the line incrementally i.e. “They” (*breath*), “They that (*breath*)” “They that have” (*breath*) ...etc., until you have reached the end of the line. Now say the full line in a less mechanical way and feel how we can say each word and mean it as we speak it.

SONNET 94

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

William Shakespeare

“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen, by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.”

Barrack Obama: Chicago 2008



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Body Language Notes

- Most people need to open up their body language
- Unstick the elbows from your sides to relax and allow the whole arm to gesture not, just the forearm.
- Actions to suit the words, words to suit the actions: if you see it we will see it! Ensure you finish your gestures
- Keep your hands open with the palms facing outwards or upwards.
- If you decide to walk or move in your presentation, do so with purpose, for example, walk in order to connect better with a person at the other side of the room.
- Temper the gestures with a roundness and smoothness.

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Avoid

- Touching your face, neck or head
- Crossing your legs while standing
- Slapping your thighs or legs

How the posture, breathing and speech can affect the brain.

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- Both hemispheres of the brain fire up when we fully meet each word we are saying
- Our postures dictate our biochemistry. When our postures are open, free and powerful, the body will produce a different hormone which changes how we feel (and are perceived) therefore changes our behaviour which changes our outcomes.
- When the breath is low, relaxed and powerful we are in a ‘rest and digest’, mode where we have optimal access to our ‘CPU’. When the breath is shallow it tends to affect the sympathetic nervous system causing the body to produce the stress hormone, cortisol, thus making us less ‘present’.
- Please remember, allow the breath to be effortless, like you are seeing someone you are very happy to see, or viewing beautiful scenery, you “take it in”
- Open body language helps us to breathe more deeply, energises the words while keeping us present as we “see what we are saying”, giving our audience a chance to also see it.

The Two Hemispheres of the Brain

What they do

Right Hemisphere	Left Hemisphere
Breadth and Flexibility	Focus and Grasp
The New	The Known
Possibility	Predictability
Integration	Division
The whole	Parts
Context	Abstraction
Individuals	Categories
Personal	Impersonal
Living	Non living
Empathy	Theory of Mind
Reason	Rationality
Implicit	Explicit
Self Aware	Over confident
Both/ and	Either / or



Virtual Presence Impact and Influence Quick Reminders

Preparation:

- If you are going to script your presentation, do so by speaking it out loud a couple of times, making voice recordings and then edit and tighten that up version in the written form. Here we will get your more authentic speaking cadence; you will remember more of the content and it will sound more natural.
- Rehearse your presentation aloud as if in front of the audience without stopping (*even if you make mistakes*), several times where possible. This process will reveal where you need work and give you a more confident delivery on the day.

Camera, Lighting and Background Setup

- Ensure that the web camera is at your eyeline where possible.
- If you can place your computer where you are facing natural daylight, this is optimal for a clear picture. Otherwise, place a light with a daylight bulb or a 'ring light', behind your camera/computer.
- It goes without saying that we want a tidy background. Be aware also that if your background is really interesting, that too becomes distracting. For example, an audience may try and read the titles of the books in your bookshelf, we are all nosey despite our best intentions!

Your Presence:

- Ensure your posture is engaged and open. Stand where possible
- Make eye contact with the camera when speaking and listening.
- Breathe between your thoughts to maintain calm and clarity and eliminate any sound fillers.
- Energise your voice without pushing, remember the voice travels up and out in an arc. It is the only three-dimensional cue in virtual communication.
- Articulate your words clearly but without force for clarity and to slow your speaking down.
- Use body language to give some of the communication cues that are missing from virtual communication. Gesture regularly, gently and clearly using whole arm, not just the hands from the elbow up.



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Exercise Videos from the [Presence Hub](#)

Reclaiming the natural Breath: <https://vimeo.com/454585759/c4993a31e9>

Placing the voice: <https://vimeo.com/454591205/f634d4e07c>

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SUPPLEMENTARY WATCHING

1. Patsy Rodenburg speaking about reclaiming your right to speak, in particular for female voice, but relevant to us all

<https://vimeo.com/319700103>

2. Watch Patsy Rodenburg speaking about the Three Circles of Presence™. She is speaking in the context of actors but the main points are applicable to us all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub27yeXKUTY>

3. Watch a video, distilling the complex and deep work of Iain McGilchrist on the two hemispheres of the brain into a 10-minute animated video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFs9WO2B8uI>

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTENING

1. Patsy Rodenburg speaking about Leading with Presence with organisational culture and leadership expert Aga Bayer.

<https://www.agabajer.com/podcast-list/65-patsy-rodensburg-on-culturelab>

2. Iain McGilchrist speaks with Dympna Cunnane on understanding the fundamental differences between the left and right brain in decision making and behaviour,

<https://soundcloud.com/fmlm/ian-mcgilchrist-edited-correct-compression>