



Stanford eCorner

Presence Plays a Role

Olivia Fox Cabane, Author and Speaker

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Author Olivia Fox Cabane describes how behaviors of presence play a crucial role in developing charisma. Fox Cabane explains how a lack of presence can be detrimental to a person's authenticity and she shares tips for maintaining presence in the moment.



Transcript

Presence: when people describe their experience of seeing charisma in action, whether they met Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, or the Dalai Lama, they often mention what an extraordinary presence the person had. And presence is the single most requested aspect of charisma when I'm coaching executives. They want to increase their boardroom presence or their executive presence. And they're right to focus on it, because presence turns out to be the real core of charisma, the foundation upon which all else is built. When you're with a charismatic master, take Bill Clinton, for example, he gives you the feeling that he's completely here with you, in the moment. Present. And I've met hardened Republicans, who've told me Bill Clinton, I hated him before I met him, I hated him after I met him, but while I met him, ma'am, I loved the man. Have you ever felt in the middle of a conversation as if only half your mind were present, while the other half was busy thinking about something else? Raise your hands if that's ever happened to you. Alright then. Do you think the other person noticed? Yes.

When this happens, there is a good chance that your eyes will glaze over or that your facial reactions will be a split second delayed. Here is the thing: because people can read facial expressions in as little as 17 milliseconds, the person you're speaking to will likely notice the smallest delays in your reactions. And on a gut level, they'll get the feeling that something is not quite right, something doesn't quite fit. This delay, technically called an incongruence, can even give them the feeling that you're being inauthentic. Nothing ruins trust or charisma faster than appearing inauthentic. We think we can fake presence. We think we can fake listening. We think that as long as we seem attentive, it's okay to let our minds turn on other things, but we're wrong. When you're not fully present in an interaction, the person you're speaking to will likely notice it. I'm sure you've had this experience of speaking with someone who wasn't fully listening.

You noticed. So, how do you get presence? Well, my favorite technique to stay present in a conversation is kind of quirky, but remarkably effective. So, right now, if you would, focus on the physical sensations in your toes - your toes, big toes, little toes, all the toes in between however many of them you have, focus on the physical sensation in your toes. What this does is that it forces your brain to sweep your body from head to, of course toe, and gets you very physically present in the moment. So, you do that for only a split second then you get back to the conversation. But it's very effective. Just by focusing on your toes you can up your level of charisma immediately. I realize that you probably weren't expecting your toes to be crucial to charisma, they are. That's one technique. Technique number two, is to really focus on the colors in the eyes of the person you're speaking with.

If you pay close attention, you will see that their eyes contain a dazzling array of colors that can keep you quite captivated. And better yet, give you the kind of deep soul searching eye contact that is extremely powerful. The kind that Bill Clinton is famous for. So, obviously don't over do it, a little goes a long way.