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How to build your sense of presence

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Johnny Cash could fill the room with his presence. He stood 6'2" and cast an even taller shadow.

I worked in broadcasting in Nashville. I had many memorable visits backstage at the Grand Ole Opry, including the night I looked into the Green Room and saw the Man in Black.

Since then, I've pictured Cash standing there, and realized that part of his presence was the way he moved.

He moved with intent. He commanded the room with physical confidence. He had a pull that made people lean toward him.

The way we move, whether purposeful or purposeless, will have an affect on listeners.

Recently I attended a seminar at which the facilitator took off her glasses, only to put them back on. In between, she held them in one hand while gesturing. She did this over and over, again and again. I found myself anticipating the next off/on sequence. It was distracting.

I've also seen many speakers stiffen up and become nailed to one spot.

Many of us spend too much time trying to memorize the words, which only creates a lack of presence. When we stand to speak, the adrenaline hits and there is a physical disconnect. We feel uncomfortable -- and words are not enough to engage the listener.

Here are some suggestions for uncovering your own presence:

- This week, notice how you direct energy into your movement, and decide if you're satisfied.
- Don't rush. Take a few minutes in the morning to center your breathing. Put your shoulders back and take several slow breaths from your diaphragm.
- Talk through your presentation in a conversational way. Use your own way of saying things.

- Practice in front of a mirror with natural gestures. Muscle memory provides physical confidence when it's time to present.
- At your next meeting, notice your posture. Don't slouch or shift around in your seat. Pay attention and sit up straight -- you'll feel more energetic.

When you put your shoulders back, you feel better and you tell the audience you're confident and open-hearted.

When you walk with purpose, you communicate that you know where you're going.

Lou Solomon is president of Interact, a firm that specializes in authentic speaking and presenting. She can be reached at (704) 374-0423 or Lou@InteractSkills.com.

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