

Command Presence

Animate and engage people.



by Chip R. Bell and John R. Patterson

YOU CAN PRETEND TO CARE, BUT YOU CAN'T pretend to be there, wrote Texas Bix Bender *Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On!*

Bender was describing a vital feature of leadership—command presence. In the military, officer candidates are drilled on the power and practice of the manner of a leader—focused, attentive, and engaged. Command presence is not about control, it is about connection; it is not about power, it is about partnership. Leaders with command presence convey character.

Davy Crockett had command presence. "Crockett seemed to be the leading spirit. He was everywhere," wrote Enrique Esparza, eyewitness to the Alamo, in a newspaper article following the legendary siege. Great leaders are all about spirit—being, not just doing. They focus on being there, everywhere, not in absentia. And, when they are there, they are *all* there—focused, attentive, engaged.

Great leaders hunt for genuine encounters. They upset the pristine and proper by inviting vocal customers to boardroom meetings. They spend time in the field and on the floor where the action is lively, not in carefully contrived meetings where the action is limp. They thrive on keeping things genuine and vibrant.

Leadership Is Being (Spirit)

Leadership is the act of influencing another to achieve important goals. It is not about rank or authority. Authority is the last resort of the inept. Leadership is about being—the conveyance of spirit. "You don't have to know that Susan is the leader," a manager said of his leader, "You can feel it the second she walks into the room. A warm connection reaches out of who she is and pulls you in. Some people might call it charisma, I call it caring."

Spirit-full leaders let go of *proving* who they are in exchange for *being* who they are. They are givers whose curious interest in others drives them

to be completely absorbed in whoever is on the other end of their conversations. They are patient listeners eager to learn, not anxious to make a point.

Great leaders are passion givers. They embrace the concept embedded in the word and pass it on to others. They show their excitement in the moment and optimism for the future, regardless of how much sleep they got the evening before or their worry over hiccups in the balance sheet. Great leaders are pathfinders who light the way with their positive faith. They would rather facilitate than challenge. They cultivate confidence rather than breed caution.

Leadership Is Being There

Leaders are present. They don't just lead by wandering around; they lead by staying engaged. They don't just know the facts and figures; they know the stories and struggles. Because they make it their business to do their

homework on customers and associates, they can affirm on sight without benefit of cue card or staff whispers. They call associates at home to congratulate them on something important to the associate. They thank customers for their business with sincerity and obvious gratitude. They hold meetings on other's turf.

Great leaders bring perpetual energy and intensity to encounters. They are always wide awake. When it comes to their role, they are never lazy, disinterested, or indifferent. They care enough to bring their best. They show up in life with completed staff work.

At the annual managers meeting, Macy's Director of Stores, Randy Scalise, gave out 15 awards to outstanding performers in the Northeast region. On the outside, the awards ceremony looked normal—applause, hand shakes, an award presentation, and photos. What was unique was

how many stories Randy told about his personal experiences with the award winners. He was an important customer for many of them—he had been there, up close and personal.

Leadership Is Being All There

The myth of leadership is that of a knight in shining armor without warts or clay feet rushing in to charismatically compel people to greatness through the sheer power of his persona. Real leaders are superior and inadequate, strong, and weak.

"He gives us so much courage," a senior leader said of Doug Borrer, CEO of Dominion Homes, a large home-builder in Dublin, Ohio. "Doug is not perfect. But, he works hard to be the best he can be. When he makes a mistake, he owns it; he forgives himself so to speak. And he is willing to confess in public. That encourages us

to reach for higher goals, knowing that if we fall short reaching for the moon, we'll still end up among the stars.

Real leaders are real role models—not "be perfect like me" models. They are open about their struggles and invite followers to enlist. Positioning leaders as perfect models is unfair to leaders and disempowers associates. Real leaders stumble and blunder, just like normal people. Greatness comes



through self-forgiveness as you "get back on the horse." Real leaders serve as role models best when they reveal their vulnerability and demonstrate their humanity. When leaders own their mistakes, they signal to all that concealment and CYA antics are deviations from corporate custom.

Davy Crockett held no official position at the Battle of the Alamo. His command was expressed solely through his presence—one that cultivated confidence and promoted passion. Coronal Jim Bowie wrote, "David Crockett has been *animating* the men to do their duty." Command presence is the embodiment of animation. And animation is what separates maintenance managers from truly great leaders. LE

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ACTION: Lead with your presence.