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## Excerpt #1: 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 this moment, I 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.

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## 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.

Doug Silsbee is a leadership coach, author and master teacher in Asheville, NC. His most recent book is *Presence-Based Coaching*. More information on Doug's work is at <http://dougilsbee.com>. Inquire at [ds@dougilsbee.com](mailto:ds@dougilsbee.com) or 828-254-2021 for a free consultation.