

Excerpt: Opening Your Presence, 2nd Edition
Introduction

Open Your Presents

Your presence *is* a present... It is made up of many unique gifts, meant to be shared with your audience. As you read, please think of “audience” as anyone with whom you speak, interact or lead.

I inwardly smile anytime someone tells me they rarely or never “make presentations” and therefore have no chance to practice or otherwise develop communication skills. This is the very same person who doesn’t understand why her spouse doesn’t listen... was overlooked for the promotion or raise... who feels misunderstood... isn’t taken seriously.

We *perform* every day, making mini-presentations, requests and orders before all kinds of audiences—waiters, clerks, our boss, team and club members, friends, spouses, children. With every interaction, we share glimpses of our authenticity, or not. In *any* interaction, you are asking to be seen and heard, which is what lies at the very core of our existence.

I have yet to meet one person who did not have a desire to be acknowledged by others and, for the sake of our discussion, we’ll call this “validation.”

One of our primary endeavors should be to do this for ourselves. Yet, can anything be validated without first being defined?

If we do not determine our worth—our value—*before* anyone else, how are they to appreciate that value?

I want to talk about safely sharing your presents (talents, tastes, personality, quirks, mannerisms, voice), the ones that make you uniquely you, while reducing your fear of making tragic mistakes. Let’s be clear... You will make mistakes. Everybody does.

But you cannot play it safe and be authentic at the same time. Get ready! Increasing your objectivity and exploring more options awaits. You may never completely erase your dread of judgment, but I ask that you be open to the possibility of minimizing the desire for outside validation and maximizing the value of personal assessment.

A funny thing happens on our quest for authenticity. We find we don't actually need another person's validation, especially that angry colleague who seems to hate everything. The compliment, friendship, raise, promotion... Those are all there for us to appreciate and accept, or not. Do I really want that extra responsibility? I'll think about it. It becomes your decision.

When you embrace your authenticity, you don't have to give in to a desperate attempt to accept any crumb that falls off the table. The very act of speaking words aloud, connecting the words to physical movements, and digging into one's arsenal of tools allows for a greater manifestation of the bigger picture—authentic connection to oneself, as well as the work, purpose and audience. Even when it is an audience of one.

Your connection with another person ripens as you connect to yourself. How you connect to yourself is profoundly affected by how you relate to others. (Sounds a bit like the chicken and the egg. Which comes first?) The truth is these are synergistic properties and what we feel is authentic is just as important as how we express it.

Wouldn't it be great if authenticity were as simple as just doing what comes naturally? I will discuss how often ideas of authenticity are wrapped up in familial impositions and cultural influences. I'll bet if you take a moment right now and reflect on your daily routines, you'll notice at least one that really isn't "you," yet feels incredibly familiar and somehow comfortable.

Habit easily disguises itself as authenticity, simply because it feels so natural. Sometimes, real effort is required to distinguish the difference. As you'll read more about, comfort is not always your friend when it comes to authenticity.

I do not propose a "fake it 'til you make it" mentality, although practicing genuine skills and stretching parameters may feel phony while your authenticity muscles get stretched. They do need a workout, and all muscles feel the burn when pushed far enough.

So how do we differentiate between impulse, desire and authenticity? How do we fuel motivation and sustain growth? I once believed in the power of self-help books. I would feel all

motivated and pumped up! Whoo-hoo! I won't eat carbs! I will meditate every single day! And slowly, sometimes not so slowly, I would lose the motivation that felt so strong just last week. I found I could not tap into the well of energy that had sent me soaring just days before.

Fortunately, I eventually noticed the pattern. We all have those "off" days from time to time, but I consistently lost the emotional high I thought was "real." The thrill incited by self-help books was not enough to sustain the creation of a new habit.

I invented an experiment for myself. I committed to performing one small, very doable action every day, regardless of how I felt, for twenty-one days.

Guess what? It worked. I did it and I established a new habit. Amazingly, I also felt better.

The 21/90 rule promotes the idea that it takes twenty-one days to create a new habit and ninety days to establish a lifestyle. But try it for yourself and start with something manageable. You might also enjoy reading about Benjamin Franklin's approach to building good habits in his book, *Benjamin Franklin's Book of Virtues*.

I tried another experiment and another. Because the new habits were not dependent on an emotional high, there was no downward spiral. I wasn't trying to reinvent myself. I was eliminating "bad" habits (not horribly destructive, but certainly not getting me anywhere) by replacing them with productive actions. The key for me was to not focus on the bad habit, but to give attention to the new and improved one.

I even noticed that many of these old or bad habits were not particularly pleasant or even authentic for me, but almost compulsive or dictated by an external force. It was liberating to say goodbye to them.

There are two very important ideas at play here:

1. **Action.** The primary focus is *not* on mental or emotional change, but to act differently with intention. The repetition of the new action creates a habit, which nurtures new feelings and thought.

2. **Replacement.** Seemingly “bad” or unbeneficial habits³ are replaced with a “good” (pleasurable, or at least constructive) action. This is key. The new action is productive, but also satisfying.

These two principles will come into play as we examine how to open your presence. I definitely want you to feel excited and motivated, but I believe strongly that your actions are what will fortify your feelings, and that will help sustain your actions.