

Power, Poise, & Presence

A New Approach to Authentic Leadership

Introduction

The first time I saw what I thought was power was when an older girl lit the papers she told me to hold while pointing where I should stand in her basement, doing the same to her little sister. Two minutes later, she was stamping out the flames of the mattress on fire, and my four-year-old sensibilities woke up, urging me to get my dad next door. He pulled the girls out of the basement, also dragging out the burning mattress saving the house and preventing the neighborhood from going up in flames.

I realized power wasn't being told what and how to do things; Power was embodied in my dad's fire-burned hands. He willingly risked his life and our livelihood. I learned presence was having clarity of purpose without doubting or second-guessing myself. Decades later, I forgot these lessons.

My husband lost his job two years before I was scheduled to graduate with my Ph.D. Our two kids, the house we lived in, the car we drove, and the food we ate depended on him working. He lost his job. I lost my confidence. I thought, 'quit school,' 'get a job,' or 'move back home.' I didn't expect to remember my father's charred and bandaged hands, reminding me my parents and our family somehow survived when my dad couldn't work. My perfect poise was born, and I emerged able to stay in discomfort and uncertainty to complete my Ph.D. studies.

This book is the story of your power, poise, and presence. Trust me; you won't have to run from a burning house or lose your job to find it.

I wrote this book for my clients, women juggling multiple priorities and looking for level ground, men wondering what to do with their discomfort, and for the leaders this world needs.

This book, born of the fire sending me running for help, ignites this story of your authentic leadership, awaiting your discovery.

What I found working with women, whether she held a VP, Director, Project Manager, CFO, CMO, or entrepreneur role, was they were facing real and similar struggles:

- Feeling they had little power to act in their roles
- Losing their confidence or doubting themselves
- Criticizing themselves or feeling ashamed if they didn't have all the answers
- Being uncomfortable with risk, staying too long in a role they had long outgrown

It wasn't only women struggling. My male clients were also waging their battles,

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- Taking on other's work and correcting it until it was right
- Not feeling they had the power to change anything
- Feeling stuck
- Being unsure how to show up because they didn't have good leadership models
- Hiding their discomfort from everyone or blowing up like Vesuvius for others to watch in horror

Imposter syndrome strikes anyone, resulting in an eruption for all to see or paralysis, similar to being trapped inside a burning house, running out of options.

I needed an intentional approach beyond the story of a fire and a lost job to help others. I wanted to fix a seemingly pervasive, unyielding, and all-consuming problem people in my neighborhood were facing, being powerful when feeling powerless, being poised in uncertainty, and being present when in doubt. In a word, leadership.

Like the little girl running for help, I was equipped with everything I needed. I studied trends, observed leaders' actions in private and public, researched various published studies, investigated the latest neuroscience findings, asked curious questions, and reflected on my conversations and outcomes with my clients. What resulted left its mark on me, similar to my father's hands from his actions. I poured myself, wisdom, sensations, emotions, and observations into this book. What began with articles, workshops, and events aimed at helping women advance in leadership evolved into a story of leadership presence for everyone. Your authentic leadership can be described only by you. It is for you to discover.

Reflecting on my experiences from the fiery and fateful day in the basement uncovered sensations I had ignored: my breathing, heartbeat, posture, and other sensations I embodied in experiencing what I thought was power. Being told what to do and how to do it was powerlessness. People often lament they don't have the power to be change agents. My memory of a four-year-old who almost burned down a building and moved people twice her age out of her path rejects this assumption.

The realization of my power led me to get help. For all outward appearances, nothing changed. I was still in the basement, seemingly powerless, surrounded by fire, and being told what to do, knowing everything was different. Time stopped. I planned all my next steps. Decades later, I remember the color and smell of the lawn, the deliberately focused path I traveled, and the fear I caused in anyone daring to get in my way. Yes, even as a four-year-old, I was a powerhouse.

As I grew older and wiser, the appreciation for both sides of power led me to try new techniques with people struggling with their expression of power. The methods I used revealed something my clients had never known they always knew. Together we found a simple way allowing them to have transformational insights and begin to do things differently from anything they had ever seen modeled by anyone else.

Gravitas is used for describing leaders with executive presence. I find the literal definition for gravitas, 'Je ne sais quois,' meaning I don't know, useless. I ditched 'gravitas' in favor of something clear and challenging to embody - poise.

Poise is being calm and balanced during uncertainty or volatility. I ran from the basement to tell an uncomfortable truth with poise. Poise was my father's composure in getting up and, with swift action, attending to the emergency I created. Reflecting on my poise and working with people to uncover theirs, we found specific patterns, attributes, characteristics, or markers for their poise, helping them pinpoint when they changed from not poised to poised. The same potatoes create mashed potatoes or scalloped potatoes. Each recipe is different. It is the same for power, poise, and presence. I was helping people unearth their unique biological markers signaling when they were well poised, allowing these same people to use these markers like a recipe to create their unique power, poise, or presence moments.

Presence is the aura radiating your state of being. Presence is rooted in confidence. In my experience, you can be present (little 'p') in any situation. If you want to exude Presence (capital 'P'), you can't do it without confidence. These three - power, poise, and presence form the first stage of uncovering the heart of your authentic leadership.

When I helped people find their authentic leadership zone, they discovered something they never knew always existed within themselves and, once discovered, changed nothing and everything. I helped people uncover their biomarkers for power, poise, and presence. They told me how they used these biomarkers in their daily life, how power helped them rescue situations, how presence allowed them to land new jobs, and how poise uncovered the right thing to do when uncertain - and I wrote it all down in this book. They related how draining it was for them when operating outside their power, poise, and presence zone. I wrote everything they and I experienced in this book, hoping I could help others. The techniques I use and the findings I share will help guide you along your path to uncovering your power, poise, and presence.

Congratulations on your brave new future.

Chapter One

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Why Power, Poise, and Presence

Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong.

- Mandy Hale (Hale 2018)

"I don't know why I can't advance. I'm watching men move ahead. I finished the Ivy League Leadership Program. I passed with flying colors! Why am I struggling? Why can't I make it work for me?" said Bev, the Robotics Manager working in the defense sector. She was the only woman in her department and one of few in her field. She felt isolated and alone.

Repetitive conversations similar to this one inspired me to help other Bev's. People longed for a deep experience to fuel their professional trajectories from dejected, passive, or angry observers to empowered, balanced, and confident titans.

Titans communicate with power. Titans are poised, and most of all, others feel a Titan's presence. Power, poise, and presence are not something *for* you rather something *of you*, your fragrance. Your power, poise, and presence fragrances are unique. The principles and techniques in this book will help you discover your characteristic scent-producing principles allowing you to show up with authentic power, poise, and presence.

Leadership presence is essential for anyone seeking professional, personal, or career growth. Your actions and communications are critical for your success regardless of the stage of your career. According to the Center for Talent Innovation, leadership presence is a top indicator of future promotions. The number one reason people are excluded from top leadership roles is lacking "Executive Presence." (Hewitt 2013) How Executive Presence is defined is a vague mixture of looking and acting the part. Having leadership presence can't be merely an 'act.' Being the part is different from acting the part.

The best actors don't act. They *become* their role. If you want to discover your inner power, poise, and presence, by adopting a one size fits all set of postures, breathing exercises, or mental conjuring, then my approach is not for you. Put the book down and move on to the set of leadership presence books already lining the shelves instructing you how to act the part. If you are ready to face the monster, or the mouse, within yourself, the one sucking away or tiptoeing beside your power, poise, or presence, or you are ready to transform your monster or mouse into the titan bringing you energy, lifting you, and bringing your soul in harmony - if you are ready to *be* the part - then please continue.

Women Need Power, Poise, and Presence

For all the advances women have made, few make it to the top of the business world. As of 2021, over 8% of Fortune 500 companies were led by women CEOs, 41 out of 500. (Connley 2021) Considering women make up half of the workforce and are the primary earners in 40% of families, 8% is nowhere near closing the gap. (Wang 2013) Sparking change at the top by mandating diversity targets fails to include women in the conversation. (Burns 2021).

The "C-level," or the "C-Suite," is used to describe the high-ranking executives in an organization. While only 8% of Fortune 500 companies were led by women in 2021, globally, twenty-nine percent of women were in a senior leadership role. In the US, 31% were in senior leadership roles. (L 2021) According to a McKinsey Report on Women in the Workplace, the data of men and women climbing the corporate ladder show men being far more successful in reaching the C-Suite than women, with 70% of men compared to 30% of the women in senior leadership roles below the C-level.

Men and women had different journeys to the C-Suite. (Burns 2021) Despite women being half of the entry-level workforce, they failed to advance compared to the fast-tracked men. The outlook is worse for Black, Hispanic, and Asian women. (LeanIn.Org 2022) This is nothing new. The phrase "glass ceiling" was coined by Marilyn Loden to acknowledge the invisible barriers women faced in the workforce over forty years ago. (Loden 2022)

Figure 1. Corporate representation is comprised by role and gender. Compiled from data sourced from Women in the Workplace 2022, Leanin.org, and McKinsey 2021 (LeanIn.Org 2022)

Forty years later, few women successfully climbed the corporate ladder after entering the workforce. While the data from McKinsey showed the number of men and women entering the workplace were similar, 52% and 48%, respectively, both women of color and white women lost ground at each step up the corporate ladder compared to men of color and white men, 24% to 75% at the C-Suite - the highest rung on the corporate ladder. (Burns 2021; LeanIn.Org 2022). The data was both undeniable and deflating. The data dismayed me. Women were advancing into leadership roles at a depressing and slower pace than their male peers.

Exasperated women were sharing with me their struggles to advance in their careers. I witnessed the lack of actionable feedback they were getting from their leaders, understood their sense of feeling left out of crucial conversations, observed their lack of support, and witnessed the opportunities to widen their networks shrink. These conversations were similar regardless of the industry or their level in the organization. I found it surprising my male clients complained of facing similar hurdles to their female peers. However, they handled it differently - and neither were handling their hurdles well.

The women verbalized their exasperation, leaned into frustration, and prepared to stomach their situation thinking there was little they could do because the risk was too great to leave their employer. Many times, these women would explore leaving once convinced leaving was the next step. Men, on the other hand, would lose their tempers, ball their fists, ready to punch a wall or risk the uncertainty of moving, many times leaving for another company or a different field.

While bias, prejudice against or in favor of a person or certain group, slows a women's leadership progression, laws and workplace equity measures attempt to correct bias discrimination. Correcting unconscious bias and stereotypes outside of conscious awareness is more complicated. Studies show small gender biases lead to similar gender disparities observed in the McKinsey study. Mandating leadership or executive roles to get to gender equity leads to short-term gains in gender equity, only to return to the initial disparities within a few years, according to study results. (Nordell 2021)

Aside from bias, arguments concerning motherhood pulling women away from career opportunities suggest the lower levels of women in higher leadership roles is due to motherhood. However, various studies have shown women are rather pushed out of the workforce due to workplace inflexibilities, long working hours, lack of support for boundaries, or the high volume of work. (Lim 2019; Salem 2022; McCarthy 2021) Conversely, women deciding to lead has shown merit in a study of Emergency Medicine leaders. (Guptill 2018) Whatever the root cause: bias, being pushed or pulled, or deciding to lead or not, the fact remains fewer women are rising into similar career levels compared to men and are, meanwhile, facing unique external and internal challenges.

Power, Poise, and Presence for Men?

The unique internal challenges are showing up powerful when feeling powerless, poised amid uncertainty, and being present with confidence when fear or doubt takes hold. Women aren't the only ones needing power, poise, and presence. Any method touting how to stand, how to project, who to be like, or whom to emulate belittles the truth. You need to stand, project, and be you. Men can fear others' perceptions of what or how they should be, they suit up with power, poise, and presence. Someone else's.

Men may show confidence. Similar to the actor, they can act the role instead of becoming the part, knowing how to trigger the behavior and live with the discomfort. Outwardly, they may show confidence. Inwardly they wring their hands and build up stress. Eventually, stress may manifest in outbursts, burnout, or anger. If these outbursts are a chronic stress response, the long-term repercussions are cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, stroke, obesity, and more.

Mental stress over a lifetime may contribute to heart disease and cardiovascular episodes. (Vaccarino 2021) A recent study shows men undergoing multiple divorces are at an increased risk for heart disease. (Johns Hopkins Medicine 2021) Men may display a strong show of emotion, anger, blow-ups, or blaming, all due to mishandling power, poise, and presence. Yes, men need power, poise, and presence too.

Benefits

Labeling the disparity of women at the top a ‘woman’s problem’ is both a fallacy and truth. Lacking women in leadership roles is a challenge women face. The fallacy is women aren’t the only ones losing out. Entire organizations are suffering by not having women in leadership roles. Society demands equity, and equity pays. The most recent report from the International Labor Organization (ILO) highlights having more women in decision-making positions can improve business profitability. (Viveros 2019)

Gender diversity boosts economies. Accenture, a global professional service company, calculates global gross domestic product would increase by up to US \$8 trillion by 2028 if the innovation mindset were raised by 10 percent in all countries. (Shook 2021) Accenture proclaims if “organizations want to thrive, they have to get equal.” Corroborating Accenture’s claims, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates reducing the labor force gender gap by 50 percent would lead to an additional GDP gain of 6%. (OECD 2017)

Women are doing the work of supporting their employee’s well-being, leading to happier, less burnt-out employees, thus reducing the attrition rate. (Burns 2021) Happy employees are effective employees - productivity trended up to 62.8%. Higher productivity directly correlates to business profits, and therefore those profits are directly linked to gender diversity, according to the ILO. (Viveros 2019) Women increase the bottom line for the organization, and for organizations to benefit, studies suggest they need to reach a critical mass of women at the top. (Viveros 2019; Shook 2019) The stakes are enormous.

Understanding the importance of a diverse workforce, including having women in top leadership roles, doesn’t quell the struggle to retain women, advance them into leadership roles and keep them in those roles. Leadership quotas may help level the field at first. Without women believing they belong in those roles, having resiliency for what frustrates them, and bearing confidence in being their authentic best, women may continue to struggle or continue to leave the workplace. (Nordell 2021; Guptill 2018; LeanIn.org 2022)

The cost of an up-skill initiative for half the workforce is an expensive undertaking for any organization; however, the price of inaction is costlier. The Workforce Institute estimates an employee's replacement costs the company a conservative 30% of an employee's salary. (Mahan 2020)

Real Reason

What is the real reason behind women not advancing in their careers similar to their male counterparts? Women tend to stay out of the spotlight and promote other's work instead of their own, perhaps, in part, because women engaging in self-promotion can suffer backlash or reprisals. (Rudman 1998; Moss-Racusin 2010) Women tend to self-promote less often or may undervalue their accomplishments compared to their male counterparts. (Moss-Racusin 2010; Exley 2022)

A recent ILO study found women were over-represented in support management functions: HR, Facilities and Administration. Men were over-represented in strategic management functions: Risk, Visioning, Planning, and Financial Analysis. (Viveros 2019)

Strategic management roles serve the springboard to CEO and Board Level positions. According to the ILO, when women are promoted into leadership roles, they promote into supportive management roles, not to strategic ones. Medical fields show women are assistants and associate deans working on education, diversity, and faculty affairs and rarely in influential and strategic clinical or research roles. (Lautenberger 2020) However, a few women are advancing into strategic leadership roles.

The successful women in Emergency Medicine from earlier have more than the casual intention to lead in strategic roles, making strategic roles a life goal. (Guptill 2018) Beyond setting the intention to lead, these successful leaders sought support personnel: mentors, sponsors, and coaches. These successful leaders intended their work and life to support their leadership aims. Thus, they planned according to their intentions. Converse to popular opinion, women, and others have mastered using time to support work and home life. (Vanderkam 2017)

Studying women advancing into strategic leadership roles may shed light for their peers struggling to follow their advancing examples. Beyond the intentionality of deciding to lead observed in Emergency Medicine leaders, a study of medical trainees reveals insights from the other end of the leadership spectrum. (Guptil 2018)

Male and female medical fellows were observed simulating an emergency cardiopulmonary rescue in male or female-led, single-gendered, and mixed-gendered teams where, unbeknownst to participants, they were gauged on their leadership potential. When women were in the lead, regardless of the team composition, there was more chaos, a lack of clear guidance, and a failure to follow through on instructions. The lack of leader confidence, presence, assertiveness, and poise led to weaker team performance in the simulation. By her peers and her supervisors, female leads were deemed, poor leaders. The observation of her

performance being poor also led to her peers judging her not being leadership material. Greater progress is needed earlier in the leadership pipeline for all. (Lautenberger 2020)

When coaching men or women, I often hear, “I’m not showing up the way I know I should,” or, “I’m trying to be what I think is expected or acceptable, and it doesn’t feel right,” and doubt takes hold. The male leaders from the medical study, if they are anything similar to my male clients, probably didn’t have any stronger poise or confidence than their female counterparts. My male clients tend not to let doubt, lack of confidence, or discomfort stop them from acting in the moment. Both men and women are uncomfortable. The difference is, perhaps, women are letting discomfort disrupt their *ability* to act while men are letting discomfort control the *way* they act.

While my male clients might say they don’t “feel comfortable,” they’ll go on to show up confident, barking orders or risk acting a certain way. My female clients might say they “neither feel nor *act* confident nor the way they want.” In fact, my female clients will lose all remaining confidence when even small doubts arise.

My male clients want to feel comfortable with the discomfort of not ‘feeling confident.’ The discomfort leads them to question what outside of themselves is off. My female clients want to figure out what is *wrong* with them and how to act with confidence, even if they don’t necessarily feel it. My female clients, similar to Audrey, someone you’ll meet later, will ‘want to learn how not to crumble.’

Often what happens is people emulate the behavior they see in others achieving their goals. Imagine me trying to jump and twirl and almost breaking my neck, thinking I could be the next Simone Biles. The truth is I don’t have her skill, talent, or, most importantly, her years of training. When I think I can be her by mimicking what she does, I am being delusional. Sure, if I practice, I can then learn - if I want to dedicate all my life towards those skills similar to how Simone has - or I could rather appreciate gymnastics from afar. I chose the latter. Pretty quick if I’m honest.

If a strong leader is loud and boisterous and is all you’ve ever known, then you might also try being loud and boisterous. I’m not saying you are delusional. I would invite you to think broader. If you are not, by nature, wired for loud and boisterous behavior and insist on putting this behavior into practice, you might feel sore and worn out. I was sore, dizzy, and worn out in my twirling escapades. You may come across disingenuous or phony because being loud and boisterous isn’t in your nature.

In my twirling escapades, I expended a ton of energy. By the end of a few twirls, I was exhausted, aside from being bruised. If you are doing something outside your natural or built-up skillset, you may be uncomfortable, use up loads of energy and fail to demonstrate your desired outcome. While I was trying to twirl and bounce, similar to Simone, my appendages wouldn’t move and rotate at odd angles. I was battered, bruised, exhausted, and I easily

communicated with my performance and emotions ‘Lizette is not a gymnast, nor will she ever be.’

Our behaviors and emotions communicate similarly to words or gestures to those near us. Mine did. Behavior study experiments have suggested we are affected by others’ emotions at an incredible pace. We pick up on others’ emotions and infect others with our emotions. (Reis 2009) Indeed, this emotional contagion may explain the peer perception patterns from the medical resident studies.

Emotional Contagion and Embodied Experiences

Emotions or sensations are not accidental. Discomfort, for example, has a physical manifestation, an experience, telling a vibrant story. We often ignore the story or focus on the uncomfortable experience alone. I might relive a discomfort from my life on a constant loop, ruminating on it. In the case of the medical trainees in leadership roles, they may have ignored the embodied wisdom their discomfort communicated to them. Those sensations may have been trying to say, “this behavior doesn’t fit you.” I don’t take my husband’s or my mom’s medication because it was prescribed for them. When uncomfortable sensations rise up, they may be similar to the medication label, telling you, ‘not your meds.’

External forces aren’t responsible for people being poor leaders. We benefit from honoring and listening to the emotions and sensations we and others experience.

In a workshop I conducted, I was asked the question, “How can I avoid the fear of missing out pushing me to attend all these meetings?”

How I answered isn’t important now. You’ll find out in a later chapter. What is important is, after the workshop, one attendee commented in private, “your impactful and insightful reply was counteracted”

by my final response of, “I don’t know if that’s helpful for you?” communicating to the audience ‘I wasn’t confident in my response.’

As a coach, I don’t want to lead my clients in distinct directions or tell them what to do. I thought with my reply, I was granting attendees the ability to choose what to do with the knowledge I shared, at the price of suggesting I lacked confidence. I changed my language to communicate, “I am confident in my message,” while allowing attendees the freedom to use the information I shared. I replaced my final question with this one, “What do you want to do with this knowledge?”

While I can’t control how others perceive me, I can change what I do, say, act, and the emotions I embody, influencing their perceptions. I can doubt myself and ruminate on what I should have done, or I can choose to act with the knowledge I gained and move forward. When

we doubt, it is possible we are influencing others with our contagious emotions, affecting their emotions and perceptions, and communicating poor leadership potential.

Rather than ignore, ruminate, or get stuck with what you experience, I invite you to explore your power, poise, and presence. We will explore your sensations, emotions, knowledge, and experiences to uncover how to use the wisdom in these pages uncovering new insights for you.

Chapter Two

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Biomarkers

“Not I nor anyone else can travel that road for you. You must travel it by yourself. It is not far. It is within reach.”

- Walt Whitman (Whitman 1998)

A One-Way Street

After you eat a meal, your blood glucose levels rise, and cells in your pancreas secrete insulin, a hormone causing your body to absorb the glucose circulating in your blood, returning your glucose levels to normal. Insulin-compromised patients’ bodies can’t produce enough insulin, or the insulin is ineffective. Insulin-compromised patients track their blood glucose with a glucose meter to make appropriate interventions to keep their glucose levels in a normal range to avoid long-term complications.

Glucose is a biomarker of diabetes. The National Institute of Health says a biomarker is a characteristic objectively measured and evaluated, an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or pharmacologic responses to a therapeutic intervention. In non-specialists’ terms, biomarkers are measurable substances pointing to disease or health. (NIH 2021)

According to the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), there are four types of biomarkers: molecular, histographic, radiologic, and physiologic. (United States Food and Drug Administration 2021) The concept of biomarkers serves us in examining your characteristics, power, poise, and presence, similar to the blood glucose meter results.

A blood glucose meter measures blood glucose, and it's a one-way street, meaning the meter will give you a value for glucose in your blood and doesn't impact the source, your blood, your body, or the way your body processes glucose.

What if I told you the results from the glucose meter could be used to change disease into health in your body with nothing more than the biomarker? You'd call me delusional. Your blood glucose level measured from your glucose meter can't change the insulin released in your body or your insulin's effectiveness. Your glucose measure is at the end of a one-way street. The types of biomarkers we use in this book are a two-way street.

How We Use Biomarkers

We go through life feeding the 'meter,' resulting in characteristics, for example, Power or Powerlessness emerging. Take this example. After a presentation, you think to yourself, 'I've done a good job,' because 'People are giving me good feedback,' and 'My boss looks happy with me,' therefore I feel empowered or proud.

When we break this down, here is an example of what might be happening. Into our biomarker meter goes 'feel good about the work,' 'hearing good feedback,' 'seeing a happy boss,' and out pops the reading 'EMPOWERED' or 'PROUD' or whatever is conjured up for you.

Feeling, hearing, and seeing are all physiological biomarkers. These physiological biomarkers exist along a measurable spectrum. I can feel a little to a lot. I can hear or see fuzzy to clear; even if I don't experience a spectrum of possibilities, the spectrum exists. The reading popping out of the meter is the characteristic you label power, poise, presence, or something else.

Many of us live a life of servitude to the meter and experience the element reported out, rarely realizing the biomarker we feed into the meter is under our control. The analogy would be changing your insulin level or your insulin's effectiveness, thus changing the glucose circulating in your blood and the meter's results.

Someone may argue, 'change the meter,' ensuring regardless of what biomarkers you present, your confidence emerges, for example. *You* are the meter. Changing the meter may be beyond your control. Changing your biomarkers are in your control. You control your input biomarkers.

The biomarkers you feed your meter are necessary components leading to your desired characteristics. This will give you a baseline to understand your meter. I will teach you how to discover your biomarkers by traveling in both directions on your two-way street, successfully feeding the meter for your desired results. Once you have this knowledge, you can provide the meter with the biomarkers you identify to show up the way you want.

The Neuroscience behind Biomarkers

Your feelings, bodily movements, sensations, emotions, and memories can all be considered

biomarkers. Memories are probably the most complicated because they evoke strong feelings, movements, sensations, emotions, and the memory's characteristics. Recall a powerful memory and see what sensations and characteristics rise for you.

Weeks after my brother died of pancreatic cancer, I remember breaking down in tears when I heard the lawnmower hum and smelled freshly mowed grass. I remember the room I was standing in when the smell of fresh-cut grass hit me, reminding me of the landscape business he would never operate again. Those sensations reminded me of our summers in Chicago and the quiet strength I found in our relationship, and the peace he found. The memory is carved in my body, sensations, emotions, smells, and sounds. Whenever I bring this memory up, I experience him and the peace flowing from years of shared experiences. Memories are full of biomarkers.

Think of biomarkers akin to ingredients in your kitchen, memories full of fragrance and flavor in the spice rack, dry goods of all shapes and sizes in the pantry, leafy vegetables of various textures, and milk and juices of different heaviness and colors in the refrigerator. We are awash with biomarkers.

Aromas emerge from the kitchen at any given moment. We may realize the aromas when cooking, and not at other times. What scent do you smell at this moment? All day long, we breathe, inhale and smell, unaware of the things we smell. While you may be unaware of all the scents, sensations, movements, feelings, emotions, sights, sounds, and temperatures you experience, your brain absorbs and processes all these. The brain uses all those extended spaces and biomarkers for cognitive thinking inputs. Thinking happens from the extended spaces your brain accesses. (Paul 2021) Our work together will bring those symbolic spaces into your control, allowing you to mobilize your biomarkers and assemble your power, poise, and presence.

The characteristic emerging from my memory of my brother is one of peace. A characteristic can be formed from a recipe, and your biomarkers are the ingredients. When I want to tap into my peace, I think of prayer. I am never alone in prayer. My peace is expansive. My peace smells similar to the healthy oils released from freshly cut grass. I see sunlight softened and layered through sheer curtains, allowing me to taste light, airy sweetness. My breath is soft and smooth. My mind is clear, and my thoughts are silent. If I were to write a recipe for my peace, it would read:

Lizette's Peace

1. Bring to mind prayer.
2. Imagine you are in good company.
3. Think expansiveness.
4. Add the smell of fresh-cut grass.
5. Layer in sunlight, soft and airy.
6. Taste sweetness.
7. Include soft and smooth breathing.

8. Clear your mind.
9. Silence your thoughts.

My peace recipe card contains my biomarkers. Your biomarkers for peace are probably different. You may trigger some of your peace through my peace recipe. Any one of my biomarkers may foul up your recipe for peace. If, however, my peace recipe works for you, I invite you to use it, modify it and make it yours. Your power, poise, and presence recipes are similar to this one.

What are my biomarkers?

Knowing you have biomarkers can be exciting and lead you on a quest. In what direction should I travel? You may wonder, 'what are my biomarkers?' and 'what exactly makes something a biomarker?'

Biomarkers can be anything meaning something to you and a few things meaning nothing to you. Some biomarkers can be scents of my fresh-cut grass from earlier or sensations of expansiveness or thoughts of a clear mind or your breathing, or certain emotions. These biomarkers may make sense to you because when you think about an experience or a memory, these sensations may come to mind without much thinking. They arise from your senses, and you are conscious of them.

Other biomarker types are nonsensical. Even if I recall my peace from earlier, I didn't consider where it emerged. My heart, since you are wondering. We don't think about sensation saying, 'hmmm, where might the center be?' Location can be an important marker. I rarely find the scissors in our kitchen because someone moved them from the drawer. Knowing the scissors have a home shows me where to look. A location is an important marker to discover where a characteristic calls home.

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