

**Newsletter: Perspective Migration
Mark Moser in May 2021**



Being present and communicating effectively

Who of us does not dream of being able to communicate in a manner that is effective and leads to excellent results? But I often struggle just to say what I am thinking. I do not find the tone or words to express my thoughts. And when I do find the words and tone I often realise they are not heard and/or do not lead to the desired outcome.

I wish I could help others to communicate in a manner that is clear, avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Over the years I have found an ingredient that is as vital to effective communication as salt is to a delicious soup. The ingredient is “presence”.

Presence is a key to connecting with persons and being convincing. It allows us to steer a conversation by gaining trust and noticing where we can sow seeds of trust and connection in the communication process. But just as important is the skill of persuasion.

You may be thinking: “But I do not need to be convincing in my job as state prosecutor, judge, police officer or interviewer for the Migration office.” Being convincing is a key element of professional communication. Many of our tasks rely on being persuasive. We persuade persons to give us information they may prefer to withhold. We persuade bosses to provide us with more resources. We persuade co-workers to take on an assignment and to offer support.

The art of persuasion and the art of being present are married. But not always happily married 😊.

It was Walt Whitman who said: “We convince with our presence.”

The state prosecutor was questioning the accused person in regard to her role in falsifying papers and fraud. He was going through his list of questions to the specifics of the allegations of fraud and getting more and more irritated by the evasive responses. Then he asked “Were you conscious of the fact at that moment, that what you were doing is against the law?” After a series of long, winding answers it was clear from his para- and nonverbal signals, that he was losing patience. I noticed a change of his body language. He never

looked up from his notes, he looked at the secretary of the court's screen and just nodded randomly.

Then the baseline of the communication changed. He sat up straight, breathed deeply and looked out of the window. He got up and tilted it open. Returning to his chair he paused and leaned forward, looking softly and attentively at the accused person. There was a shift in presence. "When I changed the signature my focus was on what the benefit of my actions would potentially be in regard to ... (continued) and so in response to my consciousness, it was more on the consequences of signing the papers rather than the implications, that I knew somewhere in the back of my mind, it would have." The accused sighed. The state prosecutor waited. His body language open. He let silence linger long enough to create meaning.

Presence is not easy to describe, but you know what it feels like after experiencing it!

Alan Watts wrote in *The Wisdom of Insecurity*, "To understand music, you must listen to it. But so long as you are thinking, 'I am listening to this music,' you are not listening."

It takes courage to overcome our insecurities, to overcome the small ego and power play and to bring the best of us, our confidence, passionate compassion and care for truth to the table of "now". They can only change something in the here and now. Not in the past and not in the future. Only in the present.

Presence is made up of several components:
Physical, mental, emotional and energetic.

Physical presence starts with making myself as comfortable as possible whilst keeping my objective in mind. I remind myself that my body speaks louder than my verbal message. An open body will convey openness and will influence my communication partners as we tend to mirror our body language. I take a body posture that is calm but with a good degree of tension as I want to be attentive (which requires tension, but not too much). I do not want to create pressure as this creates counter-pressure. I give the others space but hold an invisible but tangible ribbon which allows connection.

Mental presence expresses itself by being fully here. In this negotiation, meeting, interrogation or whatever, through active listening. Being here does not require a tense concentration which is a great effort. I think of mental presence as keeping a balloon floating in the air between my communication partners. I blow at it every few seconds or give it a tap to keep it flying. I recognize distractions and do not resist them but gently leave them aside. Active listening comes into play and I listen to understand more than to be heard, and collect as much data as possible to be able to formulate what the sender is trying to convey before appraising the heard. When I recognize how challenging it can be to transmit thoughts into words and to convey them in the right sequence and manner, the quality of my listening and of the speaker's message increases.

Emotional presence includes noticing and acknowledging emotions triggered by the interaction. I do not reject or embrace them but say "hi and bye". Emotions can help build

bridges to others or tear them down. In some cultures, the absence or presence of emotions is key to building trust and receiving recognition as being professional. It may therefore require a short explanation of how we deal with emotions in a given professional situation in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Energetic presence is our ability to show up authentically, to make people feel seen and cared for. With energetic presence, we can intentionally direct our energy, presence, and actions, becoming the 'cause' of impact — getting in front of the experience we want to create. Presence is when all your senses agree on one thing at the same time. Our communication becomes congruent and verbal, para- and nonverbal signals align and say the same thing. This conveys reliability because it is authentic.

Holding presence requires energy and therefore, my goal is to be present in the next five minutes. And then I let go of the presence for a little while and catch it again (like a balloon in the air) and I hold another five minutes of presence.

Many people tend to flee, in the sense of mental wandering, sudden changes of subject, talking to themselves or just daydreaming. So they are only physically present. Do we notice when we and others tend to flee?

Observe the situations in which you tend to escape behaviour.

Escape manifests itself in interpersonal communication through:

- Divided attention
- Cancelled visual and audio contact
- Mental wandering
- Talking instead of hearing

We can support persons who are “fleeing” from the communication setting by noticing, speaking about it and providing support to stay in the here. This may include taking short breaks and letting all involved drop concentration to check their phones or look out of the windows. It may be letting people move physically or change positions, by changing the pace or topic or by even just acknowledging that a topic is unpleasant and / or challenging.

Learning to be present continues to be a crucial ingredient in my professional work to enhance my competence.

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