

Learn to Lead Through the Power of Presence

By Jeremy C. Burton

“I sent them an email three days ago and haven’t heard back.”

“I texted them twice and am waiting on a response.”

If you are in a leadership role, you have probably heard these type of comments. This is an all too common type response in this work era. The irony, of course, is some of these requests are being emailed and texted to people who are literally a short walk away.



Technology has given us fantastic tools, but has diminished the leadership art of presence.

To be a leader in your organization you must embrace the idea that a call or visit is sometimes the prescription for moving the needle, managing conflict and building strong relationships.

Here are 5 principles you should incorporate in your leadership routines:

1. Pick up the phone when projects are stuck

This is a HUGE pet peeve of mine. Stop typing and pick up the phone! This call will speed up your process and will eliminate any stress caused by misinterpreting email tone. Emails are often read in a negative tense even if it is not intended.

2. With critical projects, visit peers and leadership face-to-face

I had a critical project on the line with a redesign of the website. The process was pretty slow-moving. To make quicker progress, I began going into the office of the IT department every two to three days. I would talk to the programmer in the lead and ask two questions: Do you need anything from me right now and is there any way I can serve you on the project?

This simple exercise made this programmer feel valued and nudged him lovingly forward. This discipline can work very well with the right demeanor.

3. Speak face-to-face in tense or combative situations

Don't have it out over email or text if someone is angry or misunderstands you. Phone is a secondary option if they are remote or traveling. Find a private place where you can look them in the eyes and listen. When you respond, ensure you do it with a soft voice and relaxed body language. You can turn these types of situations into a winning relationship quickly.

4. Send feedback after phone or face-to-face meetings

These encounters are great for relationship building, but sometimes things are misunderstood or misinterpreted. A great practice is send a quick email to reiterate what you discussed.

5. Call or visit when nothing is pressing

Don't wait until there is a crisis on your hands. Start building relationships with people now. Buy someone a cup of coffee, take them to lunch or pop-in just to see how their weekend went. These types of interactions will help you be more effective as a team long term.

Simple yet powerful. Not only should you practice presence regularly, you should encourage those under your mentorship to learn this valuable soft skill.

Now, get off your email and go pay a colleague a visit.