

Presence Consulting Creates Lasting Change

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The next time you experience an exhilarating event—like a weekend retreat, a presentation by a world-class speaker, or a tour of another country—pay attention to the comments from participants at the very end. As often as not, you will hear something like “Oh, well, back to the real world.” The notion that the experience could possibly change one’s life in the “real world” seems preposterous.

Many organizations face this disconnect when initiating change efforts, especially efforts around people and culture change. People leave an electrifying session on the power of culture change only to return to the same old systems. Using the lessons learned to transform even a team, let alone an organization, becomes an uphill battle; people’s energy quickly dissipates, and change doesn’t happen.

Enter Presence Consulting: a dynamic bridge between the education and the day-to-day work interactions, empowering people to apply and live the change.

Presence Consulting is exactly what its name implies. Outside consultants come into a client organization and become fully integrated into the web of relationships there. They attend the same meetings, eat in the same cafeteria, and chat in the same hallways as the people inside the organization. They even schedule “unscheduled time” to wander around and talk with people. To be sure, these consultants often facilitate formal education sessions that support the change process. But what happens in between those sessions—the “being present” to the people of the organization—sets Presence Consulting apart.

The unique position of Presence Consultants—as insiders *and* outsiders—makes them a safe resource for people who are striving to work through the change. The constant presence of the consultants fosters trust; their exceptional ability to engage people builds trust quickly. Their status as experts breeds respect. And because the consultants are formally outside the system, people deem it safe to say the unsaid and challenge the unchallengeable when with them.

Without this kind of safety, no change can take place.

How do Presence Consultants leverage the safety and trust created to move change forward? Often it is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. After meetings (which the consultants attend along with the people who work in the organization), someone may pull them aside to ask, “Got a minute? I want to run something by you.” At no time are people more receptive than when they are asking for feedback, so these moments become prime opportunities to communicate the change in a way the person can adopt.

At other times, it is a matter of pointing out the change occurring right in their midst. In a recent session on our 12 Inclusive Behaviors, someone spoke of a missed opportunity to challenge a colleague. She also communicated her decision to rectify the situation. We immediately pointed to her decision as an example of one of the Inclusive Behaviors: “*lean into discomfort—be willing to challenge self and others.*” She became a living example of what previously,

to the group, had been merely an abstraction.

That is also the motivation behind another Presence Consultant imperative: to model the change. Every day, we attempt to “match the video with the audio,” to provide a visual embodiment of what the change looks like. That includes modeling ways to challenge the status quo, which paves the way for others to do the same. A model of **Inclusion as the HOW®** often connects with people, and changes their mindsets, in ways that a formal presentation never could.

Through all these ways, Presence Consultants foster a change *within* people every day. They “get in the heads” and hearts of the people experiencing Presence Consulting, so that the consultant’s voice is present even when the consultant is not. This improves the chances that the change will last far longer than the consulting engagement does.

In fact, we can tell that Presence Consulting is working when the people in the organization essentially become their *own* Presence Consultants. Recently, a leadership team became stuck on subjects that were not yet safe to discuss; they required *leaning into discomfort* and “mentioning the unmentionable.” We pointed this out as an opportunity to grow by challenging one another. Now these same people freely challenge one another with the need to put everything on the table. This

Inclusive Behavior is now *their* Inclusive Behavior.

When Presence Consulting works, people make problems visible, the right questions come to the surface, teams encourage everyone to contribute, meetings become more productive, manager-leaders listen before they lead. Most important, the organization taps into the entire workforce to gain a 360-degree perspective and thus drive better decisions. And it all starts with people whose purpose is simply to be there, in real time, to help people make their own change.