

# aspirations

*to greater*

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## JOCELYN WRIGHT

CHAMPIONING DIVERSITY IN FINANCIAL SERVICES *p.16*



**SHERRI STEPHENS**  
A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY *p.10*



**MARTA SHEN**  
EYE ON THE FUTURE *p.22*

# The power of your presence

## “A Lasting Impression”

By Robyn L. Scott, Executive Presence Coach

I once coached an executive who, following decades of modeling her behavior after masculine leaders in a male-dominated field, had developed a rigid presence. Her style was not a truthful reflection of who she really was, and her nonverbal expressions were, well, not very expressive. She had acquired a rather cold business persona that either intimidated or confused people.

After one of our exercises, I referred to a quote: “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

“Maya Angelou said that!” my client exclaimed. Her presence transformed as she recalled meeting one of the greatest American poets of our time. She then reflected, “I don’t really remember what she said, but I felt important.”

“What did Maya do that left you feeling important?” I asked.

My client placed her hand over her heart and leaned toward me (signs of vulnerability). She shared, “Maya Angelou took the time to really listen to my mom who went on and on about her recent book. She didn’t interrupt. When Maya talked, she didn’t rush her words. I remember that she looked me in the eye when she spoke to me. She had a commanding presence. She was really grounded.”

Like Maya Angelou’s quote suggests, the “what” isn’t as impactful as the “how.” Here’s how to tap into one of your greatest powers – your presence:

Lead with your **TRUTH**.

### Take responsibility for your body’s language.

We have many ways of self-soothing when we get nervous. We cross our arms or we sway back and forth. We avoid eye contact or we wring our hands. These mannerisms act like armor and protect us when we feel vulnerable. Feeling safe is a good thing. Coming across as “closed off” or “shut down” isn’t. Physical manifestations of anxiety betray the most competent of leaders.

**“She was really grounded.”**

Uncross your arms, balance your posture, and relax your hands. While you’re not responsible for how others interpret your style of communication, you are in charge of your physicality. I’m a big fan of controlling the controllable because everything outside of you is beyond your control.

### Release the illusion of control.

Let go of the temptation to memorize a script or preplan witty responses. Engage your emotional intelligence by listening as much as – if not more than – you talk.

**“She didn’t interrupt.”**

No one will ever get mad at you for listening too much. Welcome the information people want to share with you, and trust your instincts to formulate a genuine response in the moment. Take the pressure off yourself to steer the conversation and go along for the ride! Speaking of journeys ...

### Understand your purpose.

Follow your North Star. Consider the point you want to make before you start making it, and let that guide you. Create a map that aligns your body’s language with your intention by placing powerful verbs behind your statements: “I am here to inspire my client!” “I am here to rally my division!” Your central nervous system knows precisely how to communicate your message, which prevents mixed signals. From there, take your time.

**“She didn’t rush her words.”**

When you know where you want to land, you tend to get there more efficiently. Avoid rambling, and know that as you become more economic with your word choice, not only do your statements take on more power – you take on more power. With that alignment, you can positively impact others.







*She was really grounded.  
She didn't interrupt.  
She didn't rush her words.  
She looked me in the eye.  
She took the time to really listen.*

### Teach people how to treat you.

Since we mirror each other, be the light that brightens the room instead of waiting for it to reflect on you. If you want to be greeted with warmth, soften your approach. If you want to be seen, maintain eye contact with people and honor their contributions. If you want to be heard, listen more. When you speak, use inclusive language.

***“She looked me in the eye.”***

Create a shared experience by commanding attention vs. demanding attention. Invite the focus.

### Humble yourself.

“But I want to have swagger when I present. I want to pitch ideas with bravado!”

Bravado is like pounding on the chest, and courage is revealing your heart. The pounding tries to distract people from your fear, whereas courage asks you to pull back your armor and be real. Bravery combined with passion wins every time.

***“She took the time to really listen.”***

When you take time to be truly present with others, you give all involved a gift: the ability to relax in the midst of this hurried gotta-know-it-n-say-it-right-now society. Your breathing calms, your shoulders fold away from your earlobes, and your eyebrows don't furrow. These micro-expressions trigger the same response in your listener, allowing everyone to communicate more empathetically. This is when your presence becomes your super power.

And that's the **TRUTH.** 🎧

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