

Book Review

***Leadership Material: How Personal Experience Shapes Executive Presence.* By Diana Jones. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017.
(e-book available)**

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Diana Jones has written an exceptional guide to the complex journey of becoming a valued and responsive leader. For most of us the role comes first. We then have that extended “seat of our pants” period when we struggle with how much of our true person can exist alongside, or even benefit, the job of leading. Diana’s book wakens the reader to a level of consciousness bright with promise. Her language is simple and flows as you turn pages, reading remarkable stories of persons like you, making their way—sometimes defensive, sometimes clueless, and still eager to learn and succeed.

The book is organized in 10 chapters, each chapter with case studies from Diana’s 30 years as an executive coach. Then you are provided with practice sessions developed to invite you into the training session and become your own case study. For example, in “Chapter 3: How Relationships Work,” Diana offers the reader a series of questions and short tasks giving you an experience of your personal sociometry—the people who make up the world you inhabit, who stand out, blend in, or trip you up. You get to know empathy in the workplace. You study your own groups and create a case study of your connections. This guidance has immediate benefits when you follow along the tips Diana gives for the language of the receptive leader.

Persons trained in psychodrama, sociodrama, and sociometry will find this chapter a remarkable example in the way Diana introduces the concepts and experiences drawn from her years of study to become one of the few certified sociometrists in the world. (She is a TEP certified through the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association and a past member of their executive board.) In Chapter 3 there is a section titled “The Tele Connection.” Diana begins with:

Something beyond the traditional concept of empathy is required to account for the complex dynamics of work relationships. Relationships are not one-way, they are two-way between people, and multidimensional among people. Where ‘empathy’ falls short in organizations is

that its one-way nature leaves staff and peers unaccountable for their part in the relationship.

The field of Sociometry gives us language and concepts to help us describe what is occurring. . . . Tele reflects the socioemotional distance between people based on measures of companionship. (p.59)

It is helpful for business leaders, heads of agencies, and managers of large and small corporations to know there is a rich field of study of interpersonal communication available. And further, it is a field that goes beyond the building of skills and resources. It is a field that grows you into a person who connects with others, who is seen by others as receptive, a person others want to have as a leader. Diana shines the light on the steady commitment it takes to discover the way your life experiences enrich the work you have chosen. She calls us to value our emotional life as the source of how we have come to know the important events that have shaped us. To quote her again, “Mutual positive connections inspire people to take action, leading to progress and forward movement” (p. 61).

Executive presence is highly sought. It conveys a level of involvement that is welcoming, inclusive, attractive, and solid. Some may confuse this presence with charisma. Perhaps energetically they have similar components; however, executive presence is earned through mining your own personal history for the essence of that life event as a valuable experience to build upon. Diana describes these events as the source of the “emotional tone” the leader brings into the room, the source of his or her receptivity to the others.

This is one of those books you take with you when you travel to offsite locations. It helps you integrate moments that have unsettled you. The sections of each chapter take you directly to Diana’s succinct listing of questions to ask yourself. You are able to reflect more easily with her practical approach. A whole team can engage the perplexing issues and feel Diana’s presence as guide. Attributing meaning to something immediate and sharing the search with colleagues creates a bond. Well done, Diana. Thank you for your generous sharing from your professional and personal life.

Readers will want to check out Diana Jones’s website *The Organisational Development Company* as a resource for useful videos, podcasts, and her monthly newsletter.