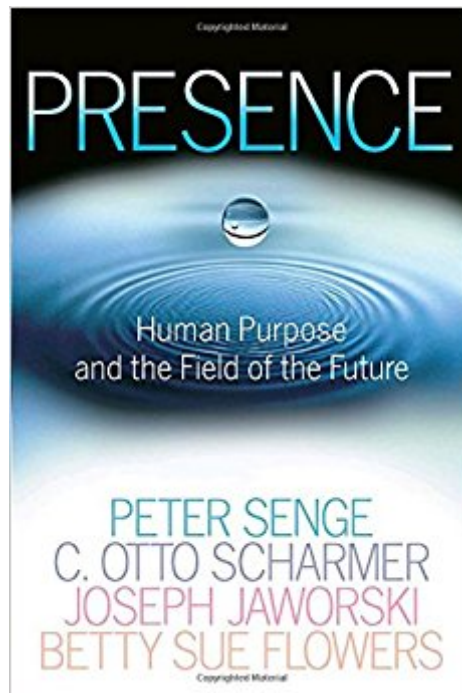




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Presence: Human Purpose And The Field Of The Future



Synopsis

Presence is an intimate look at the development of a new theory about change and learning. In wide-ranging conversations held over a year and a half, organizational learning pioneers Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers explored the nature of transformational change—how it arises, and the fresh possibilities it offers a world dangerously out of balance. The book introduces the idea of “presence”—a concept borrowed from the natural world—that the whole is entirely present in any of its parts—to the worlds of business, education, government, and leadership. Too often, the authors found, we remain stuck in old patterns of seeing and acting. By encouraging deeper levels of learning, we create an awareness of the larger whole, leading to actions that can help to shape its evolution and our future. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of 150 scientists, social leaders, and entrepreneurs, including Brian Arthur, Rupert Sheldrake, Buckminster Fuller, Lao Tzu, and Carl Jung, Presence is both revolutionary in its exploration and hopeful in its message. This astonishing and completely original work goes on to define the capabilities that underlie our ability to see, sense, and realize new possibilities—in ourselves, in our institutions and organizations, and in society itself.

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Customer Reviews

Presence can be read as both a guide and a challenge to leaders in business, education, and government to transform their institutions into powerful agents of change in a world increasingly out of balance. Since business is the most powerful institution in the world today, the authors argue, it

must play a key role in solving global societal problems. Yet so many institutions seem to run people rather than the other way around. In this illuminating book, the authors seek to understand why people don't change systems and institutions even when they pose a threat to society, and examine why institutional change is so difficult to attain. The authors view large institutions such as global corporations as a new species that are affecting nearly all other life forms on the planet. Rather than look at these systems as merely the extension of a few hyper-powerful individuals, they see them as dynamic organisms with the potential to learn, grow, and evolve--but only if people exert control over them and actively eliminate their destructive aspects. "But until that potential is activated," they write, "industrial age institutions will continue to expand blindly, unaware of their part in a larger whole or of the consequences of their growth." For global institutions to be recreated in positive ways, there must be individual and collective levels of awareness, followed by direct action. Raising this awareness is what Presence seeks to achieve. Drawing on the insights gleaned from interviews with over 150 leading scientists, social leaders, and entrepreneurs, the authors emphasize what they call the "courage to see freshly"--the ability to view familiar problems from a new perspective in order to better understand how parts and wholes are interrelated. This is not a typical business book. Mainly theoretical, it does not offer specific tips that organizational managers or directors can apply immediately; rather, it offers powerful tools and ideas for changing the mindset of leaders and unlocking the latent potential to "develop awareness commensurate with our impact, wisdom in balance with our power." --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Critical Acclaim for Presence

“A remarkable book, Presence is a journey from the present to an unknown future, a journey of exploration rather than dogma, and a journey toward a vision of humanity at its highest. Like a good documentary film, Presence is a book with emotional truth, a wonderful combination of intellectual and visceral experience.”

•Robert Fritz, author of The Path of Least Resistance

“At this turbulent juncture in human history, a whole new set of social innovations promises to shift humanity away from its destructive path towards a brighter planetary civilization. Presencing and its U process is one of the most profound. It provides all who want to change the world not only with profound hope, but with a systematic and effective way to birth a sustainable planetary society.”

•Nicanor Perlas, recipient of the 2003 Alternative Nobel Prize and the U.N. Environmental Program Global 500 Award

“If you believe, as I do, that an organization is ultimately a human community, then nothing is more important than how we sense our future and act to create it together. This is something all creative business leaders know yet have found almost

impossible to talk about until Presence. Rich Teerlink, CEO (retired), Harley-Davidson
“Presence is a timely and altogether important book. Drawing on a leading-edge understanding of human learning and awareness, it offers a simple but effective getaway to our capacity to become change agents of the future in business, work, play, and relationships. Finding our presence is finding the key to creative change and to our own future.”
Ken Wilber, author of A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality
“Presence is remarkable in at least three ways. First, the authors’ work has extraordinary emotional, as well as intellectual impact; it continued to affect me long after my initial reading. Second, I found that the insights I gleaned from the work depended on what was happening around me. I suspect I will take away different messages each time I read it. Third, the authors somehow opened me to unexpected messages and opportunities in my own life. My reading of Presence coincided with many seemingly chance encounters that in very real and specific ways have been essential to my own work, helping me find new ways to connect with colleagues, customers, and the larger community.”
Darcy Winslow, General Manager, Global Women’s Footwear, Apparel, Equipment, Nike, Inc.

I was excited at the thought of reading a really profound book (based partly on other reviews and Peter Senge’s involvement), but I was really disappointed. I’m sure the gurus and guru-worshippers imagine that I’m just too dense to get it. In all fairness, there are probably two or three sentences that are really profound. The rest of the book, in my opinion, is just ephemeral fluff. I started this book three different times and tried to force myself to read it. I just did not enjoy it at all; the hokey-ness of it just could not hold my attention. It could be me, but the book just reeked of psych-babble, feel-good pseudo-science. It probably isn’t fair to review a book that I couldn’t finish, but I would not recommend this book.

The book sets up a great understanding of how to move beyond self in the process of learning how to play well with others. Framing the understanding of Theory U, the examples of how people moved from individual constraints and passive activity in decision-making to joining forces and going beyond existing paradigms is inspiring for all those who wish to create a better world.

While our "political" leaders are busy playing with the media and keeping the spin on, some leaders from academics and business are working on the true issues of our time. Senge, et.al., in this book Presence, are making real progress in how to approach the challenges of managing and leading

during these times of great change, as decisions made today either imperil or enhance future generation's abilities to survive. Written as a dialogue, with examples from experiences by the authors and results of extensive interviews with world leaders from various fields, this book is a masterwork. Having learned from leading scientists, managers, philosophers and artists, this team explains that as we project future scenarios, and truly gain wisdom from what they can teach us, we gain the power to change the future. They further demonstrate the empowerment that is possible by inclusion of many different realities in creation of learning environments and warn of the lack of vision that wearing 'Cartesian' blinders bring, when working in a global context that includes the East and the West. Introducing the "U" theory of learning, developed by Otto Scharmer (one of the authors), the reader begins to see the power of leadership based on focusing on the "whole" rather than the noise that captures so much of our leaders attention. Systems thinking principles are used throughout the book. The combination of the dialogue based style, the new ideas found in the "U" theory, and the hopeful message that we can change the world by becoming tolerant, inclusive and wise, as opposed to "busy", makes this a masterwork. It is well referenced and the bibliography is very useful. Read this book.

This book is amazing if read and processed gradually. I found the principles of living to be life changing. It has helped me find a new way of being that allows me to rethink what my purpose in life to be. After being present with the authors daily in short, quiet, yet meaningful moment, I am able to suspend judgment about many old ideas and found a peace within that is allowing life to enfold in a new synchronistic way. I have read it three times.

This is one of those books where you can have 100 readers, and each one will come away with something different. You might view it as a definitive guide for co-creating solutions to hard problems in complex environments. Or, you can use it as a collection of vignettes, each having its own bit of wisdom. In fact, there are quite a few gold nuggets here. You'll have to find those which appeal to you, stitch them together, and, as the authors suggest, prototype a solution. But be forewarned. Whatever your purpose, you'd better have a completely open mind. These guys definitely stretch beyond the usual scientific boundaries. However, if you stay with it, you'll begin to see how you can truly be part of something greater, working toward a greater good. In fact, that's probably the only assurance we have that the authors' doomsday scenario won't come to fruition. You'll need to be patient in plowing through the long conversations. But if you are a believer in emergence, you'll see why those conversations need to be preserved. And what emerges is a better way. Rather than

driving change, we see the greater possibilities that can result from discovering, then co-creating, the change that wants to come out. And yes, there are some case histories based on real situations. The authors attack scientific reductionism and fragmentation head-on. Thankfully, they also give us an alternative approach - if you have the guts to try it. They make this point very strongly: the only way we can deal with today's complex problems is to view them from the perspective of what the authors call unbroken wholeness, and interrelatedness of nature. By Chapter 14, we get to see how integrating science can help us do just that. Unlike the authors, I'm not into doomsday scenarios. So the end was a bit hard to swallow. But I still came away with a lot of food for thought, introspection and reflection regarding the future, and how we might take an active part in creating that future, which is so desperately trying to emerge. My suggestion: give the "U" approach a try, see what emerges, and run with it. You might be pleasantly surprised.

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