

## Somatics, Neuroscience, and Leadership

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### History of Strozzi Somatics

For the last 40 years, Strozzi Institute has been training leaders in business, education, military, non-profit, social change, and many other domains. What distinguishes our work is our unique mind-body approach to developing a greater capacity for effective action. Some have seen this approach as cutting-edge; others have seen it as marginal at best. Despite a long history of positive results, the question “What does the body have to do with leadership?” remains bewildering to many.

As science turns its attention to the study of the brain, this question is becoming easier to answer. Discoveries in neuroscience confirm that the somatic approach we use is actually the most direct route to developing the behavioral and interpersonal skills that exemplary leaders share. This explains why over time, our Embodied Leadership™ methodology has come to be seen more and more as “the missing piece” to transformational learning and leadership development.

However we didn't start with the science. Our somatic approach grows out of a lineage that stretches back decades and often, centuries, drawing upon what people have observed across time and culture about what it takes to become an exemplary citizen, leader, and human being. The work is grounded in traditions that have influenced human transformation for generations, including Eastern and Western philosophy, meditation, and martial arts. It also draws upon relevant work in more contemporary disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, management theory, and bodywork. Each of these time-tested domains has made an important contribution to our understanding of the nature of being human. Strozzi Institute's place in these multiple streams of wisdom has been to interweave their insights and then focus the lens on questions of leadership. In designing our programs we used what has worked for generations, paying close attention to the results as we experimented with applying those lessons to today's needs. Over time we have built a truly transformative discourse on somatic leadership.

Now, new research in neuroscience further validates what our intuition, successful results, common sense, and satisfied customers have been telling us for years. Rather than being marginal, cutting edge, or a “complementary” approach, Strozzi Somatics is shown to be fundamental. It turns out that by including the body, we have been addressing the heart of leadership all along.

## **Two Major Contributions of Neuroscience**

### **The Biology of Human Behavior**

One of the most significant contributions neuroscience has made to somatics is the newly scientifically supported insight about how relational and behavioral learning occurs. We now know that this sort of learning is largely a biological process. In response to one’s relational and emotional environment, individual brain cells undergo both structural and biochemical changes that make them more likely to fire. Although this process goes on throughout our lifetime, it is in especially high gear during the early years of life when the brain and body are developing rapidly. In simple terms, this means that the pattern of relating that took care of your most basic needs for love and survival when you were young literally shaped the very structure of your brain. This shaping – known as implicit memory – develops primarily through biological and behavioral responses to sensory, social, and emotional cues. These messages register in the brain much faster than their cognitive, rational, logical counterparts. In fact during the first two of years of life, implicit memory is the *only* sort of memory that our brains are capable of recording.

Because of this, our biological structure makes certain behaviors more easily accessible to us than others. For example some people are quick to anger, others are eager to please, and still others are quick to give up in resignation. These inclinations persist into adulthood, and are closely tied to one’s sense of identity and security. Because they are embodied, they operate below conscious awareness and become automatic habits that drive our actions, sometimes despite our best intentions. While these patterns of response are definitely changeable – studies of neuroplasticity show that the brain is far more malleable in adulthood than was once thought – they are also fairly resistant to change. After all, these tendencies developed out of an impulse

for survival, and since you're here today reading this, they've clearly been effective. Consequently behavioral change can feel threatening, unsafe, or disruptive, because strong impulses around identity and survival often get triggered in the process of pursuing a new way of being.

This is why exclusively intellectual learning, while it is certainly useful for gaining new information, is ultimately insufficient for transformational leadership development. Take Carlos as an example. Carlos is a terrifically friendly guy. This nice-guy persona is a big part of his self-image. However he has received feedback in his performance reviews that he's an overly accommodating leader. In his eagerness to please everyone and make sure that the whole team is happy, he fails to make definitive choices or set clear standards. He has a good grasp of his problem, having read widely about the importance of decisive leadership. He's aware of the cost to his team's success and his own career. He's developed a great deal of insight about himself by talking at length to colleagues, coaches, and peers about how his tendency to be overly accommodating is hampering his success. Still, the ability to take more decisive action is simply not at hand for him.

*This is because he's trying to address a behavioral tendency that was learned through non-cognitive, biological processes with a primarily cognitive solution.* While this is the most commonly used approach, it is, unfortunately, a tremendously limited strategy that in most cases falls short. Shifting a behavioral tendency requires social, emotional, and biological learning. You simply cannot get this kind of learning through bullet points on a slide. You can't even get it through personal insights and "aha's." The part of the brain that governs behavior speaks a different language and learns in an entirely different way.

In order for Carlos to become more decisive – in other words to *embody* decisiveness so that it's an easily accessible quality that's always available to him – he needs to reproduce the process by which he learned to be accommodating. One way behavioral tendencies originally become embedded in our nervous system is through relational and emotional experiences that are repeated over time. This is exactly what Carlos needs to engage in: an ongoing practice that addresses the emotional and relational aspects of being decisive.

At Strozzi Institute, we specialize in developing these kinds of practices for leaders. A fundamental underpinning of Strozzi Somatics is that what creates durable personal change is not intellectual learning but rather highly relevant practice. This claim reflects what scientists are now

telling us about how implicit memory forms. Behavioral tendencies are built biologically through recurrence over time. We can only change them in the same way: by engaging the whole self – physiological, emotional, social, intellectual – in ongoing, repeated practice.

### **The Intelligence of the Body**

Another significant contribution neuroscience has made to somatic work is the discovery that our intelligence lies not just in the brain, but rather in the body as a whole. The brain extends down your spinal cord and out to the furthest reaches of your body through the central and autonomic nervous systems. But beyond this long-known body-brain relationship, there are multiple new findings that illuminate the nature of this connection even further.

There are at least two other centers of the body that have been shown to have some functions that are surprisingly similar to the brain in your head. Recent work in neurocardiology suggests that the heart has an extensive intrinsic nervous system that enables it to process information and to learn, remember, and make functional decisions independent of the brain. Similarly, the relatively new field of neurogastroenterology has demonstrated that there is another “brain” in the gut – known as the enteric nervous system – that also functions nearly independently of the brain inside your head. It is because of this that you can digest food without a second thought; it’s also why a person can be “brain dead” but still have the ability to process nutrients. In fact, the brain in your gut sends signals to the brain in your head *nine times* for every signal in the other direction. In other words, your gut has more influence over your mind than you might have imagined! While your heart and gut definitely do not “think” in the cognitive, rational sense of the word, they do pick up critical information from both inside and outside the body and translate it into actionable information.

Furthermore, the brain itself devotes most of its real estate to sensory and emotional processing, rather than cognitive, intellectual thought. It’s long been known that the left side of the brain specializes in logic, language, and reason, whereas the right hemisphere is better at recognizing social cues, non-verbal signals, and sensory information coming from inside the body. Lately it’s also become popular to refer to the “reptilian,” limbic, and neocortical aspects of the brain: three roughly anatomical groupings that have different but overlapping functions. While the reptilian brain mediates physiological processes such as heart rate and respiration, the limbic system

primarily mediates emotion, and the more recently evolved neocortex is the seat of logic and reason. The structures that store implicit memory – the kind of relational and behavioral learning I referred to earlier – are located primarily in the limbic and reptilian systems, and are heavily influenced by the right hemisphere of the brain.

Looking at the brain in this way, it becomes clear that conventional strategies for learning the interpersonal skills of leadership inadvertently neglect a great deal of our intelligence. Intellectual approaches to learning address only about one third of our brains, and virtually ignore the whole-body intelligence that lies in our heart, our gut, and the rest of our body. Furthermore, conventional cognitive-based learning rarely reaches the part of our intelligence that is primarily responsible for governing social interactions and behavior – those key interpersonal skills that effective leaders must learn to master.

Behavioral learning is a complex psychobiological process. It stands to reason that leaders who want to unlearn, re-learn, or learn new behavioral and relational skills must follow that same process for the best possible chance of success. At Strozzi Institute we focus on bringing more of our natural intelligence online. We don't forgo intellectual learning; rather we expand upon traditional learning modalities to include sensory and emotional learning as a route to developing the capacity to take new action.

## **Key Distinctions for Purposeful Leadership**

### **Feeling**

#### *Our Claim*

At Strozzi Institute we use several key distinctions that support people in developing greater leadership capacity. One of the most fundamental is feeling, or in other words, increasing conscious attention to and awareness of sensation, mood, and emotion. Feeling is about focusing attention on your direct, in-the-moment experience of life. It is a critical skill for anyone who wants to develop their capacity for compelling, effective leadership.

We typically begin our programs by teaching people how to feel more. Conventionally the words feeling and emotions are used interchangeably, but we teach leaders how to feel more than just their emotions. The more you feel, the more you contact the life energy that is constantly moving through you in the form of both sensations: pulsing, streaming, heat, tension, lightness; and emotions: passion, joy, grief, fear, indignation.

Feeling is a natural part of our intelligence, although it's often overlooked or neglected – sometimes deliberately so. Our claim is that skillful internal feeling results in skillful external action. The more you can feel, the more effective you can be in almost any situation. By feeling more, you add both intelligence and power to your actions. This is because feeling more opens the door to becoming more responsive and less reactive. As you increase your capacity to handle a wider range of sensation and emotions, you start to see options and possibilities that are invisible to you when you're in the midst of a knee-jerk reaction. When you feel more, you have greater access to information that's critical for action. As opposed to just thinking your way out of a difficult situation, you have the ability to tap into more of your intelligence.

### *Science Says*

As it turns out, the rational decision-making centers of the brain are heavily influenced by information from emotional and sensory centers – so much so that people who suffer certain kinds of damage to the emotional parts of their brain become utterly incapable of making a decision. Even if they have all the necessary information, they are unable to choose between competing options because they can't get a sense of their own preferences. These discoveries make it clear that relying exclusively on your rational thinking mind is not only incredibly limiting, it's not actually how we are built.

Yet somehow we've learned to mistrust our feelings as unpredictable, fickle figments of our imagination. Nothing could be further from the truth. There's no doubt that feelings and emotions can be difficult for our rational minds to make sense of at times. But as author Jonah Lehrer points out in the book *How We Decide*, these feelings “actually represent an enormous amount of invisible analysis.” The brain extracts patterns from our environment and experiences so that we can incorporate the lessons of the past into future decisions. When we encounter new experiences, these patterns are expressed as feelings. This is how executives who rely heavily (and successfully) on their intuition, hunches, and gut feelings just *know* which direction to take

without a lot of analysis. Learning to put this intuitive intelligence to use both purposefully and effectively is one of the unique benefits of a somatic approach to leadership training.

It's easy to forget that feelings such as these are inherently embodied, sensory experiences. One way scientists observe feelings in the lab is by measuring the electrical conductance of the skin. As it happens, during fetal development skin cells arise out of the same cluster of cells that eventually grows into the spinal cord. Later in life, the skin – the largest organ in our bodies – consistently recognizes patterns much more quickly than the rational mind. This happens repeatedly over a wide range of research: first people's skin conductance will change, then their actions will change, and only later – sometimes *much* later, if at all – will they be able to explain their change in behavior.

We experience these inextricably entwined emotional and physiological signals by *feeling* them. They operate faster than our intellect and are always influencing action and behavior. That's not to say that the invisible analysis of feelings always draws accurate conclusions or guides us to the best course of action, any more than intellectual analysis does. The implication for leaders is simply this: trying to set feelings aside and make the most well-reasoned decisions possible is not only unwise, it's actually impossible. Rather, it's learning to skillfully integrate the wisdom of our feelings with our powerful intellect that gives us the best possible platform for making decisions and taking action.

### *For Example*

Ultimately, feeling more is what makes purposeful leadership possible. Emotions tell us what we care about. When we attempt to disconnect from our feeling self, as we often do in our professional lives, our most fundamental concerns go unaddressed. Think of the leader who is praised, valued, and rewarded at the office but barely knows her own children. Or the procurement leader who looks the other way while his suppliers engage in damaging mining and labor practices.

Our times call for a greater ethic of care and responsibility. There is too much at stake – both in our own lives personally and in the life of the world – to shut off, ignore, or devalue the wisdom of our feeling self. That's not to say that giving everything over to emotions is an appropriate alternative. It's *skillful* internal feeling – being able to read your own internal signals and respond

to them appropriately – that results in more skillful external action. This is a competence that can be deliberately cultivated.

### *How We Train for Feeling*

We begin by introducing clients to the language of sensation. Without this language, it's difficult to make fine distinctions and accurate observations. Imagine if your only words for emotion were angry, happy, and sad. With such a limited vocabulary, it would be impossible to sort out the subtle differences between enthusiasm and curiosity; resentment and resignation. For most of us, our language for sensation is limited to just a few terms: good, bad, comfortable, uncomfortable. We help people expand their vocabulary for sensation by teaching them how to notice subtle differences in temperature, pressure, and movement. As a result, people begin to open up to whole worlds of their own experience that they were previously unaware of.

We also teach people how to use this language to observe their moods and sensations *while they're in action, interacting with others*. This allows leaders to discover and track their own reactions while they're participating in relationships, holding conversations, and taking action. This is one of the hallmarks of our work and what makes it both practical and actionable: we have participants put their learning to the test in real-life situations. This orientation towards ongoing self-observation during daily activities helps people see their direct, in-the-moment experience more freshly, without as much interference from the filters of implicit memory. As people become more familiar with their automatic feelings and reactions, new choices open up and the possibility of taking a different action comes within reach.

### *Results We've Seen*

As a result of learning to feel more, participants in our programs increase their commitment to act on behalf of what they truly care about. After participating in one of our programs, a Vice President at a well-known national bank instituted an Environmental Council to improve materials and energy use within the company. A senior executive at another firm negotiated a part-time working arrangement so she could spend more time with her young son. This simple action inspired many of her colleagues to re-evaluate their own priorities. Rather than negatively impacting her career, within two years she was promoted to the next level and was pregnant with her second child.



Research on mindfulness has shown that where you focus attention can literally change the physical structure of the brain. With enough repetition, the practice of mindfully attending to feeling states while in action can begin to supplant old conditioned patterns and pathways with new, more resourceful ones. We've seen it happen over and over again: leaders who can feel more also experience more empathy for others, stay more consistently connected to what's important to them, and are more able to be the kind of person they want to be. This results in their becoming more purposeful, consistent, and trustworthy in both their professional leadership and in their personal lives.

## **Centering**

### *Our Claim*

If you're going to feel more, you must also develop the ability to handle a wider range of emotions and sensations. Inevitably, life puts pressure on us. The ability to manage one's own mood and positively influence others' mood in the face of pressure, stress, and difficulty is a hallmark of an exemplary leader. However for many of us, high-pressure situations bring out our worst. Strozzi Somatics helps people feel their reaction to pressure without either ignoring it or being driven to act on it. Our centering practice creates a space between feeling stress and acting stressed; feeling angry and acting out of anger. By learning how to create this space, leaders develop greater choice in their responses and more capacity to take action consistent with their values.

### *Science Says*

Our bodies are exquisitely designed to deal with pressure, fear, and stress. This is an inherently protective force. The part of your brain that scans for danger is virtually always paying attention. It filters experience through the amygdala and the hippocampus – closely related structures in the brain that are associated with determining threat and safety (amygdala) and with memory (hippocampus). In other words, how you determine what's safe and what's threatening is significantly influenced by implicit memory; by the conclusions you've drawn and the patterns you've embodied based on your prior life experience.

Because of this, if in the past you experienced something as threatening or uncomfortable, you are more likely to experience it that way today even if it is in fact perfectly safe. Some trigger in

your experience that feels (note: *feels*) like a threat, danger, stress, or pressure will travel through your amygdala and hippocampus and activate your sympathetic nervous system, more commonly referred to as your fight / flight / freeze response. Changes throughout your body begin to occur immediately: cortisol levels rise, your heart beats faster, your pupils dilate, and you may begin to sweat. Your body is preparing for action. Depending on your unique way of dealing with stress, you may be more inclined to lash out in anger, freeze with fear, withdraw into your shell, or give up your ground in an attempt to appease. And all of this can unfold in milliseconds in response to a simple comment by a colleague.

Under this kind of pressure, you'll revert to your most embodied behaviors; those that are most practiced, most easily accessible, and most to hand for you. This is highly adaptive and a sign of great resilience. It means you don't have to think in times of danger – you can just act. Whatever worked well in your early life environment – whether you were rewarded for not crying, as is common for boys in America; praised for striving to be the best in the face of obstacles, as is common in many education-oriented cultures; or found safety by fighting back against bullies or older siblings – is what you've been practicing the longest. And what is practiced persists.

This is because, in neuroscience terms, neurons that fire together wire together. The more often a certain pattern is activated in your brain-body system, the more accessible that response becomes, until it's strongly wired into your nervous system and very easy to trigger. In fact it even becomes part of your character and identity, such that others will assess you – and you may see yourself – as the kind of person that is typically accommodating, or aggressive, or attentive, or agitated. In this way, the very process of adaptive resilience, while it is at first helpful, can later come back to haunt you by making you more automatically reactive and less choiceful in your responses to the everyday events of your life.

### *For Example*

Let's take Shelly as an example to illustrate this point. Shelly is known in her organization as a results-oriented go-getter. Mid-way through negotiating a deal with another company, she discovered that her team couldn't deliver what she had promised. Her immediate and automatic reaction was a feeling of frustration, anger and betrayal, accompanied by sensations of tension in her fists and face, a racing heart, and shallow breath. These sensations and emotions prompted her to simultaneously blame and scold her team and at the same time push them to do the

impossible. Unfortunately this produced even more resistance from the team, exacerbating her problem even further.

In this particular high-pressure situation, Shelly was defaulting to anger, confrontation, and command and control. This is one of her embodied, automatic responses under pressure. As the second youngest sibling of five in a boisterously noisy Italian-American family, she learned that to get others to pay attention required her to be quite forceful. She also played a mean game of basketball, and while her state-championship team valued sportsmanship, winning was valued even more highly. These life experiences shaped her to be aggressive and forceful when something significant was at stake. While that capability may have worked well in the past and may even be an asset in her job, in this case it's limiting her effectiveness. This aggressive way of being is no longer producing the results she wants.

This is all completely understandable; even unavoidable. It's simply how we are built. We come to embody behavioral strategies that work under one set of circumstances, and then we can't help but continue with those actions even after circumstances have changed. The question is how can we become more resilient and resourceful when faced with the inevitable pressures of life?

#### *How We Train for Centering*

We answer this question by teaching leaders a centering process that allows them to realign their entire psychobiology around a central care or concern. In teaching people to feel more, we give them more practice at noticing and experiencing uncomfortable sensations (clenched jaw, shortened breath, furrowed brow, churning stomach) without having to immediately take action to make the feeling go away. This creates the space for more choiceful responses. Then we give them a way to *shift* those sensations, moving from discomfort and contraction to a more centered, open presence.

The practice of centering involves aligning the physical body so that it is holding the least amount of contraction possible. This counteracts the action of the sympathetic nervous system, which sends signals for your muscles to contract and ready for action in the face of a perceived threat. Centering is not just a physical practice, however; it also includes the non-physical action of connecting with what you care about and who you want to be. This combination of physical re-centering with re-centering in what has meaning and matters to you is a powerful practice for building a new response to pressure. Centering is not simply deep breathing, nor is it repeating

affirmations, nor is it a relaxation technique. Rather it is an active realignment of your entire psychobiology – mind, body, and being – with what’s most important to you. This opens the possibility of taking action that is more aligned with who you are, how you want to be in the world, and where you’re going.

### *Results We’ve Seen*

For Shelly, the capacity to re-center gave her a different, more resourceful way to engage with her team. She was able to request flexibility from the team in a non-aggressive manner, helping them see how it was in their best interest to support the project. This opened the people on the team to be more willing to work with her. Although they still could not deliver on the promises she originally made to the other company, both she and they were able to face that reality with more collaboration and creativity, bringing everyone’s intelligence to bear on solving the problem. Working together they adjusted deadlines to accommodate the full range of their commitments, and came up with a solution that satisfied the needs of all parties.

New research has shown that how you organize yourself physically can change your state of mind, impact hormone levels, and affect behavior. Over time, with enough repetition in enough different kinds of situations, the practice of centering and re-centering can build a new embodied response: a more resourceful set of actions that become the new familiar, comfortable, and more choiceful way to respond under pressure. At Strozzi Institute we teach leaders how to attend skillfully to their sensations, tolerate the physical discomfort of emotional and relational triggers without having to take immediate action, and shift their attention and sensation to access a more centered, grounded, and resourceful presence. What we see is that people consistently change their response to pressure in highly resourceful ways. People who used to shout in anger become better listeners; people who habitually shrink from conflict become more capable of taking a stand for their own dignity and standards; people who find themselves tongue-tied in high-stakes conversations become more relaxed and creative under pressure; people who have difficulty executing on their commitments become competent in fulfilling on their promises and responsibilities.

Studies of neuroplasticity have shown that the structure of the neural networks in the nervous system changes depending on what we pay attention to, and how often we pay attention to it. As Shelly paid more attention to her default tendencies under pressure and trained to replace those

tendencies with a more centered presence, she changed her actions, her conversations, and ultimately, her results.

## **Presence**

### *Our Claim*

These new, more resourceful ways of relating ultimately produce a stronger leadership presence. Presence is an ineffable quality that often seems to defy definition. At Strozzi Institute we see presence as an inherently relational quality; others assess you as either having a strong presence, or not. We have found that the magnetic quality of leadership presence is not merely an accident of birth but can actually be learned and embodied.

### *Science Says*

We primarily read presence, authenticity, and trustworthiness through non-verbal cues. This involves the right hemisphere and the limbic system of our brains: the aspects most devoted to reading social, emotional, and non-verbal signals. According to research done by Albert Mehrabian at UCLA, up to 93% of communication is non-verbal, including gestures, posture, and tone of voice. Research done by Paul Eckman at UCSF shows that facial expression of emotion is extraordinarily consistent cross-culturally, suggesting a biological basis for non-verbal communication. A smile, a blush, or a look of disgust are all embodied responses to social and relational experiences.

When you think about how long spoken language has been around in comparison to how long we humans have been around, that makes sense. Both developmentally and evolutionarily, before we began using language we made sense of the world somatically. Early in human history, when language was at its most rudimentary, we navigated the world primarily through sensory means and communication happened largely through expressions and gestures. Even now, every single one of us relies exclusively on a somatic reading of the world as an infant and toddler.

In addition, recent research on mirror neurons has revealed some startling new news about how our brains make sense of what other sentient beings are doing, thinking, and feeling: on the inside, we mimic each other all day long. If you see me lift an apple and take a bite, similar

neurons in your own body and brain fire, even if you don't take the same action. That's part of how you understand and make sense of what I'm doing. Although these studies have thus far focused largely on motor activities and have not yet been conducted on more ineffable states such as presence and authenticity, there's speculation among scientists that mirror neurons are part of our biological apparatus for empathy. There is enough evidence to hypothesize that these mirror neurons may play a role in helping you sort the trustworthy and the real from the charlatans and the fakes.

In other words, we have developed highly sophisticated non-verbal means of making sense of each other and the world. We can't not do this; there's no way to turn this process off. It's simply running all the time – a part of the human operating system, if you will. People are reading for authenticity and presence all the time, and when it's there we know it and can feel it. We are drawn to leaders who embody a strong and compelling presence.

*For Example*

Recall the last time you were interacting with someone who drifted off in the middle of your conversation because they were daydreaming, fiddling with their smart phone, or otherwise attending to distractions. See if you can recall what that interaction felt like for you. How satisfied were you with the exchange? How connected did you feel to that person? What was your level of openness and trust?

Now remember the last time you were with someone when you knew you had the full focus of their attention. Even if there were interruptions from time to time, you had the sense that this person was really *with* you, and that what you had to do, say, or share was genuinely important to them, and they were truly listening. How did this interaction feel different? What was the impact on your sense of connection, trust, and satisfaction?

*That* is the power of presence.

There are countless implications for leaders here. I'll point out two in particular. First, presence is an essential component of building trust. When you are fully attentive, open, and connected, others *feel* that. We know this because we see it in our programs all the time. We'll ask one of our participants to shift their body and mood in a way that brings them more present, and the

whole room will respond with an audible intake of breath. Everybody recognizes presence when it occurs.

That kind of unmistakable presence opens a greater opportunity for genuine connection. When people are attended to with sincere interest, they become more open, more willing to engage, and more willing to follow your lead. This sort of presence is not a technique that can be put on like a coat; rather it is an embodied way of being that produces an overall assessment of trustworthy leadership.

Second, presence inspires action. Great leaders speak their mind with both passion and compassion, putting the full emotional force of their convictions into their words. Think of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, or Ghandi's proclamations about resisting British rule. As much as the message itself, *how* the message was delivered is what motivated millions to take action.

Presence – or its lack – has enormous consequences for leaders. Presence grants genuine leadership authority by building trust and inspiring others. This is quite a bit different from the leadership that is conferred by position, title, or status. In our courses, we see over and over again that when one person becomes fully present, they influence those around them to become more present, too. It's an almost irresistible force, which perhaps accounts for the magnetism of strong and trustworthy leaders. Your presence can bring others into the game, silently inviting them to sit up, take notice, and take action.

### *How We Train for Presence*

We see presence as a function of feeling, centering, and attending. This means allowing more life energy to move through you by feeling your sensations fully, aligning and relaxing your physical body, centering in what you care about, and attending to yourself and others simultaneously. In other words, the more fully embodied you are, the more present you can be.

Paying attention to what you're *feeling* immediately brings you present, because sensations only occur in the present moment. The more relaxed you are and the more aligned your body is, the more life energy can flow through you. This means you're presencing yourself in a whole, unified way rather than squeezing off some part of your lived experience. That results in a stronger

presence that others can, through all the non-verbal means we've just discussed, actually *feel*. As in the example above, you know when someone is present with you, or not.

The practice of *centering* helps you become more present, open, and connected. The ability to center in action while you're taking care of the business at hand – even and especially when the world is spinning in chaos around you – is a critical leadership skill. It allows you to stay connected to others and be in the present-moment experience, rather than being run by your historical filters. Centering is a practice of aligning your system to access to *all* of your intelligence: gut, heart, head, and every other part of you. It helps you become more relaxed and less reactive, more resilient and less rash. This sort of centered presence builds trust with others.

Finally, presence is a function of how and where you focus your *attention*. People assess you as being fully *with* them; the felt sense of your attention is neither absent nor overbearing, but simply... present. This comes from attending to your own experience and concerns while simultaneously attending to the cares and concerns of others. This blend produces the assessment that you're able to stand up for what you care about while giving enough ground to truly listen to and legitimize others. And like feeling and centering, this is a skill you can develop.

### *Results We've Seen*

Leaders who learn to feel more and center themselves begin to develop the kind of trustworthy magnetism that is a fundamental aspect of leadership presence. Some people are magnetic but you can't trust them because they're too reactive. Those who practice the skills of Embodied Leadership™ become less reactive and more responsive. They're able to listen better, and legitimize others more. Because they're centered around what they care about, they're also more consistent in word and deed. Others can sense this congruence in them, and it builds trust. This ability to build trust through one's presence is a critical skill for any leader.

## **The Promise of Embodied Leadership™**

People come to Strozzi Institute with typical leadership concerns, such as how to generate change, articulate a compelling vision, mobilize others, build more trust with and amongst their team, resolve conflict in productive ways, and find a satisfying sense of balance both personally



and professionally. While some still claim that leaders are “born, not made,” at Strozzi Institute we have repeatedly seen people learn to embody the qualities that exemplary leaders share. Through holistic training that addresses the biological self, the emotional self, the relational self, the ways we make meaning of the world, and our capacity to take action, leaders develop new personal and interpersonal skills. Participants leave our programs able to more consistently bring the qualities of presence, commitment, accountability, vision, resilience, dignity, and respect to a wide range of life situations. As a result, leaders expand their ability to imagine a new future and bring it to life by effectively coordinating the action of teams.

Our mission at Strozzi Institute is to develop leaders who embody pragmatic wisdom, grounded compassion, and skillful action. Over 95% of participants leave our programs satisfied that we have delivered on this promise. In addition to gaining valuable new leadership skills that they can immediately put into action, many participants express gratitude for the tremendous positive impact on their personal and professional lives. Frequently our clients go on to send their friends, colleagues, customers, and family members to us for additional learning.

Yet even our most satisfied customers have been hard pressed to explain why working through the body is such an effective way to develop leadership qualities. For most of us, the idea of integrating the body into leadership learning is so far outside of what we’re accustomed to that trying to make sense of it remains a mystifying puzzle, even when we’ve experienced the benefits ourselves.

Thankfully, new research on the brain is opening a window that sheds light on the biological underpinnings of somatic learning. We now know that our training closely parallels the natural human process of social, emotional, biological, and relational learning that goes on throughout our lives. Neuroscience is starting to point towards a somatic approach as a crucial, non-optional aspect of leadership development. It’s an extraordinary and unexpected finding, but it turns out that at the heart of leadership development lies a whole human body: history, longings, loves, biology, breath and being. Through this work, it is our great privilege to support leaders in embodying a broader and deeper capacity to act with consistency, courage, and deep care. We invite you to join us.