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## How to Pose for Presence

*Sit up straight.*

— YOUR GRANDMOTHER

WHEN SHOULD WE POWER pose? Most of us would benefit from a power boost before a job interview, a meeting with an authority figure, a class discussion, a difficult conversation, a negotiation, an audition, an athletic event, or a presentation before a group. People have also written to me about how helpful power posing can be

- before entering new situations, meeting new people, or speaking a nonnative language in a foreign country,
- when speaking up for oneself or for someone else,
- when requesting help,
- when ending a relationship — professional or personal,
- when quitting a job, and
- before receiving — or giving — critical feedback.

We don't all face the same kinds of challenges or feel intimidated by the same experiences. That's why it's important to notice the situations (and people) that trigger powerless body language — so that

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you know when to apply preparatory power posing. You'll also benefit enormously if you can get in the habit of checking in on your posture, both during challenging situations and generally throughout the day.

## Prepare with Big Poses

Use the big poses to speak to yourself before walking into a big challenge. By taking up as much space as you comfortably can in the moments preceding the challenge, you're telling yourself that you're powerful — that you've got this — which emancipates you to bring your boldest, most authentic self to the challenge. You're optimizing your brain to be 100 percent present when you walk in. Think of it as a pre-event warm-up.

- In some ways, every day is a challenge. Prepare by power posing first thing in the morning. Get out of bed and practice a couple of your favorite poses for just a couple of minutes.
- In your home, office, and other personal spaces, you're not constrained by cultural norms, stereotypes, or hierarchical status. In other words, you can look as dominant as you'd like. Take advantage of that: pose big in those spaces.
- When you can find it, make the most of privacy in public spaces — pose in an elevator, a bathroom stall, a stairwell.
- Don't *sit* in waiting rooms, hunched over your phone. Stand or walk around instead.
- If you can't strike a pose physically, do it mentally: imagine yourself in the most powerful, expansive pose you can think of. Be a superhero in your own thought bubble.
- If you're about to face a challenging situation and you have no other option but to sit, wrap your arms around the back of your

chair and clasp your hands together. This forces you to open your shoulders and chest.

- If you can and when it's advantageous to do so, arrive before your audience arrives. Get comfortable with occupying and expanding in the presentation space. Make the space yours, so your audience is coming to your "home" as opposed to you going to theirs.<sup>1</sup>

### Present with Good Posture

As important as it is to adopt bold power poses *before* challenging situations, it's just as important to maintain less bold but still strong, upright, and open postures *during* challenging situations. Power posing is great when you're preparing by yourself for a challenging encounter, but it's not so great in the middle of a meeting. Adopting high-power poses in actual interactions is very likely to backfire — by violating norms, causing others to shrink, and so on, as I explained earlier. It's also not easy to maintain a pose while working at your computer all day. Fortunately there are some subtle things you can do when making like a silverback won't cut it:

- While you're presenting or interacting, sit up or stand up straight.
- Keep your shoulders back and your chest open.
- Breathe slowly and deeply — remember how much proper breathing can center us. (This is hard to do with slouched shoulders and a collapsed chest.)
- Keep your chin up and level, but don't raise it so far up that you're looking down your nose at people.

- When you're stationary, keep your feet grounded (no ankle-wrapping). You should feel solid, not as if you'd lose your balance if someone gently pushed or bumped into you.

- When you can, move around. When it comes to public speaking, one of the biggest trends of the last couple of decades is the move away from the lectern. Why? Because movement is more engaging for the audience. But it's also more energizing and powerful for the speaker. It allows you to occupy more space and inhabit more of the room.

- If the space allows, take a few steps, then pause in one spot as you continue speaking. (Don't pace. Pacing looks nervous and aggravated.) Movements should be neither erratic nor continuous. They should be clear and defined.<sup>2</sup>

- Use props. If your body tends to collapse into powerless poses when you speak, try using props that will force you to stretch out. If you're standing, rest your hand on a table, on the back of a chair, or on a whiteboard. If you're sitting, lean forward and place your hands on a table, or make sure your arms are resting on the arms of the chair rather than knotting up in your lap. If you don't have a big prop, use a little one: hold a glass of water or a laser pointer or a remote control — anything that will prevent you from collapsing your arms and clasping or wringing your hands.

- Adopt open gestures: they're both strong *and* warm. For example, when our arms are outstretched with palms up, it's welcoming and signals trust.

- Avoid "penguin arms." When people feel anxious and powerless they often pin their upper arms — from armpit to elbow — at their sides, gesturing only with the lower halves of their arms. (Try it.) This is just another way in which we contract, but it causes us to feel awkward and anxious and to come across that way.<sup>3</sup> (I learned this helpful piece of advice from some good

friends — authors and body language experts John Neffinger and Matt Kohut.)

- Don't just take up physical space, take up temporal space. This advice holds across all the contexts in which you speak (unless you're a contestant on a game show in which you're required to speak very quickly), whether it's during a presentation, a pitch, an interview, a difficult conversation, a discussion with your doctor, or a response to critical feedback at work. When we feel insecure and distracted, we rush, fearful that we're taking too much time, and we seem eager to escape.

- Pause! Terrified of silences, we fail to harness the immense power of pauses.

- Try relaxing the muscles of your throat so that your voice lowers to its natural level.

- If you make a mistake — which we all inevitably do — don't allow yourself to collapse inward. If you feel yourself beginning to collapse, fight it. Pull your shoulders back, unfurl, and power up.

## Mind Your Posture Throughout the Day

It's important to avoid falling into the powerless poses we often mindlessly inhabit. How to do this?

- Notice what is happening in the moments when you do begin to contract, collapse, and disappear. What are the situations and stimuli that cause you to shrink? What are the idiosyncratic things that make you feel powerless? This awareness alone will help you resist the urge the next time you find yourself in a similar predicament.

- Set posture reminders for yourself:

- Make your phone an ally, not an enemy:

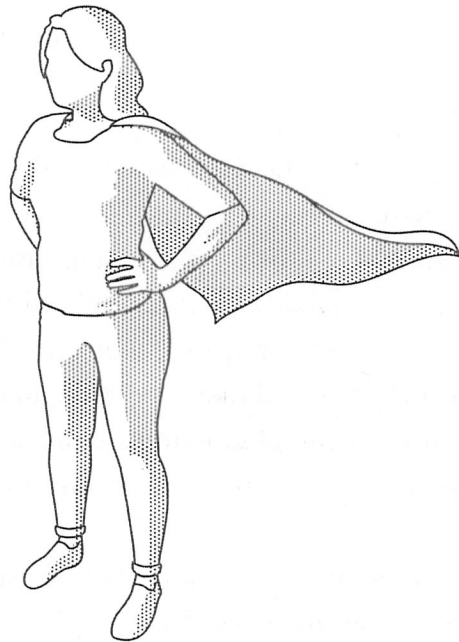
- Program your phone to remind you to check your posture every hour,
- but don't iHunch over it.
- Place Post-it notes on doors, around your office and house, and above your computer screen.
- Enlist the help of trustworthy friends, family, and coworkers. Ask them to let you know when you're slouching (and ask if they'd like you to do the same for them).
- Organize the spaces in which you spend time in ways that facilitate good posture:
  - My collaborator Nico Thornley places his mouse far enough from his body that he's forced to expand in order to use it.
  - Hang pictures of people and things that make you happy high on your walls to entice you to stretch and look up.
- If you tend to sleep in the fetal position, stretch in bed before you fall asleep. If you wake up in the fetal position, stretch before you get out of bed.
- Combine power posing with daily routines. For example, my research assistant Anna stands with one hand on her hip while she brushes her teeth.
- If you spend a lot of time on phone calls, use a headset and stretch out while you're talking (or listening) rather than pulling your arms in to hold the phone against your ear.
- We're learning more and more about the many psychological and other health benefits of standing instead of sitting at work, on your the computer, and so on. If you are able to do that, give it a try.<sup>4</sup>
- Take breaks to walk around throughout the day. In fact, consider having "walking meetings," which not only improve your mood;

they also lead to better communication, worker engagement, and creative problem-solving.<sup>5</sup>

- You can purchase a wearable device that will monitor and remind you to correct poor posture, although the cost is limiting for many people. This technology is improving at breakneck speed, so I won't recommend any particular device, but there are plenty of options.

- Always cold in your climate-controlled office? Stop swaddling yourself into a fetal ball inside that shawl, scarf, blanket, oversize cardigan, or whatever it is you use. I'm sorry to sound like a mom, but *wear layers!*

- Seize the social opportunities you have to stretch out, such as going to the gym, running, taking a yoga class, and dancing. Don't waste opportunities to expand!



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### Self-Nudging: How Tiny Tweaks Lead to Big Changes

*Anyone can carry his burden, however hard, until night-fall. Anyone can do his work, however hard, for one day. Anyone can live sweetly, patiently, lovingly, purely, till the sun goes down. And this is all life really means.*

— ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

I USED TO PANIC under certain kinds of pressure. For example, if I got a negative review or rejection of a paper I'd submitted for an academic journal, I went into full-blown make-it-better-by-doing-something — *anything* — mode. Without taking a breath, I'd jump right back in, dissecting the editor's and the reviewers' comments ad nauseam, agonizing over them, addressing every single one of them in a "perfect" revision, composing the cleverest, most thorough response letter, and sending the full package back to the editor. Immediately. And doing all this from a place of anxiety and threat.

On many of these occasions, my friend Holly, an unfaltering voice of reason, would remind me, "You don't have to do anything