

New Reality Sensing

Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change

By Peter Senge,
C. Otto Scharmer,
Joseph Jaworski,
and Betty Sue Flowers

Reviewed by Suneeta Mishra

AS AN ADMIRER of Peter Senge's works, I was excited about his new book *Presence*, which he wrote along with C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers. Expecting an extension of *The Fifth Discipline*, I was truly surprised by this thought-provoking book: *Presence* took my breath away. Its honesty and power of narration about the transformational change process is so powerful that it's almost scary to reflect upon and contemplate.

The book starts with an exploration of the deeper dimensions of transformational change. "The blind spot concerns not the what and how...but the who: who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate, both individually and collectively," the authors write. They do not attribute the sweeping changes in the world to a handful of individuals or systems, but to the consequences of a life-form that has the potential to grow, learn, and evolve. They conceptualize the world as a living system and voice their apprehensions about the imminent collapse of its ecological environment if man-made imbalances continue to exist.

Leveraging the wisdom and insights gained through Scharmer and Jaworski's interviews with 150 scientists, social leaders, and entrepreneurs, the authors propound a type of learning that is a function of the awareness and source of actions. More specifically, it involves sensing new realities, prior to their emergence, so that the results are shaped by the future rather than by the patterns of the past.

That deeper sensing and heightened awareness of self and belonging in the world leads to what the authors call "presencing." Individuals can learn to "presence" an emerging whole and become a force of nature.

The authors discuss presencing in terms of a theory originally developed by Scharmer. Theory U presents a learning arc shaped as a deep U. On the top left end is *sensing* (observing and becoming one with the world), which gives rise to *presencing* (retreating, reflecting, and allowing inner knowing to emerge), which is placed at the bottom arc of the U to signify depth of perceiving reality. At the opposite end of the U is *realizing*, which is described as acting swiftly with a natural flow. Those three stages of movement through the U are further qualified into seven related phases.

In spite of its sophisticated premise, *Presence* is an engaging and unique book. The authors, who are clearly good friends, describe a series of informal meetings where they share transformational experiences and reflect on the learning and understanding that emerged on a larger, global scale. Their presentations read more like stories, and they consciously avoid taking a theorizing tone. Their experiences are described in vivid details.

The authors' narrative also is tellingly punctuated halfway through the book by the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. Their tones change and readers can almost feel the urgency and somberness that affect the discussions that take place after that day.

In addition, the authors touch upon a host of other related areas. They illustrate the collective learning process by describing examples from the corporate world, and explaining how organizations create and adjust according to their evolving environments.

After I finished reading *Presence*, I found myself reflecting on my own life; thinking, connecting, and acknowledging a deeper learning that has led to alterna-

More Fall Titles

T+D editors examine three more books due out this month.

Results: Keep What's Good, Fix What's Wrong, and Unlock Great Performance

By Gary L. Neilson
and Bruce A. Pasternack
(Crown Business, October 2005,
\$27.50)

The cover of this book encourages us to "keep what's good, fix what's wrong, and unlock great performance." And like all well-intentioned business books, *Results* is a decent collection of anecdotes, case studies, and a few PowerPoint-style graphics. The challenge in this book is to find what really relates to you and your unique business challenges directly, and focus on it.

As a reader, I often look at a book's table of contents for some guidance. But, these chapter headings—that someone might have thought were highly arch—are of little use. What does "Let 1,000 Flowers Bloom: The Fits-and-Starts Organization" tell us? Additionally, the authors seem to fall back on cliché-driven terms, especially as subheads.

Having said that, however, the book maintains a breezy style that makes it an easy read. It's not unlike sitting through a company-mandated training session only to find that you walked away with some good information. It may not actually solve all of your many business problems, but this book is not fluff, either. In the end, the authors note that much of their work is based on their own assessment tool, Org DNA Profiler. The 30,000 surveys completed by visitors to their website, plus thousands of others, generated some interesting data sets that the authors deliver at the end of the book.

While this book might offer some challenges in its flow, a reader who sticks with it will be rewarded.

—Rex Davenport

5-D Leadership: Key Dimensions for Leading in the Real World

By Scott Campbell and Ellen Samiec
(Davies-Black Publishing, October 2005, \$27.95)

It seems as if a new book on leadership is published every day. What makes this one different? Its authors effectively combine their theoretical model with a detailed supporting framework and practical, real-world examples.

The model describes five dimensions of leadership: visioning, commanding, enrolling, relating, and coaching. Taken together, these elements make up what Campbell and Samiec call “the fully equipped toolkit for today’s business leader.” Then, the authors expand on those dimensions not only through real-world examples from major companies (for example, Harley-Davidson and Nestlé), but also through a detailed breakdown of the building blocks that go into each individual element.

Commanding, for example, is broken down into five building blocks: quickly determining priorities, based on available information; making rapid, often unilateral decisions; issuing clear directives with a brief business rationale; monitoring for speed of action and compliance; and determining and enforcing consequences for failure to comply. The authors elaborate on the importance of each component, but those sections are less than half of the book.

Cambell and Samiec also include a great deal of practical information to help leaders put the book’s principles into action. For example, one chapter details a five-step process for discovering your leadership strengths and includes helpful charts and worksheets.

—Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

Resonant Leadership: Renewing Yourself and Connecting with Others Through Mindfulness, Hope, and Compassion

By Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee
(Harvard Business School Press, October 2005, \$25.95)

In his forward, Daniel Goleman, co-author (with Boyatzis and McKee) of the bestselling *Primal Leadership*, writes “leadership that works well goes beyond the image of the lone star somehow sprinkling magical pixie dust on others. True leaders know that they too are being led—that leadership operates on a two-way street.”

That communal awareness helps to create “resonant leaders” who are able to successfully manage the emotions of themselves and others. And *Resonant Leadership’s* purpose is to help readers maneuver past the obstacles that bog down leaders and stunt their emotional intelligences. Proclaimed as an “indispensable guide to overcoming the vicious cycles of stress, sacrifice, and dissonance,” the book does a good job of dissecting those problems and explaining their consequences through inspiring real stories. Equally compelling—and rather unique to business and leadership titles—are the exercises designed to get readers innately in tune with their feelings and behavior. They run the gamut of formats, including multiple choice questions and timed writing assignments. At the very least, the activities force readers to assess their thoughts and actions in terms of the physical and mental impact on themselves and others. And it’s hard to imagine that as a bad thing.

—Josephine Rossi

tive futures for me. And I think that kind of post-reading contemplation is exactly what the authors intended to evoke. However, let me clarify: This book is not about personal self-realization. It’s not easy to read and it’s not for everybody. The authors do not offer definitive answers to their musings. So, readers expecting a prescriptive book with bulleted lists on bringing about profound changes will be seriously disappointed.

If, however, you are open to uncommon ideas and are convinced about the power of individual transformational change leading to changes in the future, then this book is a must-read. Because it’s bound to foster a higher level of perspective and hope for the future, I give *Presence* three and a half cups of coffee.

Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change, by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers. Doubleday Publishing: New York. 289 pp. \$27.95

Suneeta Mishra is a learning specialist with the Expo Learning Group at The Home Depot Store Support Center in Atlanta; suneeta_mishra@hotmail.com

Send books for possible review to **Books, T+D**, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043; books@astd.org.