

**JULIET ERICKSON**

# **Power Skills**



**A MASTERCLASS FOR WOMEN  
IN BODY LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION**

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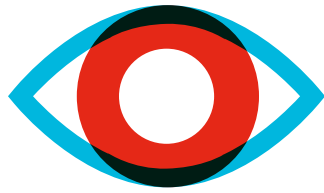
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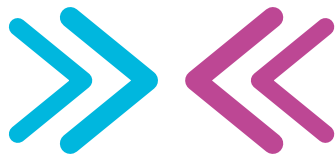
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# introduction

*For the last 30 years I have worked with thousands of women from all walks of life: academics, students, entrepreneurs, leaders of non-profit organizations, scientists, politicians, entertainers and CEOs. My role as their coach has been to help them communicate the best version of themselves. They gained traction in high-stakes situations where succeeding or failing had a high professional or personal impact. The truth is, no matter how many billions of dollars are at stake, how great or important an idea, or even how famous or clever a person may be, their success largely boils down to whether they communicate persuasively with others.*

Men have outnumbered women three to one among my clients, not because the men necessarily needed more help, but because more of them had the high-profile jobs, the access and the means required to hire a person like me. Interestingly, the women I have worked with have represented a more diverse group – a more integral blend of different races, identities, ethnicities, religions and

nationalities and belonged to a broader range of socioeconomic groups.

I write this book because I feel passionately that now is ‘prime-time’ for women to step fully into their power. By prime-time, I mean that women have begun to overhaul the concept of what power means with a subtle but profound reordering of traditional definitions and structures. We wield power without a suit and tie or a high-profile job. We focus less on title and career, and more on responsibility to ourselves, our family, work, community and the world. We are both equal opportunity employers and self-employers.

By power, I mean a power without reference to gender, where we, as women, are embraced by ourselves and others as competent, effective and impactful. As women, our focus is more on self-mastery and self-esteem rather than title and status. As the feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun said, ‘Power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter.’

I believe our minds and spirits are in place but I observe that our bodies often defy us. We still struggle with our body language, communicating something different from what we intend or wish, particularly when we are stressed.

For all people, gender norms and behaviours are culturally formed and reinforced. It's no surprise to any person reading this book who gender-identifies as a woman that there are behavioural and attitudinal norms and assumptions that have a strong influence in shaping their lives. Some of these are inspiring, but many are debilitating.

At birth, most of our movements are instinctive; we experience hunger or fear and we respond by crying. As we grow, our movements gradually become more active, more intentional. As the mind develops, it begins to program the functioning of brain and body. In learning how to walk, talk, play and relate to other people and through repetition, we are gradually patterned to move reflexively and unconsciously. This process is the beginning of our conditioning, whether we like it or not. How we walk, talk, respond and behave is informed by the people who raised and influenced us.

As we continue to grow, even beyond childhood, we continue to be conditioned by our neuromuscular system and socialization. While these patterns that we develop may not always serve us, we function every day not really thinking about them and continue to reinforce them. Because these patterns are repeated and reinforced, it creates limitations and imbalances in our bodies.

Most of us are not very aware of the repetitive nature of our actions, both mental and physical. In this book, I will be encouraging you to take steps to develop your awareness in order to begin the process of breaking the cycles. Self-awareness is the key to any process of transformation.

This lifetime of shaping creates many of our body language habits. Whether the shaping serves us or not, we often remain unaware of it from day to day. With greater self-awareness, we can begin the journey of breaking the unconscious patterns of behaviour that don't serve us.

I want this book to be your go-to body language resource and toolbox that you can call on when you need it most. I hope you enjoy the illustrations as much as I do, as they reinforce important insights and learnings.

The first chapter on communication styles is about improving your powers of observation, both yourself and others, and, particularly, how your communication style informs your body language. By the end of the section, you will be able to readily identify your own communication strengths and vulnerabilities, as well as those of other people. You should also have a clearer idea about how to respond to other people in a way that will help you to achieve better outcomes.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 contain a toolbox of techniques designed to increase your awareness of, and comfort with, your own body language. They will introduce you to ‘foundational behaviours’ that you can integrate into your movement, gestures, posture, eye contact, facial expressions and voice. A foundational behaviour is a physical action that provides a way to understand interplay between our conscious and unconscious choices. It will help you easily settle into a more natural, authentic physical self. As a result of choosing foundational behaviours, you will begin to feel differently in the moment and you will notice the responses you get from others will begin to change. By the end

of this section you’ll be able to introduce subtle yet profound changes into your everyday body language.

The last two chapters about managing confrontation and cultivating presence are areas of practice that offer the greatest opportunity for women to transform themselves. It is in these two areas where I am most often asked for assistance. While both managing confrontation and cultivating presence require similar grit from you so that you become comfortable with them, they are different animals. Which would you rather tame, a tiger or a bull elephant? How about both? By the end of this section you will understand more about the nature of these two areas of transformation and be able to utilize techniques right away in a range of situations.

The insights offered in this book will make it easier for you to choose body language that creates the outward expression of confidence and, at the same time, the internal feeling of ease and calm. Over time and with practice, these behaviours will liberate you from the effects of your conditioning. They will help you to regain more control over, and comfort with, how you communicate through body language.



**6 What I have discovered is that if women can bring awareness to their physical presence and their bodies, it can dramatically shift and transform the effectiveness with which they communicate, persuade and influence others. 9**

